Perceptions of Leader Development Programming by College Students with More Introverted Personalities

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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study on the perceptions of leadership development programming by students who identified as more introverted than their peers. The study examined the self-efficacy of these students towards leadership and the contributing factors to the achievement of their efficacy to be a leader. Conducted at a Research I, land-grant institution, the study consisted of interviews with students who identify as more introverted than their peers. Interviews allowed the researcher to examine their experiences and attitudes towards their own leadership development. The purpose of the study was to better understand the concept of leadership efficacy in the context of introverted student experiences. Findings from the study highlighted the importance of close relationships as a source of vicarious learning, verbal encouragement, and as a steadying influence on emotional well-being for introverted students developing as leaders. Students value teaching as an optimal model for leadership. As they navigated the rigors of serving in leadership roles in college, students looked to close relationships and regular practices of self-care to mitigate the impacts of stress on their energy. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on the understanding of personality and leadership development, specifically how self-efficacy is manifested in those with an introverted personality.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of leadership development programming among college students who have more introverted personalities than peers. While there has been significant investment in higher education in leadership development programming, widespread dissatisfaction with leaders is present in the United States. An appropriate response to these general concerns on the state of leadership is to examine the perspective of emerging leaders who navigate their motivations to lead against a backdrop of historical biases and present-day assumptions. As some have perceived an "extraverted bias" in many of our societal institutions, it is important to consider whether such biases are ingrained in leader development programming that ultimately hinders the development of potential leaders. This study found that many students did recognize introversion as a hinderance to their development in some facets of leadership such as public speaking and engaging with larger groups. Students routinely practiced coping strategies to mitigate stress, and concurrently close relationships were a valued part of encouragement, vicarious learning, and emotional resilience as students navigated leadership roles. Students aspired to serve in roles as a teacher. At a time of significant leadership dissatisfaction, efforts should be made to fully account for the barriers that prevent new and diverse leaders from matriculating into leadership roles.

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of the decade of the 2020s in the United States is marked by a significant loss of public confidence in leaders. In the United States, confidence in leaders is at a historically low point (Smith-Schoenwalder & Jeffrey-Wilensky, 2025). Gallup polls on leadership in 2021 found that just 33% of American adults have confidence in the country's prominent public institutions (Brenan, 2021). More specifically, only 12% indicated confidence in Congress, only 16% had confidence in television news, 36% had confidence in the institution of the Presidency, and only slightly more (38%) had confidence in the Supreme Court (Brenan, 2021). Perhaps most concerning is that only 2% of the public believe that government leaders will do the right thing "almost always," which suggests a broad public consensus that cuts across a diversity of political ideologies (Brenan, 2021). All this public sentiment has been expressed within the context of a global pandemic, bitter ideological debates, complex economic uncertainties, and military actions that have far-reaching impacts across continents.

At the heart of this mistrust in institutions is a specific dissatisfaction with the current state of leadership. A study by Shollen and Gagnon (2019) found that only 28% of Americans had confidence in their leaders. The same study found that 60% of Americans believed leaders were not as effective as twenty years prior. At a time when a need exists for leaders who can evoke unity and collective action, the only unifying viewpoint seems to be a general dislike and mistrust of leaders.

This mistrust of leaders extends beyond public institutions. In the private sector, only 18% had confidence in big business (Brenan, 2021). Confidence in corporate chief executive officers was also reported to be at an all-time low in 2017 (Edelman, 2017). This is despite corporate leadership development being a $50 billion-dollar industry in the United States

(Prokopeak, 2018). Even with a large allocation of corporate funding ultimately resulting in poor results, 94% of industries indicated they planned to maintain or increase their expenditure on leadership development. Many industries are spending over $1,000 per employee to develop leadership capabilities from within the company (Prokopeak, 2018). In fact, leadership development as of the late 2010s, was estimated to occupy the majority of costs in organizational training budgets (Ho, 2016; O'Leonard, 2014), even though only a small minority of organizations believe their leadership development programs were highly effective (Schwartz & Pelster, 2014).

Kellerman (2018) notes that despite an exponential growth in the leadership development industry over the past couple of decades, this growth has failed to produce quality leaders. She writes of the leadership industry that "it has failed over its roughly forty-year history to in any major, meaningful, measurable way improve the human condition" (Kellerman, 2014, p. 3). Kellerman attributes the failure of the leadership education industry to a couple of fundamental problems. These problems include focusing on a leader-centric approach to leadership education, absence of consistent standards of quality and tendency to overlook the importance of followers, and how broader situational contexts impact the success of leaders (Kellerman, 2014). Expanding on this notion, Rosch and Jenkins (2020) suggest that leadership education has failed to adequately implement experiential activities by which students can actually gain true leadership experience.

While the impact of this crisis is relevant to all sectors of society, among those who should be most concerned about a lack of public confidence in leaders are those in higher education who design leader development programs (Rosch & Jenkins, 2020). The coinciding of this leadership crisis with a society that features the most college-educated populace in history

would seem problematic, particularly after decades of ingraining leader development in the curricular and co-curricular structures found in higher education (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Higher education offers leadership development that is grounded in theoretical foundations leading to deeper outcomes than those offered by short-term industry-based programs (Rosch & Wilson, 2022). Yet consensus over which theoretical foundations are the most relevant to leadership development remains elusive. Kellerman (2018) notes that there remains virtually no agreement on leadership pedagogy after over four decades. This has led to an undergraduate leadership development landscape that features a wealth of leadership models, practices, and programs but an absence of rigor and recognized professionalism associated with the education and preparation of leaders (Kellerman, 2018).

This call for increased rigor is complicated by inadequate assessment strategies on the impact of leadership education in the higher education environment (Rosch & Wilson, 2022). Some areas of leadership development among college students are marginally understood due to a lack of adequate study. For example, research has failed to fully examine causality with respect to many leadership outcomes (Rosch & Wilson, 2022). While we know students with diverse traits respond to leadership programming differently (Rosch & Wilson, 2022), greater understanding of why individuals with different traits respond differently merits further study. This type of qualitative research can add to this understanding through the reflections of individual students.

Higher Education Institutions and Leader Development Efforts

The current prevalence of college-based leadership development efforts was largely driven by a previous widespread effort to respond to a similar crisis of confidence in leaders (Komives & Wagner, 2016). Responding to concerns about the need for developing more

effective and ethical leaders, Astin and Astin (2000) suggested that higher education should play "a major part in shaping the quality of leadership in modern society" (p. 11). This declaration followed a decade of major investments during the 1990s in leader development strategies by higher education institutions (Dugan & Komives, 2007). These strategies utilized the development of new leadership models for college students, the rise of volunteerism and service-learning, the prevalence of national leadership organizations, an emphasis on college learning and developmental outcomes, and an emphasis in business and industry on teamwork and collaboration (Dugan & Komives, 2007).

This emphasis on leadership development has resulted in the modern college landscape having infused leadership development programming into all facets of institutional programming. As of 2025, the International Leadership Association (n.d.) reported 948 leadership-focused majors and minors at the undergraduate or graduate level. In addition to curricular-based approaches, guiding standards recommend higher education extracurricular programming base leadership development programming on researched-based leadership development frameworks (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2023).

Table 1

Common Leadership Development Models Used in Higher Education

Model	Description	Use in Higher Education	Citation
Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCM)	A values-based, collaborative leadership framework built around the "7 Cs" and designed specifically for college students.	Used in undergraduate leadership courses, co-curricular leadership programs, service-learning initiatives, orientation leader training, and multi-institutional research.	(Higher Education Research Institute, 1996)
The Leadership Challenge (Kouzes & Posner)	Framework emphasizing five practices of exemplary leadership.	Used in leadership minors, workshops, certificate programs, and student-leader training.	(Kouzes & Posner, 2017)
Relational Leadership Model (RLM)	Defines leadership as purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical, and process-oriented.	Integrated into student affairs training, residence life, student organization development, and leadership textbooks.	(Komives et al., 2013)
Transformational Leadership	Focuses on inspiring followers, stimulating creativity, and supporting individual development.	Taught in leadership theory courses, graduate programs, and assessment contexts.	(Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass, 1985)
Authentic Leadership	Leadership grounded in values, self-awareness, transparency, and moral perspective.	Used in reflection-based leadership courses, coaching, and graduate leadership development.	(Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008)
Adaptive Leadership	Leadership approach for navigating complex, systemic challenges.	Used in public administration, higher education leadership programs, and change-leadership curricula.	(Heifetz et al., 2009)
Strengths-Based Leadership / CliftonStrengths	Approach focused on leveraging individuals' natural talents.	Used in student success initiatives, first-year programs, advising, residence life, and leadership centers.	(Rath & Conchie, 2008)

Model	Description	Use in Higher Education	Citation
Emotional Intelligence (EI/EQ)	Framework emphasizing emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, and social skills.	Used in student leader training, conflict resolution workshops, and leadership courses.	(Shankman et al., 2015)
Leadership Identity Development (LID) Model	Describes how students form and evolve their identity as leaders.	Used in leadership education research, program assessment, and developmental curriculum design.	(Komives et al., 2005)
Servant Leadership	Leadership philosophy emphasizing serving others and shared power.	Used in faith-based institutions, service-learning leadership courses, and community engagement programs.	(Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 1998)
Experiential Learning (Kolb)	Learning cycle involving experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation.	Foundation for internships, practicums, outdoor leadership, service-learning, and reflection-based leadership development.	(Kolb, 1984)

While leader development programs are entrenched in both the curricular offerings of institutions and in the intentional programming of co-curricular realm of higher education in student organizations, student governance, and university athletics, the aggregate of these programs has not elicited a pipeline of leaders who are perceived to be capable of meeting societal problems (Kellerman, 2018). Just as there have been calls for greater scrutiny in the classroom curriculum, the impact of co-curricular experiences on the development of student leaders merits a greater understanding of exactly how these experiences impact students and how these experiences impact different students (Rösch et al., 2023). Concerns over a deficit of critical thinking skills among college graduates is a concern for preparing students for leadership roles beyond college (Flores et al., 2012). A survey of college provosts has shown a steady

decline in confidence in their graduates' abilities to enter the workforce (Busteed, 2020). Another survey found that only 33% of employers view recent graduates as proficient in leadership, while 70% of recent graduates ranked themselves as proficient in leadership (NACE, 2017).

A study of student cognitive models of their capacity to engage in leadership behaviors found that there was no difference between students who had participated in formal leadership development activities and those that had not participated (Rosch, 2018). This is despite heavy investment in a variety of curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular based platforms designed to advance students as leaders.

A survey of millennials found that they expected their development as a leader to be the responsibility of their employers; meanwhile employers tended to expect millennials to bear the responsibility of developing as a leader (Deloitte, 2018). Despite the significant financial investments and academic emphasis on leadership, a crisis in leadership remains.

Biases Related to Perspectives and Personality

While there are many ways to scrutinize the shortcomings of leadership education, it is worth considering whether long-held assumptions are latent in leadership development programming that are limiting the emergence of all potential leaders. Perhaps by encouraging and nurturing the leadership growth of a broader spectrum of individuals, more leaders can be engaged in the work of leading society, eliciting greater opportunities for trust and engagement in leaders across a variety of environments.

Such consideration provides the basis for this study which focuses specifically on the leadership development experiences of students with more introverted personality traits and

whether such individuals are adequately motivated to grow and emerge as a leader while in college. Previous critiques of leader development approaches may be biased, requiring research on whether personality-based biases are perceived in leader development approaches in college.

Among the existing research on leader development, historic biases have been identified within the traditional structures of leadership development practices and underlying theories. Women and various racial and ethnic groups have been hindered in leadership pipeline opportunities (Spector, 2016). Western cultural biases have long been embedded into various leadership theories (Allen, 2018). Traditional leadership theories have been criticized as being entrenched with "Anglo-American values such as rationality, utilitarianism, pragmatism, individualism, neoliberalism, patriarchy and whiteness presented as part of an 'objective', universal worldview" (Liu, 2020, p. 22). These values have led leadership theories and practice to be synonymous with power and control (Liu, 2020). While gender and cultural-based biases have been scrutinized for their influence on accepted leadership theories, a similar scrutiny is needed to consider long-held assumptions on personality and leader development. While connections between personality and leader development have long been studied, the influence of societal biases related to personality may be latent in the processes through which leaders are encouraged, prepared, and supported. Whereas biases in leader development have been questioned for their rootedness in culture or gender influences, biases related to personality also merit scrutiny.

Examining these complexities across individual differences requires research approaches that better allow for new directions of consideration. Klenke (2016) asserts that strictly adhering to quantitative approaches that historically dominated research on leadership can lead to misguided outcomes. In a time where confidence in leaders seems to be at a point of crisis, it is

critical to push our understanding of leadership phenomena further to better understand their applicability in improving leader development. Klenke (1996) notes that "while trait theories may not have produced unambiguous results, trait theory continues to resurface as explanatory constructs to account for effective leadership" (p. 62). As such, more nuanced approaches are needed in understanding how personality influences leader development. Extraverted individuals have been more likely than introverted individuals to emerge as leaders (Landis et al., 2022; Judge, Bono, et al., 2002). Little is known as to why this phenomenon exists and what introverts can do differently to address this disparity (Spark & O'Connor, 2021). Through a better understanding of the impact of personality on the development of leaders we can perhaps move a paradigm from leadership being *described* with respect to how it is associated with personality types.

The portrayal of extraversion as an indicator of leadership is not without its critics among those who advocate for the benefits of introverted personalities. Susan Cain (2013) asserts that ingrained societal biases lead to inaccurate associations of leadership and extraversion. She notes that perceptions of extraverts as being more intelligent or better leaders are prevalent despite many studies that show no linkage between leadership effectiveness and personality. In essence, Cain asserts that many introverted individuals are not getting a fair opportunity to showcase their abilities.

Cain's (2013) assertions on ingrained biases against introversion are a point of consideration in this study. Given a lack of confidence in leadership nationally, it may be worth considering whether leadership development structures are enabling the growth of only certain types of leaders with limited skill sets.

Assumptions or approaches that hinder the development of introverts as leaders may be manifested in many leader development programs. At a minimum it is important to consider if a reflection of bias impacts the development of leadership efficacy among those who identify as more introverted. Determining if introverts experience bias in college leader development programs is the focus of this study and ultimately may contribute to greater trust in leaders by extending and enhancing opportunities for more individuals to be encouraged and nurtured in their growth and emergence as viable societal leaders.

Perhaps a needed approach is to avoid a focus solely on individuals or solely on the theoretical foundations of leadership education but rather explore the nature of disconnects between individuals and the experiences designed to build the competency of the individuals. A "one size fits all" concept of leadership education or successful leaders is potentially at the root of the failures of leadership. The experiences of students who are more introverted and who hope to grow as leaders could be a prime opportunity to examine the nature of disconnects between the person and the programmatic experiences designed to enhance their growth as leaders.

Bridging disconnects require an understanding of the personality traits and the situations that evoke personality-based strengths and weaknesses. Trait Activation Theory posits that personality traits become exposed based on contexts that "activate" traits to be visible and influential in a situation (Tett & Guterman, 2000; Tett & Burnett, 2003). In this study, Bandura's (1997) framework of self-efficacy establishes impacting factors that are actualized by introverts in ways that expose their introverted personality traits. Through better understanding of this intersection of personality and self-efficacy, leadership development programming can be more impactful. Whereas there are wide variety of schematics that are designed to develop leaders in

college, better scaffoldings can be built to support introverted students in developing the confidence to pursue and grow from these opportunities.

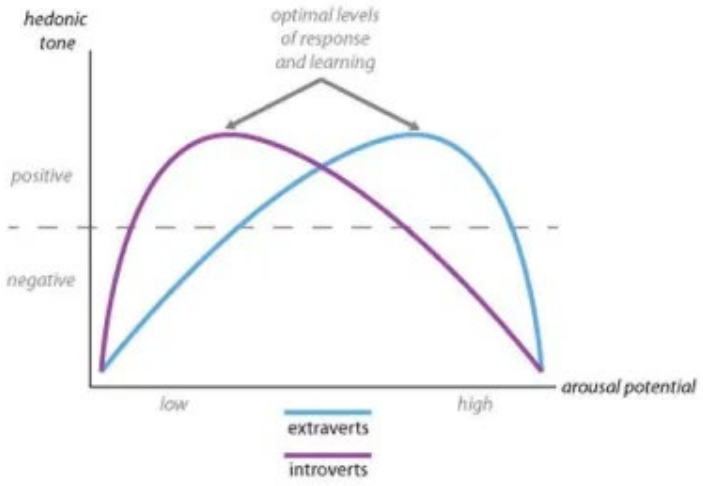
Theoretical Framework

In considering the leadership development of introverted students, it is important to consider how introversion influences student perceptions of their growth as a leader. The frameworks of personality and self-efficacy provide conceptual foundations to explore this phenomenon. These two models share some commonalities as both represent the mutual influence of inner self with external influences.

As extraversion is a component of many models of personality, a framework representative of extraversion provides context for how introversion is considered in this study. While the concept and terminology of extraversion is found in multiple widely accepted constructs of personality, Eysenck's (1967) biological model how introverts and extraverts differ in response to social settings best reflects the concepts explored in this study. This model was based on research that consistently showed that personality differences between those with more introverted tendencies and those with more extraverted tendencies stemmed from differences in arousal systems found in the brain. In his research, introverts have higher baseline cortical arousal while extraverts have lower baseline arousal. As a result of these differences, introverts are more easily overstimulated by social environments and as a result prefer quieter situations while extraverts seek external means of stimulation often in the form of social situations with groups, parties, and overall active settings. As there are aspects of leadership and leadership development that involve group-based engagement, this model could be explanative of perceptions of leadership development and overall leadership efficacy by introverts and extraverts.

Figure 1

Model of Eysenck's Arousal Theory for Personality



Note. Adapted from "Listen while you learn? The effects of background music and personality on language learning," by music-mind-brain, 2015, *Music, Mind & Brain @ Goldsmiths*

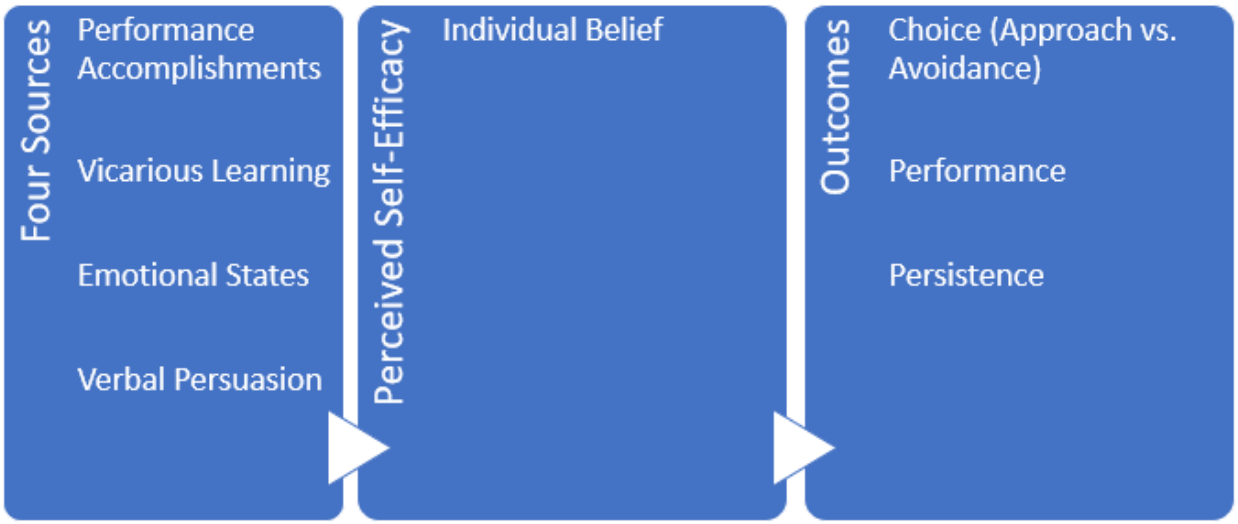
Self-efficacy has been shown to be a significant predictor of success in college (Gore, 2006; Zajacova et al., 2005). Likewise, self-efficacy is also a key factor in the development of successful leaders (Keating et al., 2014; Rosch et al., 2015). Yet, self-efficacy is facilitated through a mixture of factors, both internally and externally derived (Bandura, 1997). These internal and external influences on self-efficacy provide a parallel linkage to the framework of Eysenck's model of extraversion and introversion which reflect how individuals respond to external stimuli based on internal psychological influences.

Albert Bandura's (1997) model defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Bandura identified four major contributing factors to self-efficacy:

performance accomplishment, vicarious learning, verbal encouragement, and emotional states. Self-efficacy ultimately is a factor in individual performance and behavior (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Bandura Self-Efficacy Model



Note. Model represents Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Model (1997). From *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Worth Publishers.

The development of self-efficacy in emerging leaders is a key need in collegiate-based leader development programs (Day et al., 2009; Hannah et al., 2008; Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011). Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in their abilities to achieve a desired outcome from their efforts (Bandura, 1997). It is influenced collectively through performance outcomes, vicarious experience, verbal encouragement, and psychological arousal (Bandura 1997). Bandura's Self-Efficacy Model offers a framework to explore how personal confidence in an individual's leadership abilities is developed in introverted students. Utilizing this framework allows for an opportunity to consider whether leader development activities in college settings

adequately support the development of introverted students and enable their growth in other aspects of leadership development.

Study Purpose & Research Questions

Using Bandura's model of self-efficacy, this study explored the experiences of students who identify as introverted as they consider their growth as a leader in college. The purpose of this study was to explore how introverted students experience self-efficacy in their growth as a leader. Interviews with introverted students interested in leadership provided authentic perspectives on the students' self-efficacy journey in college. The specific research questions guiding the study include:

1. Performance Accomplishment: How do introverted students define success in student leadership scenarios?
2. Vicarious Learning: How are introverted students affected by observations of leadership scenarios in the college environment?
3. Verbal Encouragement: How do introverted students receive encouragement on their participation in leadership development activities?
4. Emotional States: How do introverted students manage emotions as a result of their leadership development opportunities in college?

Significance of Study

This qualitative study sought to explore student experiences among those who are more introverted than their peers, with the goal of better understanding how students can be encouraged in their development as leaders. In exploring these experiences, the hope was to understand the perceptions of self-efficacy by introverted students as these students partake in

leadership development programming in college. This study also sought to explore the expectations that students have for their growth in their efficacy in their leadership abilities and to determine whether experiences in college have met these expectations.

This study is significant to the field of leader development in college as it provides a window into the lived experience of students who identify as introverted and who are seeking to develop as leaders and considers how introverted individuals gain awareness of their strengths and are encouraged and nurtured in developing confidence in their abilities to lead. This study presented an opportunity to consider how individuals with different personality traits develop as leaders in hopes of developing a broader spectrum of leaders who are equipped to engage with a diversity of problems and audiences. A general lack of societal confidence in leaders suggests that leaders with different qualities may be needed. Similarly, understanding the lived experiences of a sub-group of students helps inform practitioners on strategies that may be needed to benefit all students who are developing as leaders. As society seeks to remedy systematic bias that has been latent in many educational and societal systems, this study explored a potential bias that may not be fully recognized or understood. When considering appreciative approaches to student development, such as strengths-based leadership, it is important to assess whether these approaches are fully engrained in institutional programming and whether all students feel supported in their personal journeys and adequately developed in ways that recognize and leverage their personal strengths as they grow as a leader.

This study considers the impact of long-held theories of leadership related to traits on how leader development approaches and perceptions of leaders are continually impacted by biases associated with these theories. This study explores how an experiential and educational scaffolding can be built to support the leadership development of students who are more

introverted than their peers. It is hoped that personal traits can be better understood as individualistic approaches of leadership and not as a perceived barrier applied to populations of introverted individuals who desire to contribute as effective leaders.

Chapter Summary

With an environment of dissatisfaction with the state of leadership in the United States, it is necessary to consider how the institutions that offer leader development programming can better understand how to support the growth of a broader diversity of students. One first step in addressing the problem is to expand understanding of how individuals from different perspectives perceive the impact of leader development activities on their motivations to lead. By using a self-efficacy lens, this study connected individual efficacy with a broader reflection on the individual's lived experiences in leader development in higher education. This understanding of individual experience can help those who develop leader development programming to consider embedded biases or approaches that hinder the growth of emerging leaders. One needed area of focus is to examine commonly held assumptions about personality and leadership and specifically whether individuals with more introverted personalities are being adequately developed and supported as emerging leaders. The following chapter reviews the literature and research on personality and its interplay with leader development and leader emergence. This review will help establish where new research can reexamine long-held assumptions and explore whether there are opportunities for greater understanding of the phenomena of personality and leader development.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter highlights the literature that informs this study. Specifically, this chapter reviews trait-based theories of leadership and how personality traits are historically considered in the scholarship of leadership education. The literature review then takes a broader view of personality and considers evolving thought and understandings around introversion with particular attention to growing consideration of biases that hinder those who identify as introverts. Finally, the existing literature on self-efficacy and leadership efficacy are then considered with particular attention to the influence of personality on these concepts. This review of literature presents a foundation for further research into the influence of introversion on leadership efficacy.

Trait Theories of Leadership

Some of the earliest philosophies on leadership posited that successful leaders possessed innate qualities or genetic traits that enabled their capabilities as a leader (Spector, 2016). These leadership theories known as trait theories have the longest history in the field of leadership studies, with studies on individual differences and leadership dating back to the 1920s and 1930s (Zaccaro et al., 2018). Even as early as 1841, Thomas Carlyle suggested the concept of leaders as being produced from the elite circumstances of birth, giving rise to the concept of "great man" theories, which led to a long and controversial history of trait-focused study (Goldberg et al., 1993). The scholarly consideration of trait-theories has ebbed and flowed for decades but gained renewed interest in the late 1980s and early 1990s as new meta-analyses, methodological advances, and new conceptual frameworks revisited the merits of a focus on individual differences with respect to understanding leadership (Zaccaro et al., 2018).

Critiques of Trait Theories of Leadership

With such a long history of study, trait theories have garnered much scrutiny and much criticism. One of the most fundamental criticisms of trait theories is that, despite years of research and various meta-analyses, a definitive list of leadership traits has yet to be developed (Northouse, 2021). An influential study related to traits and leadership is a meta-analysis by Stogdill (1948), which concluded that preferable traits were contingent on the specific situations of leaders and followers. For example, traits that were conducive to desirable leadership on the field of battle might not be transferable to a business managerial situation. This vein of thinking also extends to organizational cultural contexts where there is historic debate over whether there are culturally specific or cultural universal leadership values as research has shown that there is validity to both lines of thinking (Bass, 1990). Many global cultures differ from western cultures in conceptualizing leadership, emphasizing the well-being of the group over individual achievement (Dorfman et al., 1997; Hofstede, 1993; Liu, Wen, et al., 2021) Such cultures may value different traits from those in leadership roles than those found in more individualistic, masculine cultures. This reflects a common criticism of trait-approaches in that there has been such a breadth of traits identified that it is highly subjective as to which traits should be elevated. Northouse (2021) notes that a common criticism of trait approaches to leadership is that they traditionally have failed to examine the relationship between traits and leadership outcomes. More recent models of trait-focused approaches have sought to differentiate the ways that individual traits influence leaders, including a focus on traits with respect to both leadership development and performance (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Prochazka et al., 2018).

Salient to the current leadership crisis, one critique of trait-based approaches to leadership is the inherent challenge of recognizing differences between trait-based influences on

leader emergence, leadership perception, and leadership performance. When controlled for aptitude and ability, personality traits of dominance tend to get more favorable associations with leadership despite no difference in abilities (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Ironically, it is the trait of dominance that tends to evoke less "likeability" in a study of college students (Wortman & Wood, 2011), perhaps offering a glimpse of a paradox of a positive association with leadership but a negative association with likeability—a paradox that may reflect aspects of the current leadership "crisis." A critique of many of the historical studies on trait theories suggest that they merely focused on leader emergence as opposed to effectiveness (Lord et al., 1986).

Despite ample criticism, some scholars note the value of considering traits as a factor in leader development and leader success. Trait-centric theories do provide an approach to the study of leadership that is explanatory of many concepts of leadership, and increasingly complex models have emerged related to leader traits (Zaccaro et al., 2018). Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) show a pivoting view of trait-approaches by rejecting individual traits as a sole explainer of leadership elements but rather as one factor among other elements in explaining leadership. Zaccaro (2012) advocates for viewing leadership as being influenced by multiple factors in that he sees challenges to explain leadership based on just one or even a few individual differences. He alludes to individuals as "constellations," which projects an evolution of trait-focused thinking from a binary linkage between extraversion and leadership to a more intricate picture or "constellation" of a variety of individual factors (including personality) that influence leaders and their navigation of leadership scenarios. This would suggest that awareness and examination of specific desirable traits is a useful but incomplete approach to explain leadership.

Considering traits in terms of their place among a broad spectrum of influences and contexts provides a better understanding of their influence on individual leadership (Colbert et

al., 2012). The influence of traits has also been extended to consider how the traits of followers' impact leaders (Matthews et al., 2021). While trait theory maintains a place in the study of leadership education, a post-industrial paradigm of leadership theory emerged in the latter part of the 20th century that considered the inadequacies of previous leadership constructs and instead considered the broader societal influences on leadership (Rost & Barker, 2000). Books such as Burns' (1978) *Leadership* were influential to the development of new models of leadership that focused more on the development of ethics and relationships between leaders and followers (Skendall & Ostick, 2017). This focus on leadership as a relationship still invites consideration as to the role that personal traits play in relationship dynamics.

The debate on the relevance of trait theories remains a point of contention in the field of leadership studies. While some authors have claimed that trait theory has been "totally debunked" in favor of new post-industrial models of leadership (Cronin, 1984), other leadership scholars note a resurgence in explorations of traits and leadership (Franz, 2012; Northouse, 2021). Zaccaro (2007) argued that trait-based approaches have been rejected too quickly and certain traits can be predictive of leadership performance regardless of the situation.

In summary, trait-based theories maintain a presence within the spectrum of thought related to the development of leaders. Though sole reliance on trait theories has waned from the earliest days of leadership scholarship, study of personal traits remains valuable to the study of leadership as one of many contributing influences on the emergence and perception of leaders.

Extraversion/Introversion

While trait-focused theories have historically included a variety of personal traits, personality traits have received the most attention with respect to leadership (Judge, Bono, et al.,

2002). Among the descriptors of personality, the concept of extraversion/introversion is consistently identified as a major component of personality. Carl Jung introduced the terms "introversion" and "extraversion" in 1921. Jung (1923) posited that humans have both an inward-focused aspect to consciousness (introversion) and an outward focus toward others (extraversion), with one of these two aspects being more dominant than the other. Eysenck (1963) built upon Jung's work, suggesting that people were naturally "hard-wired" as to temperament of extraversion or introversion. In Eysenck's theory, extraverts were naturally under-stimulated in certain areas of the brain and therefore needed to be stimulated by external experiences. Introverts conversely were naturally overstimulated and therefore needed space and quiet to prevent feeling overwhelmed (Eysenck, 1963). Extraversion therefore is an affinity towards being gregarious and engaging with others while introversion is more prone to reflection and a desire to focus on individual work (Jung, 1923). It is believed that somewhere between 40% and 55% of individuals with introversion can point to genetics as the primary factor in their introverted tendencies (Bouchard & McGue, 2003).

Levels of extraversion/introversion are measured in a wide variety of assessments and are indicated by the prominence of sociability and dominance (Watson & Clark, 1997). Assessments of personality tend to include indicators of the degree that an individual's personality reflects levels of extraversion versus introversion. The awareness of this aspect of personality has become an integral part of many self-awareness practices; and, as such, the concept of "extravert" or "introvert" is a well-known concept in the public lexicon. An overview of models and instruments that are intended to measure levels of extraversion/introversion are included in this section.

The Big Five Model is a taxonomy of personality that was first developed by D.W. Fiske in 1949. This model identified five major areas comprising individual personality including openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Later models of personality affirm these general compositions (Fiske, 1949). One similar model, The Five Factor Model, is credited to Costa and McCrae (1992) and is discussed interchangeably with the Big Five model (Sleep et al., 2020).

While many assessments follow aspects of the Big Five or Five Factor Model, the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) aligns with the Big Five or Five Factor Model only in its identification in extraversion and introversion as a component of personality. MBTI was developed in the 1960s by the mother and daughter duo of Isabel Myers and Katharine Cook Briggs to determine personality characteristics set forth by Carl Jung (Myers & Briggs Foundation, 2025). Though widely used in management and organizational contexts, MBTI does have some limitations with respect to its applicability in research. First, the approach to MBTI is to group people in various personality traits into dichotomous categories; however, studies have found that individuals tend to identify with these categories on a spectrum, exhibiting traits nuanced with varying degrees of strength (Fleeson, 2001). Carl Jung is reported to suggest that there is no true extravert or introvert, rejecting the notion of the introvert and extravert dichotomy. From a research perspective, this is challenging in that MBTI does not easily represent those who are slightly introverted from those who are very introverted and vice versa. Questions as to whether MBTI provides an accurate interpretation of Jung's theory of personality types have been raised over the years (King & Mason, 2020; McCrae & Costa, 1989). Additionally, concerns have been raised over the enabling of bias associated with the use of MBTI, particularly in career development contexts (Emre, 2018).

Relationship Between Introversion and Leadership

Specifically, among the "big five" personality factors, the aspect of extraversion has been most closely linked to leadership (Judge, Bono, et al., 2002). Studies have found that extraversion is a positive predictor of leader emergence, as extraverts have greater natural ability to navigate group scenarios via confidence in their social skills (Judge, Bono, et al., 2002). The ability to show dominance in social situations is also associated with perceptions of leadership. Sociability and dominance have been found to be related to self and peer ratings of leadership (Gough, 1990). The link between the positive affectivity and energy that is associated with extraversion also suggests possible links between extraversion and leadership. Colbert and colleagues (2012) note that "research has shown that the broad trait of extraversion is related to being perceived as more leaderlike (Hogan et al., 1994; Watson & Clark, 1997), and to assessments of leader effectiveness (Costa & McCrae, 1988)" (Colbert et al., 2012, p. 673).

While most of the literature on introversion suggests it as an inhibitor in leadership scenarios, there are studies that suggest that introverted approaches have advantages in some leadership scenarios (Grant et al., 2011). For example, research has tended to show that introverted approaches can have better leadership outcomes, depending on the context (Gollwitzer & Bargh, 2018). Furthermore, research has shown that teams that are composed of more proactive individuals are more effectively led by introverted individuals (Grant et al., 2011). Introverted leaders are also shown to be better at improving task proficiency and proactive behaviors when leading teams that are less satisfied toward their leaders (Thomas et al., 2013).

It is estimated that about 40% of United States adult citizens identify as introverted (Ballard, 2023), as such it is important to consider how introverts can best be supported as

leaders, particularly at a time when confidence in leaders is at a low point (Smith-Schoenwalder & Jeffrey-Wilensky, 2025). Introversion is a trait that should be better understood for how it nuances individual motivation, education, and opportunity with respect to the development of leaders. A qualitative approach allows for these nuances to be articulated and explored for their implications for the field of leader development.

Leadership Efficacy

Understanding introversion and leadership in different contexts is furthered by a greater understanding of leader self-efficacy. Based upon Bandura's constructs, leadership efficacy is defined as the "confidence a person has in their ability to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific leadership task within a given context" (Bandura, 1997).

To understand the concept of leader self-efficacy, it is important to understand the broader concept of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977, 1997) asserts that a person's beliefs about their own abilities are essential to how they think, act, and feel. Self-efficacy is a guiding factor in what an individual does, the degree of effort they put into an activity, their persistence when dealing with challenges, and their potential for overall success. Bandura distinguishes self-efficacy from self-confidence in that self-efficacy is focused on an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish a task. Self-efficacy impacts individuals by influencing cognition, motivation, emotions, and ultimate decisions to engage in activities and environments. Bandura's models on self-efficacy assert that individuals' self-efficacy is shaped by mastering a task, observing other's success, verbal encouragement, and the emotional states of individuals.

Mastery Experiences

Task mastery involves the achievement of success in challenging activity. Repeated success in achieving a planned activity deepens self-efficacy while repeated failures—particularly upon initial efforts—can lessen self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Bandura states that *"the most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences."* (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). When individuals experience success following persistent effort, they gain a strong feeling of efficacy that aids them being resilient in the face of future setbacks. Direct success is considered to be more influential to self-efficacy than vicarious learning or verbal encouragement (Bandura, 1997).

Vicarious Experiences

Bandura (1977) notes the importance of modeling behaviors in social learning. Building upon this concept, vicarious learning revolves around observing others being successful as a contributing factor to an individual's confidence. These vicarious experiences are particularly powerful if the individual being observed is seen as being similar.

Verbal Persuasion

Verbal feedback entails communicated feedback from sources that are trustworthy or competent. Bandura (1997) described verbal persuasion as a means of influencing self-efficacy through "suggestion, exhortation, or self-instruction." While verbal feedback may not supplant the impact of experiencing success or observing the success of others, encouraging feedback is important in building self-efficacy.

Emotional States

Bandura (1997) highlights the impact of physiological cues on how an individual approaches a task. Feelings of anxiety, increased heart rate, and excited feelings all are indicative of either feeling doubtful about a task or feeling ready for a task. Continued fatigue and burnout also can reduce the confidence that an individual feels engaged in a task.

Introversion and Leader Development in College

Estimates are that over 40% of students in college have more introverted personalities. The variety of experiences and approaches to teaching college can impact students in different ways based on their personality (Condon & Ruth-Sahd, 2013). The research on how introverted students respond to different learning approaches reflects varying findings and philosophies on how introverted students can best be engaged in leadership development learning environments.

Impact of Active Learning

Active learning approaches have been increasingly embraced in higher education for their value to encouraging teamwork, improving critical thinking, and increasing student engagement in course material among other benefits (Cooper et al., 2024; Prince, 2004). As such, active learning approaches are frequently utilized in leader development strategies in curricular-based leader development programs (Day et al., 2014; Komives et al., 2013).

Research on leader development programs suggest that such teaching strategies are easier for extraverted students to embrace than introverted students (Stewart & Bernardi, 2010). However, introverted students tend to have similar academic success when engaging in active learning approaches than their more extraverted peers (Bipp et al., 2008; Flanagan & Addy, 2019). What differs is their motivation within these course settings. Introverted individuals may

show lower levels of mastery and performance-approach motivation compared with extraverted individuals, likely due to lower assertiveness, activity, and social engagement (Bipp et al., 2008). This does not mean introverts are less capable, only that they may approach academic situations with different motivations than extraverts.

Some scholars have suggested that though challenging, active learning environments provide a healthy tension for introverted students to overcome as they mimic professional situations that a student may face later in life (Cain, 2013; Komives et al., 2013). At the same time if there is no attention to supporting introverted students in navigating these challenges, the emergence of a student as a leader or their self-efficacy as a leader may be hindered (Dugan & Komives 2010; Murphy & Johnson, 2011).

Adapting Learning Environments for Introverts

While introverted students have been shown to be just as successful in active-learning environments as students with other personalities, student success in these environments is best supported with intentional efforts to ensure an environment that allows a diversity of voices to be heard. For example, it is recommended that instructors assign groups with intentional diversity (Flanagan & Addy, 2019). Van Kleef, De Drue, and Manstead (2004) found that when introverts feel the pressure of time, they lose motivation to thoroughly process information and as a result feel under-prepared academically. Time to process thoughts on paper has been shown to provide a sense of control in situations where verbalizing learning is required (Condon & Ruth-Sahd, 2013). Many students have found that being in group situations led to pressure to speak up, even if they did not feel prepared to speak up (Cooper et al., 2024). A qualitative study of nursing students who self-identify as introverts found that introverted students felt they would be more

successful if the learning environment was adapted to be more equitable and if their silence in the classroom was respected (Colley, 2019). Differences in type of discourse between introverts and extraverts have been shown as well. Nussbaum (2002) found the extraverted students tended to be more comfortable with debate focused discourse, while introverts valued more collaborative approaches in groups to seek creative solutions. One approach that has been successful to aid the inclusion of introverted students has been the use of technology. As online-based learning and social media have increased in recent years, studies have shown that introverted students have preferred the use of social media in learning environments (Voorn & Kommers, 2013).

Connecting Readiness, Willingness, and Ability in Leadership Development

Keating, Rosch, and Burgoon (2014) explore the value of leadership development education in the overall process of leadership growth among undergraduate college students; however, they note fundamental shortcomings in research on the impact of this education. They highlight a need to better understand the attributes of students who undertake leadership development courses, as well as the specific attributes of the leader development programs that lead to gains in leadership. Using a construct of readiness, willingness, and ability, they advocate for a study of leader development by focusing on concepts of individual preparedness, motivation, and skills as factors in the development of leaders.

For introverted students, previous experiences in learning settings may influence their decisions to pursue leadership development in classroom-based environments. Godfrey and Koutsouris (2023) found that the secondary-school settings were difficult places for introverted students with students reporting feeling “overlooked” and “out of place”. Many students felt anxiety in group discussions, large groups, or in performance-oriented activities and often felt

ignored by teachers and peers (Godfrey & Koutsouris, 2023). Perhaps leadership development courses are perceived as settings that are not comfortable by introverted students. In a single-institution study, Pearson and DeFrank-Cole (2017) found in tracking 218 students from six sections of an introductory leadership course across three semesters that over 79% were found to be extraverts based on an MBTI-based instrument. In this study, the researchers surmised that the perceptions of leadership development classes tended to suggest that leadership studies were perceived as more palatable to extraverted students as opposed to introverted students (Pearson & DeFrank-Cole, 2017).

Introverted College Students and Self-Efficacy.

Published research on the relationship between introversion and self-efficacy suggests that it is difficult to generalize self-efficacy based solely on personality. Rather it is more appropriate to assume that self-efficacy for introverts largely depends on the context of the specific situation.

Introverted students reported lower confidence in group participation but equal or stronger confidence in self-guided or independent activities (Komarraju & Karau, 2005). Specific to leadership, Haddad and Velez (2020) found that pre-college leadership efficacy was the strongest predictor of leadership efficacy in college. Participation in leadership conferences, courses, retreats, and trainings were positively associated with leadership efficacy in college (Soria et al., 2020). Historically, extraversion has been shown to elicit more positive responses from others which can heighten self-efficacy (Judge, Bono, et al., 2002). This begs the questions of how leadership efficacy might be seeded in introverted students before college, how programs in college can be best accessible and palatable to introverted students, and how introverted students can gain positive responses from others.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this qualitative study of the leader development experiences of students who are more introverted than their peers sought to contribute to a better understanding of how more individuals can be equipped effectively to lead in society. As the strengths of introverts are finding a renewed appreciation in society, the literature suggests that fully understanding and supporting introverted students may be an area of needed growth in college-based leaders development activities. Supporting the emergence of a broader spectrum of leaders requires an understanding of how self-efficacy is manifested across the spectrum of personalities. Such approaches can potentially respond to a leadership crisis by bringing more diverse perspectives, strengths, and approaches into leadership efforts.

Research Methods

This study considers how students who are more introverted than their peers develop the necessary personal efficacy to lead and how self-efficacy with respect to their development as a leader has impacted their preparation to lead. The premise of this study is that we recognize personality traits, while long linked with leadership, have many nuances that merit a depth of individual reflection that is best elicited through qualitative inquiry. This study sought to better understand the experiences of more introverted students who desire to develop as a leader while in college. Specifically, this study is based on the following research questions:

1. How do introverted students define success in student leadership scenarios?
2. How are introverted students affected by observations of leadership scenarios in the college environment?
3. How do introverted students receive encouragement on their participation in leadership development activities?
4. How do introverted students manage emotions as a result of their leadership development opportunities in college?

In this chapter, methods and research design of this study are discussed as are the characteristics of the participants of the study and how they were selected. This chapter also focuses on data collection procedures and how data was analyzed by the researcher, as well as the researcher's personal reflexive lens in approaching this project. This chapter also reinforces the problem statement and research questions that this study sought to address.

Research Methodology and Design

This study used qualitative research approaches to explore the lived experiences of students who identify as introverts in leader development programs in college. These approaches were used to identify how leader development experiences impact the leadership growth of students who have more introverted personalities than their peers. Qualitative research in the field of leadership studies is an under-utilized approach, and the lack of qualitative research has hindered a comprehensive understanding of leadership studies (Klenke, 2016). Reflecting a constructivist approach, qualitative research considers the importance of context in the study (Klenke, 2016). In this study, the broader context of individuals desiring to grow in an environment that is intentionally designed to nurture growth is important to understanding the phenomenon of introversion and leader development. This study magnifies individual perspectives on leader development within the context of introverted personalities amidst the social environment of college campuses. Interviews of introverted individuals presented an opportunity to understand individuals from their own point of view (Williamson, 2006). Constructivism recognizes that in a social environment, consideration must be given to how people use language, symbols, and meaning to construct social practice (Klenke, 2016). We gain more complete insight into leader development through reflections on how introverted individuals construct their own efficacy in leadership through their lived experiences.

Klenke (2016) notes that quantitative leadership studies are poorly suited to advance understanding of how leaders make sense of the significant events in their lives. While quantitative studies provide descriptions of phenomena, they fail to provide clarity into deeper structures of the leadership phenomena being studied. This need for more qualitative studies in leadership research adds greater parity to quantitative research and provides a greater diversity of

studies. Long-held assumptions on personality and leadership are based on quantitative studies, and qualitative inquiry captures the nuances of people's experiences as described and defined by those researched (Klenke, 2016). If individuals with introverted personalities face challenges in being recognized for their positive qualities (Cain, 2013), a qualitative study elevates participants' experiences by allowing them to express their feelings and recount their lived experiences. Qualitative methods can be empowering to the individuals being studied as they become co-creators of knowledge (Klenke, 2016).

As noted earlier, qualitative study has long been underutilized in the study of leadership (Klenke, 2016). Traditional approaches of positivism, objectivism, and quantitative study have been preemptive in leadership studies, aligning the field with other social science studies; yet there are many phenomena about leadership that are not well understood (Klenke, 2008). Burns (1978) noted that we know much about leaders but little about leadership. Zaccaro (2007) notes that the study of traits is more relevant to leadership when they are considered as part of a complex system of interactions and context. In this sense, a qualitative approach can enrich our knowledge by accounting for context and individual differences that are fundamentally relevant to our understanding of how individuals develop and contribute to leadership. For this study, qualitative approaches were determined to provide the best approach to understanding the nuances of personality with the wide variety of opportunities to develop as a leader in college.

Participants

The participants in this study were undergraduate students and members of various living-learning programs at Virginia Tech. Living-learning programs involve students living in an environment that promotes a common academic or topical theme (Mowreader, 2023). All living-learning programs at Virginia Tech include themed community-focused programming that

is often facilitated by student leaders within the communities. At the time of this study, Virginia Tech hosted approximately 3,300 students in these programs, which constituted approximately a third of all on-campus students on the Blacksburg campus (Virginia Tech Living Learning Programs, 2025). Living-learning programs at Virginia Tech include a focus on preparing students for a life of courageous leadership (Virginia Tech Living-Learning Programs, 2025). Students in these programs were targeted because of the prevalence of programming involving student leaders, an intent to develop student leaders as an area of programmatic emphasis, and because these programs offer established communication that enables broad dissemination of recruiting materials for this study.

Students were recruited via emails (Appendix A) distributed by living learning program leadership. Students who self-identified as being introverted were recruited and recruiting materials included a link to a free personality self-assessment available on an introvert themed website associated with Susan Cain.

A total of 16 interviews were conducted following the range of interviews suggested as being necessary for a phenomenological qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants responding came from six different communities including an international-themed community, a leadership-themed community, engineering-themed community, an information technology themed program, a personal strengths-themed community, and the Corps of Cadets. In addition, students who were in “Student Leader” positions, historically referred to as Resident Assistants (RA’s), were part of the interviews. These students are involved in programming in the community but have more responsibility for responding to student life and discipline needs in the communities. The students get compensation in these roles and live in rooms without roommates but are in a recognized leadership role within the residential community.

Participant Characteristics

The overall population of students interviewed reflected a diversity of races, ethnicities, and experiences in college. The students were asked basic demographic questions as to their race, gender, and year in college. Of the students interviewed, six students identified as male while 10 identified as female. There was racial diversity in the group with seven students identifying as "white," four as "black," two as "Latino/a," two as Asian, and two as multi-racial. As expected, many of the students were previous or active members of residential living-learning programs at Virginia Tech. However, since the emails could be forwarded three students who had not been part of a specific living-learning themed program at Virginia Tech were interviewed in the study. All three of these student leaders worked in the residential living arena at Virginia Tech and were active in providing peer leadership in residential communities. A total of six students serve in "Student Leader" capacities in Residence Life at Virginia Tech. While many students did work in paying jobs on the Virginia Tech campus only one student referenced off-campus employment as a significant source of leadership experience. While ten students indicated active involvement in university-based clubs, only four were in formal leadership roles in these organizations. Two students had in-depth reflections about how involvement in community service work impacted their leadership development, and the research felt it was important to document this involvement as the primary source of their leadership involvement at Virginia Tech. Individual participant descriptions are included in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographics and Involvement

Participant	Gender	Class Standing	Race/ Ethnicity	Living Learning Community (LLC)	Campus Involvement	Role/ Position
A	Male	Senior	Black	Member	Clubs	Officer
B	Female	Senior	White	—	Clubs & RA	Officer
C	Female	Senior	Latina	Member	Clubs	Officer
D	Male	Sophomore	Asian	Member	Clubs	—
E	Female	Senior	Black	Member	Clubs	Officer
F	Female	Sophomore	Asian	Member	Clubs	—
G	Female	Sophomore	Multi-racial	Member	Clubs	—
H	Male	Senior	Black	Member	Work Experience	—
I	Female	Senior	White	Member	RA & Tutor	Mentor
J	Female	Sophomore	White	Member	RA	—
K	Male	Senior	White	—-	Clubs & RA	—
L	Female	Senior	White	Member	Service	—
M	Male	Sophomore	White	Member	Service	—
N	Female	Junior	White	—	Clubs &RA	—
O	Female	Sophomore	Multi-racial	Member	Clubs	—
P	Male	Sophomore	Black	LLC	RA	—

Note. LLC = Living Learning Community; RA = Resident Assistant; "—" indicates data not reported.

Data Collection Procedures

This section provides a description of the interview procedures and strategies for understanding the data in greater context and ensuring that interview questions were asked in ways to best gain insights from interviewees.

Interview Procedures

Interviews were conducted in the 2024-25 academic year using a semi-structured interview format (Appendix D). Recruitment of participants began in Fall 2024 via a personalized email sent to the administrative faculty member in charge of each program. The Director of Living Learning Programs at Virginia Tech assisted the study by encouraging faculty to support the study. The emails to directors included the specific email to be forwarded to students (Appendix A). Emails were sent to students via distribution by the administrative faculty in charge of the various communities. After two weeks, the program faculty were asked to send a follow up note. Additionally, an email was sent specifically to the Student Leaders who serve in official capacities across residence-life programs. As students responded via email, information detailing the study as required by the Institutional Research Board was shared with students. Subsequent scheduling and completion of interviews were completed during late 2024 and early 2025. The interviews were conducted via a real-time video chat (i.e., Zoom) to allow for schedule and location flexibility for the participants and the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were utilized as the method of interviews. This type of interview was chosen because it allowed flexibility in questioning related to leadership, as the researcher sought to allow interviewees to expand their own concepts of leadership (Knight, 2017). Semi-structured interviews also are preferred for their ability to facilitate discovery by allowing questions to build upon the interview responses (Magaldi & Berler, 2020).

To aid in the development of interview questions an a priori (Appendix C) propositions table was developed to link Bandura's framework on self-efficacy and existing scholarly literature to the interview questions. An interview protocol (Appendix D) was developed to provide a framework for the interview. Interviews began with informal questions, where

participants were asked to talk about their background, their current involvement and activities in college, and their future aspirations beyond college. This focus on rapport-building was designed to make the participants comfortable and encourage open dialogue.

Pilot Testing

Pilot test participants were recruited from administrative faculty who routinely engage with students. The purpose of this testing was to test the phrasing of questions and to gain feedback on the clarity of questions in an interview format, adjusting questions as needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pilot testing was also used to test Zoom transcription software that would be utilized in the actual interviews. This pilot testing occurred in October of 2024, prior to the start of the interviews. By engaging with professionals who work with students, the researcher was able to better consider word choice, the sequence of questions, and the extent to which there would be mutual understanding of concepts between the students interviewed and the researcher.

Saturation

Data Saturation is defined as when no new codes or themes are identified in the data analysis process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Hennink and Kaiser (2022) determined through an empirical analysis of qualitative studies that generally 9 to 17 interviews provided saturation. As the researcher identified themes from the interviews, similar themes were surfacing across the interviews concurrent with the notion that saturation is achieved when similar instances are being observed over and over (Tight, 2023) The researcher's analysis of the data found redundancy in the responses of the students interviewed and determined that the existing interviews reached a threshold of saturation.

Data Analysis Procedures

In qualitative research, the primary goal of data analysis is to identify meaningful patterns and themes (Flick, 2014; Patton, 2015). The identification of patterns and themes was undertaken during review of interview transcripts by highlighting key phrases or quotes that reflected common themes among those interviewed. The researcher utilized *Intellectus Qualitative* to catalog and organize data into categories and themes. *Intellectus* was an online program that featured a variety of capabilities to aid in the study and sorting of data. Among these capabilities was serving as a repository for transcripts. Allowing themes to be manually entered into the program and related excerpts from transcripts identified to be sorted into the themes utilizing the AI features for the program (Intellectus Qualitative, n.d.). The following paragraphs detail the steps taken in the data analysis process.

Audio from the interviews was mechanically transcribed using features available through *Zoom*, allowing for a verbatim record. Transcripts were reviewed for any words that seem to be incorrectly transcribed with the researcher referring to video recordings to listen for proper wording. Transcripts were then stored in password protected folders and within *Intellectus.*

Coding

Coding is a way to focus thinking about data and its interpretation through a process of dissecting data and reassembling it to make meaning (Creswell & Creswell Báez, 2020). The researcher chose a data-driven or open-coding approach to coding data. This approach allows for the text of the interviews to drive the coding process, establishing themes for the data to be coded and revisiting transcripts for further sorting into codes (Glaser, 1992; Lochmiller, 2021). In the coding process, the researcher coded the transcripts and developed themes. The researcher

consulted notes taken during interviews, paying special attention to significant quotes that the researcher noted at the time of the interviews. The themes were input into *Intellectus* and all transcripts were scanned by the software for additional representative quotes in addition to the manual coding done by the researcher. This approach helped to ensure that all supporting data was discovered and sorted into themes that the data best supported.

The process of coding was undertaken after the completion and transcription of all interviews. Using Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy framework, categories were established and the transcript was coded based on a review of the entire transcript. The unit of analysis was phrases in the transcript, and transcripts were highlighted to correspond with different codes based on changes in meaning. Codes were grouped into categories and then sorted into broader overarching themes based on the research questions.

Trustworthiness

The researcher worked to ensure trustworthiness, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) conceptualized as a parallel to the concepts of reliability and validity found in quantitative research. The concept of trustworthiness comprises the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Stahl & King, 2020). Approaches to solidify trustworthiness are noted as follows.

Credibility

To ensure credibility, the researcher conducted member checks with interviewees by sharing themes and representative quotes from interviews with the interviewee. These member checks helped to address researcher bias in the processes of coding and making determinations

based on the data by confirming interpretations with the interview participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability

In consideration of how the results of this study can be applied to other situations or contexts, the researcher thoroughly documented the research process. Every attempt was made to provide details such that future researchers can determine the applicability of this study to other situations (Patton, 2015; Stahl & King, 2020). The researcher also worked to involve a variety of participants in the study, such that consideration could be given to how the findings might lead to new research with emphasis on other areas of focus such as personal characteristics or context of leadership experience.

Dependability

By following qualitative processes that are rigorous and adhering to accepted practices, the researcher worked to deliver findings via processes that were well-documented and in-line with commonly used qualitative methods. The use of pilot testing and transcription software helped to ensure the accuracy and completeness of data from the interview process. Additionally, use of member checks and data analysis software allows for organized and thorough approaches to making meaning of the data provided (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Stahl & King, 2020).

Confirmability

The researcher maintained notes to track the data and thoughts on the study. An audit trail of raw data, coding, and other associated analysis was housed in *Intellectus Qualitative* along with reflexive thoughts. Raw data was reviewed against audio recordings to ensure accuracy. Consistent effort was made to ensure accuracy in findings to ensure confirmability (Stahl &

King, 2020). While no other individuals were used in coding, the theme identification features of *Intellectus Qualitative* were used to identify themes from the data independent of the researcher. The researcher then reviewed these themes compared to his own coding before confirming the identified themes in the study.

Member Checks

To support trustworthiness, member-checks were conducted after the coding process, with interviewees reviewing key themes and quotes provided by the researcher. Morse, Lowery, and Steury (2016) note that member checks allow for a shared approach to interpreting data in that help to empower those being interviewed to make meaning of their thoughts. Overall member checks help to ensure the quality and rigor of the data analysis process (McKim, 2023; Lloyd et al., 2024).

Researcher Stance

Integral to qualitative research is the importance of the researcher to be self-aware of their own perspective and how that perspective can bias their cultural and political consciousness (Patton, 2015). A reflexive approach acknowledges the researcher's lens through which they undertake the study.

As this study focuses on personality and leadership, the researcher acknowledges his own introverted personality and its impact on his own experiences in leadership roles, including his experience working in student development positions. These positions have included significant roles teaching courses and leading programs designed to foster student development as leaders. It was in these experiences that the focus of this study was conceptualized. As an educator in leadership-focused classes, the researcher noted a consistent tendency for students who exhibited

introverted tendencies or self-identified as introverts to be less engaged in some aspects of courses while being more engaged in other aspects. Similarly, introverted students tended to characterize their introversion as a challenge, even an affliction, which they felt they needed to overcome. The apologetic tone that many of these students displayed with their introversion prompted the researcher to reflect on program design and environmental structures that might present barriers to the ideal engagement of introverted students. As the researcher became more aware of his own personality, he became more aware of social or professional norms that presented similar challenges to him personally.

Concurrent to these experiences, the researcher became a certified CliftonStrengths coach. As he became more aware of the philosophy of strengths, he was struck by how much emphasis was placed on students being aware of, and leveraging their strengths, in their own growth as a student. Yet, this appreciative approach to individual strengths did not seem to resonate in the reflections of introverted students. The researcher cannot recall an instance where a student characterized their introversion as an asset or any type of strength that could benefit them in a leadership scenario. Exploring this paradox became the focus of this study.

Noting the student reflections on leadership furthered the researcher's own reflection on his personal experiences as an introvert. In school situations, the researcher felt challenged in group projects yet enjoyed deeply reflective projects and projects based on personal experiential learning. In career situations, the researcher recognized a growing resentment toward extraverted individuals who he felt were more easily being recognized and advanced in professional scenarios. The researcher also began reflecting on kinships that he had formed with other introverts with whom he had bonded. These relationships seemed to take on a de facto persona of outsiders who often felt they did not conform to the culture of their organizations. As the

researcher has spent 25 years in higher education, this study was hoped to bring greater understanding of students with more introverted personalities.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, the methods utilized in this study were chosen to best elevate the voice of individuals who many believe are marginalized. By utilizing interviews, these individuals have an opportunity to share an authentic look at lived experiences that cannot be fully understood by quantitative methods.

By conducting interviews utilizing virtual technology students could better participate at a place and time of their choosing, maximizing their comfort and convenience. As data was gathered, care was taken to analyze and code data into themes utilizing both the feedback of participants and technology of data analysis systems. The methods chosen leveraged technology to increase convenience and to supplement the researcher's analysis using AI technology.

FINDINGS

Following the framework of Bandura's self-efficacy model, the study revealed insights related to each of the specific research questions:

1. Performance Accomplishment: How do introverted students define success in student leadership scenarios?
2. Vicarious Learning: How are introverted students affected by observations of leadership scenarios in the college environment?
3. Verbal Encouragement: How do introverted students receive encouragement on their participation in leadership development activities?
4. Emotional States: How do introverted students manage emotions as a result of their leadership development opportunities in college?

Student reflections in this study highlighted a mixture of external and internal stresses that weighed on self-efficacy while also highlighting relationships and self-care practices that aided their confidence in pursuing and persistence in their development as leaders. In these themes students reflect their perceptions of both their introversion and their perceptions of the characteristics of extraversion. While leadership development in college may present challenges for students of all personalities to master skills such as public speaking, organizing, and strategic planning, many of those interviewed shared reflections on how they feel more challenged to manage these tasks with a more introverted personality. Themes identified from student responses are included Table 3:

Table 3

Findings by Category and Theme

Category	Theme
Performance Accomplishment	• Comfort with Public Speaking: Students overcome anxieties with public speaking. • Assuming Role of Teacher: Students value achieving the role of "teacher" among peers.
Vicarious Learning	• Learning from Family: Family members provide early and enduring examples of leadership. • Influence of Teachers: Pre-college teachers provide examples of successful leadership. • Influence of Peers: College peers model behaviors of involvement and leadership that inspire students.
Verbal Encouragement	• Encouragement from Family: Family members are regular consultants for introverted students in leadership. • Encouragement from Close Friends: Close friends are regular consultants for introverted students in leadership. • Potential-Focused Encouragement: Close relationships encourage pursuing new opportunities. • Encouragement includes potential-focused conversations with sources have credibility to students.
Emotional States	• Change in Environment: Changes from high school to college impact attitudes toward leadership. • Stress from Challenging Leadership Tasks: Students find certain types of leadership tasks to be particularly stressful. • Communication Challenges: Students find verbal communication to be stressful. • Need for Solitude: Students utilize solitude to support their emotional resilience. • Importance of Close Relationships: Close relationships are available for moral support to introverted leaders.

Performance Accomplishment

Interview questions sought to get a better understanding of how introverted students defined success in leadership scenarios and invited them to recount moments where they felt successful as a leader. Themes emerging from the interviews included gaining comfort with public speaking and experiencing success in the role of teacher.

Gaining Comfort with Public Speaking

Many students felt apprehensive about public speaking. The transition from high school to college showed students who made conscious efforts to address their anxiety in public speaking and who willingly engaged in activities that pushed them to overcome their fears. For example, student "I" was a leader of a student organization and also has been active in providing academic support to other students. They reflected on their previous apprehension with public speaking:

> "I would get so nervous my heart would race like crazy, and it still happens now, but I've gotten a lot better at it. I go into teacher mode—it's what I think of it—and I'll talk in front of 300 people with no issues." (I)

In reflecting on their efforts to improve, the student gained great satisfaction in their progress:

> "After years of practice and work, it pays off. Those are much easier for me now, now that I've been working on things for ten years. I've been working on my public speaking ability, teaching methods and picking up things that I like and don't like from other teachers. And my confidence [improved with] ability [to speak] in front of other people. All of it. I had ten years of practice, and this is where I am, which is much better than I was ten years ago." (I)

Student ‘E’ was a leader of a student organization and accepted roles where they represented their college in making presentations to potential incoming students and their families:

> “I like to pre-think what I'm going to say, just so that I feel better about what is going to happen. So, [for example], if it's from something like standing up at a general body meeting and telling people we need them to volunteer. Last semester I started becoming an ambassador for my department, and so I had to talk to parents and incoming students a bit and present slides. And I've noticed, the things that I was getting anxious [about] during a presentation, that would happen a lot more in high school. [I] have kind of decreased as I've gone on in school with like college wise, I think, not trying to stick to like my script and memorize everything and say everything perfectly, just going over my main points, so that I can talk like I'm having a conversation; and it's more natural.” (E)

As a leader in a living-learning program, student ‘C’ reflected on their growth in communicating with their broader community which includes speakers of different languages:

> “I used to be very anxious around people in high school to the point where it was really hard for me to be in school and concentrate. And so being in college, I think I've grown a lot and just being able to communicate in front of a group of people, keep my composure, and even just lead things and create things together.” (C)

Students shared both their anxieties in public speaking as well as giving an account to how they grew to overcome their fears and gain confidence in public speaking. As they considered their growth as a leader, public speaking was a task they associated with leadership and a task they sought to master.

Success in Role of Teacher

Many students equated successful leadership as being valued as a "teacher" by others. The students conveyed their concept of being both a subject matter expert and able to effectively communicate with others. In addition to their improvement in public speaking, student 'F' also reflected on their ability to make an impact on others through their teaching ability:

> "I'm most proud of when I'm leading and I'm able to teach people things. So, with the marching band, I was able to take small groups of instrument sections and just work on a piece of the music with them; and I was able to really teach them how to get it better and better and do repetition. And then when I started working in the studio, students would come in, and I was able to lead them through activities." (F)

Some of the students interviewed noted their leadership confidence was tied to their ability to be a subject matter expert. For example, one shared:

> "I feel the best as a leader when I feel confident in the subject, like the activity. For example, I had a harder time kind of assuming a leadership type of role in my classes. Like, I was in biology, and I was in chemistry, and those are pretty hard subjects for me. So, I would never really assume a leadership role, because I would just look kind of more towards others. I felt like, if I didn't really know enough about a topic, then why would I put myself in a role where people might assume that I did. But now, like in psychology classes and in my French class, I have a much easier time, because I do feel way more proficient and confident in those topics." (J)

This theme of teaching others as being representative of success was echoed by other students. This point was illustrated by a student 'F'; when asked to define their concept of leadership, they referenced how a teacher helped them recognize the type of leadership they valued:

> "... a teaching type of leadership. So, I'm not just like sitting there pointing out what people [need] to do, but I'm telling them why I need them to do it…. He really just helped me figure out what type of leadership style I liked and what would work with me and how to change it with the group that you're in." (F)

Another student referenced the satisfaction that they gained from serving in a teacher role: "And that satisfaction of 'I did a good thing' and I found it in teaching, I don't find it hardly anywhere else" (I).

Student 'J,' who serves in a mentoring role in her foreign language themed living learning community and has been active in teaching peers in academic subjects, shared her perception that she feels like her engagement in group settings surprises people:

> "Being more introverted does, I guess, make people maybe a little bit more surprised that I would go for those types of roles. And I think it is because of things like that where it's like, 'just because I'm introverted,' and I tend to be more independent. It doesn't mean that I don't know how or that I don't desire to kind of foster any sort of teamwork or collaboration. So, I think that there are some misunderstandings about it, and I think you know [what] I mean. I would say it's unfair to think that, you know, 'more extroverted or outgoing people are naturally better leaders,' because that's not necessarily always the case." (J)

As students aspire to reflect teacher-like leadership, it is appropriate to consider the individuals who have inspired students and provided examples of leadership during their growth.

Vicarious Learning

As students reflected on the models of leadership that have influenced their own leadership definition and personal style of leadership, a key theme emerged that students were influenced by relationships with those they could observe closely. These influences were derived from family, respected teachers, and peers they have met through collegiate programs. These relationships were influential, whereas public, political, or historical figures were not referenced as influences on their leadership.

Learning from Family Members

The significance of various family as being a model for leadership was referenced by most students interviewed. Students tended to show lessons learned from observing parents in familial contexts, but several students also mentioned learning from observing parents in professional settings. Student 'H' a college senior who has worked jobs throughout their time in college reflected on lessons learned from their mother:

> "I grew up in a single parent household; my dad was never in my life. So, a lot of the things that needed to get done for me or my siblings or just in general, my mom would always take initiative and do what she had to do with, despite not having the support of my father or other family members [at] that time. So, just growing up and seeing that, it just put in my head like, 'Wow, my mom does so much.' Like, so, okay, she instilled this in me. So, I need to take this and do this and do what I need to do and get it done." (H)

A member of the Corps of Cadets reflected on the impact of their father as a model for their leadership. While they noted the positional advancements of their father, it was other attributes that inspire their leadership:

> "My dad is a lifetime military officer. He's been in the United States Coast Guard for a while now, and he's reached an 05—a commander. So, he's in charge of a lot. And I also liked watching him kind of rise to the ranks as I was a kid and like gaining some leadership experience and seeing the way that he manages people just by being very friendly and kind of putting others first. Like I said, he works very long hours, not just for the people that he works with, but for us too. He consistently sacrifices a lot." (M)

For the students interviewed, it was common to see the influence of family both as a professional and personal example of leadership, where ethics, caring, and commitment to others can be observed in the intimate settings of family. For example, student 'J' said:

> "I guess, by observing other people, I can kind of learn lessons without actually doing things myself, if that makes sense. Like with my mom, I learned a lot about conflict management just from being in the room with her on phone calls or hearing how she would diffuse conflict and things like that…. I mean since my childhood, I've just kind of watched her keep growing and growing and climbing to different positions in her company. I know she's in a much bigger leadership role. But I guess, just watching her because she has a similar personality to me. And it's interesting. And it was inspirational for me as a kid, just to kind of see her like maintaining her family and everything but still being able to be an effective leader and, you know, putting in hard work and everything like that."

Similarly, student ‘C’ shared the following observation of their mom:

> “She is a leader in her work. She is a project manager, and so she oversees a lot of projects. And the more that, I guess, I see her in her role and then growing as a person, I can see the similarities between us in that aspect. And it's just very, I guess, admirable to me and very encouraging where she is also very organized communicating these things, being able to communicate those boundaries. And she, I would also consider, is introverted. And so, to see her also as a leader, definitely, I feel that connection with her and encouragement.”

Student ‘K’ noted the importance of older generations providing learning opportunities on leadership:

> “My grandparents … or just older members of the family who have kind of been around everyone and have a feel for everyone's who they are, they tend to listen first, and they want to absorb as much information as they can before they say something or express their thoughts.” (K)

Repeatedly, students’ reflections on parents and grandparents reflect points of vicarious learning as they recounted their influential models of leadership.

Influence of Teachers

Many students noted the influence of teachers before college as models of leadership that they observed. These influences were seen both as a leader of groups of people and as an individual motivator. For example, one student shared:

> "I admired my teacher from science, in high school. He did a really good job. He would take charge and, like, finish or know how to go about stuff. Like, he would plan stuff really well, but he would also allow students to cultivate and work together to make ideas and execute things." (P)

Student 'G' talked about a particular teacher who inspired her academic performance in high school by saying:

> "'You can do it.' And I think those words, just saying those words—like that encouragement—is so inspiring ….. [I] definitely [appreciate] my teacher saying, 'You can do it. You got it. Just work hard, be smart, and results will follow you.'" (G)

Student 'I' who alluded to her own leadership model as being teacher-like, provided more insights as to the observations she had from her middle school teachers:

> "I realized in middle school—just in middle school—all of these characters that I … looked up to and loved, and the people in my life that I looked up to and [I] was like, 'oh man, I wish I could do that or be that.' I realized what they had was confidence in the ability to speak to people, and I struggled with that." (I)

Student 'F' alluded to a high school band teacher as a model for leadership. In this reflection, she notes that she considers the band teacher to have a different personality than her own:

> "In the marching band, the teacher that was running it, he was very extremely extroverted. I think that's one of the things I based my perception of leadership on. He was very outgoing, very confident; and he really knew what to say to people a lot. So, he really inspired me to want to actually look into leadership." (F)

Another student reflected on how these models for teachers impacted her current leadership experience. Student ‘G’ discussed the impact of being in a high school club and being inspired by an officer in that club while a member. The student was particularly impacted by the passion she observed in the student officer:

> “I'd say I try to emulate their confidence, even if I don't have it. I try to position myself—like, I think mentally prepare that I can do this: ‘I know what I'm talking about.’ I'm confident, even when I don't feel that way; I try to affirm that in my head. And I'd say from [a high school fried] I tried to research or read into things that I actually was very passionate about; and when I was talking about them, I tried to emulate that passion that she had for the subject.” (G)

Some students, though, saw their time in the collegiate experience as initiating a clear change in their outlook on leadership based on the observations of others. Student ‘A’ reflects on their changing viewpoints on leadership through group work:

> “The lessons I've learned, I would say, have mostly to do with—I guess the way I'm thinking through things—that my thought process, I would say, has dramatically changed. For example, I know, before coming to college, my kind of leadership mindset was more so authoritative and just kind of seeing, like the way a group works, and more. So, just taking the leader position and kind of handing out jobs for people, or just kind of splitting up the work and not really like looking through the other sections. And so, especially with my land development courses, which are very goal oriented and very group-based classes, it was very easy to kind of just split up everything and then take that leadership role, and make sure everyone's done their parts, and not really communicating

> through things and working through things as a group. It was more so, just splitting everything up, and not only talking about it. Through both my professors I just mentioned, I learned the importance of collaboration, and then the importance of being a leader; but at the end of the day, also making sure that everyone in your group is heard." (A)

While teachers are commonly valued as influential figures across all personalities, these students forged bonds with teachers that allowed them to observe their leadership and provided a model for them to immolate as they developed as a leader.

Influence of Peers

Student 'L' is a member of a living learning program at Virginia Tech and was assigned a peer mentor. This peer mentor they were assigned was influential to her development, though she had a different personality.

> "I would say that I didn't notice or think about leadership until I got to college and I was in Thrive (a living learning community). And I was roommates with my peer mentor, and she was the first person I ever met where I saw like, 'oh my gosh, that's a leader; that's what leadership looks like.' And she's very intentional about the way that she would give advice and support." (L)

Similar to student 'L', student 'G' also was influenced by her living-learning program, specifically observing others who have a similar introverted personality:

> "You see all these people that are really accomplished as an introvert. When you're talking to someone and they do something as simple as smile a little bit when they're

> talking, that makes you smile as well, just like a natural response. So, I feel less shy around strangers when they kind of give me that [good] vibe. So, when I see other people and their accomplishments in Hypatia (living-learning program), I don't feel as judged. I feel motivated to do things for myself." (G)

Student 'A' provided similar feedback from his experiences working with other students he perceived as being more introverted in their personality.

> "I've met some of the most smartest, some of the most engaging introverts; and at the end of the day, it has made me feel that you don't really need to be the first one to speak, nor to be the loudest one in the room to kind of convey your opinions; and some people are just simply more soft spoken, and tend to keep things more so to themselves, but still provide some great output whether that's a group setting or a solo setting. And so, in my opinion, an extrovert doesn't necessarily convey bad." (A)

Another student ascended to the position of president of their organization, as an introvert, but recalls the impact the president of the organization when she entered it made on them while exhibiting a more extraverted personality:

> "She seems way more extroverted. Like, she's very comfortable loudly talking to a kid. Or sometimes she wouldn't even need the mic, she could just project to the entire classroom. And I'm like, I guess as a freshman, to me, she seemed so much bigger than now that I'm like—oh, I'm literally like her age, doing the exact same thing, and I still don't feel like I'm truly embodying everything the way she embodied it. So, I might have made her bigger than she is, in my head. But the traits that she kind of embodied, I feel like some of it rubbed off on me, and things that I was learning, and I think I've gotten

> better at [them]. But definitely, I don't think exactly like the same type of personality." (E)

While projecting loudly does not necessarily connote extraversion, the student observation of a projecting voice reflects a perception of extraversion held by the student. This statement reflects a perception of extraversion and perhaps an insecurity of being challenged to match their peer's energy or stature in a leadership setting.

For another student, her themed living-learning program centered around the appraisal and appreciation of individual student strengths. For her, this collegiate experience enabled her to consider how she interacts with others in a leadership capacity:

> "I definitely think the biggest one is celebrating differences and what makes us unique, which is partially from the Clifton Strengths model. So, having all thirty-four strengths equally valued, and, okay, you're solving this problem different[ly] than me, or you're studying for the same test different[ly] than me. That doesn't make it better. That doesn't make it worse. And I guess also, [I] just [feel] like a certain responsibility for the actions and how it can affect others. I think we had so many open conversations about, 'Oh, you texted me that you said that you get lunch, and then you ghosted me, and that hurt my feelings.' And [with] those sort of conversations happening within eighteen-year-olds, I don't know, I hadn't seen [that] before; and that was definitely different and new, and it just made me more aware of how what I do impacts others around me." (L)

Student 'N' in a different residential environment felt that the opportunity to connect one-on-one with residents was a better reflection in their leadership style while feeling that their style may not be as valued as other approaches:

> "One of the most important things is that you're connecting with residents, and I think the way people sometimes see connecting with residents is being able to host events, being able to like being able to put yourself out there and like talk to everyone and just be like this huge personality. And I think as an introvert my personality isn't… as maybe explosive as an extrovert's might be, so I think supervisors would see an introvert interacting maybe one-on-one with residents or more quietly as a bad thing. But I don't think it should be seen as a bad thing if introverts connect in a different way." (N)

For another student in the Corps of Cadets, the opportunity to observe a student company commanding officer offered an opportunity to appreciate their relationship qualities as a leader:

> "In the Corps of Cadets, our former company C.O., he's a very good leader, genuine like some of the best leaders I've ever seen are coming out of this school…. I think some of the stuff that I admired about him in particular was just how caring, like how much he cares about the people under him." (M)

While only one student referenced the impact of a job setting outside of the college environment, their reflections on their experience showed how they learned from the leadership of others and through the realities of serving customers:

> "I was a very impatient kid—very, very impatient. When I wanted things done, I wanted them done right then and there. If I wanted things to happen, I'm like, 'this has to happen quickly in terms of leadership,' though, like I really had to slow down. I had to become more observant. I had to pay more attention to the things that are going on around me. And yeah, I think becoming a manager really taught me patience and how to take my time with things, especially when you know they need to get done right the first time;

> because you might not have time to come back around and fix it, especially; and I can apply that to school as well. There's times, [where I'm] like, 'I need to get this right the first time.' So, I have to take my time and be patient with what I'm doing and the people I'm working with, just to make sure things are done right." (H)

The college experience allows students to engage with peers in different settings. Classrooms, living environments, student organizations, and work environments all create living laboratories for students to grow as leaders. In these settings, peers provide an opportunity for students to observe and model leadership approaches that are impressionable.

Verbal Encouragement

Family and close friends serve as models of leadership which these introverted students observe; and for some students, these same relationships serve as a source of verbal encouragement. These close relationships provide encouragement for students to grow in their efficacy as leaders by asserting a belief in the student's ability to be a leader. In some circumstances these relationships have provided a push to pursue leadership opportunities.

Encouragement from Family

'P' is a student who serves as a residential advisor and navigates the rigors of dealing with peer students in a residence hall environment. When asked about their sources of encouragement they spoke about their sister:

> "I go to my older sister a lot, just because a lot of the stuff that I'm going through, she has either also gone through or she has a very level head, so she kind of helps me calm down and think through things logically, which is really nice." (P)

Student ‘H’ references their mother as a model of leadership but connects with family and old friends as a “go to” for support and advice:

> “There's one time I really sat down with myself, and I'm like: ‘Oh, my gosh! Like, it's so many things that keep happening back-to-back, and it's putting an emotional strain on me.’ And there was a time where I felt cornered and did not know what to do, and like I said, ‘I will come back to my family, and then my childhood friends’—or like my cousin that I'm so close with—and they will literally encourage me and help me.” (H)

For student ‘A’, the comfort of knowing that family remains a close resource is important:

> “I know a quick phone call away is very easy. And just this—I would say most of the time—does the job in terms of stress [relief]. And just like kind of making sure I used a phone call with them, [it] kind of like lets me breathe and kind of take things a lot slower.” (A)

When asked about who encouraged her the most to pursue leadership roles in college, student ‘I’ reflected on how her mother provided encouragement and calming support when exploring her potential role in college as a student leader (SL):

> “I know my mother encouraged me for some roles. When I was thinking about applying for the SL job. I was nervous, and I wasn't sure: Should I do this? Should I not do it; like is this the right decision? Is this good? Is it not?” (I)

Encouragement from Close Friends

Student ‘E’ found herself placed with a roommate whom she had met at a pre-college program. Although both were more introverted than their peers, both made a conscious effort to pursue involvement on campus:

> “Me and her committed a lot to trying to push ourselves to go to different activities and trying to meet people and not stay just me and her and being comfortable with that.” (E)

When asked whether her roommate was similar or different then her student ‘E’ responded:

> “She is a bit more comfortable like in silence—I guess, I would fill in space more—but definitely also introverted, maybe a little bit more than me but also she was involved in things… Eventually we both found ourselves in similar leadership positions in different organizations.” (E)

Student ‘L’ shared how roommates she met through her living-learning program have been a source of encouragement throughout her college experience:

> “I have three roommates and I met them all through Thrive [living-learning program]. So, they were all there with me that first year. They lived down the hall. We lived down the hall from each other. And we've always lived down the hall from each other for the past four years. And we like eat meals together and are always studying together. But we all are, we talk through our problems all the time with one another.” (L)

Student ‘O’ attended the same precollege program before college and also credits her roommate with support as she has become involved in leadership activities:

> “Sometimes you just unload or like say how you feel and just have somebody else's second opinion. Because she has leadership experience as well, I'm sure she's had to handle things.” (O)

The importance of close friendships or roommates whether forged through facilitated programs such as living living-learning communities or pre-college camps have proven to be a powerful source of verbal encouragement.

Potential-Focused Encouragement

In deciding to pursue a student leadership role in residential life at Virginia Tech, student ‘I’ consulted their mother for advice and her mother’s advice encouraged her to pursue the role by equating it with her experience in the family:

> “She was like: ‘You can handle this like you have two younger sisters; you can do this. You're basically going to be an older sibling to freshman. Being the oldest sibling comes with a bunch of knowledge.’ So she's like, ‘You already have it,’ like ‘you're good. You'll be fine. You'll get used to it with people being around people.’ I was nervous about being the person that the freshmen go to for help.” (I)

Student ‘E’ spoke of her and her roommate’s mutual commitment to branch out into organizations and new groups at Virginia Tech. Both had known each other through previous pre-college camps at Virginia Tech but the conversations upon arriving at college seemed to give ‘E’ confidence:

> "I think just knowing that this was like a pivotal moment—I mean, I'm not sure if it will be, but thinking on, 'this is probably like where people usually find themselves better,' I would like to try to grow a bit more." (E)

When asked about encouragement, student 'G' talked about her roommate, who she attended a pre-college camp with prior to college and now continues to room with in college. She describes her roommate as extraverted and talked about how her roommate has encouraged her by bringing her asking her to attend activities with her: "Because she's also involved in a lot of activities, so it's also motivated me to start applying for more things and get involved in more opportunities" (G).

Emotional States

Students were asked questions about stress and moments of encouragement. As emotions impact the comfort and confidence of students it was clear that emotions were impacted by the stresses that come with leadership activities and the broader environment that the students navigate. Ultimately students reported they deal with stressful leadership situations via a variety of strategies of self-care and support from close relationships. For some, these relationships included both the familiar connections of family members and old friends; and for others, the connections of collegiate-based mentors and friends provided emotional support.

Change in Environment

The change from the high school environment to the collegiate environment itself emboldened some students to adopt positive mindsets on their ability to lead. Some students who felt reserved or hesitant to take on leadership roles in high school seized the opportunities found

in college to “remake” themselves and pursue more leadership roles. Student ‘C’ shared this about their experience transition to a living-learning community “Mozaiko” in college:

> “Before, I would say I didn't do or participate in a lot of like leading roles, maybe in the group. I would maybe have stronger opinions when doing classwork, but it was never in terms of like I was trying to be the leader or I ended up being the leader in high school. It was more in college, and especially I think being in Mozaiko, where I started doing more leadership activities.” (C)

Student ‘E’ also reflected on the change from high school to college:

> “In high school I was involved in a lot of different activities, but I was really never one to step up first or take over. I never wanted to be captain of any of the teams I was on. Clubs that I've been participating in for a really long time, like people who joined way later than me I noticed becoming President, doing all these other things. Like, the leadership I had in high school was kind of accidental; like, no one else ran, so the teacher would be like, oh, you can do this kind of thing.’ I never really made myself [run] for class president, or something like that. That was definitely something I didn't think I could really handle. And so, I think I wanted in college to branch out more. I was moving away from home for the first time; I definitely felt like it was time to try a bit, but I don't think I expected to do as much ‘leadershipy’ things as I did now.” (E)

For another student the transition to an intentional living-learning community came with some apprehension over joining a community that includes intentional group involvement. Student ‘L’ had this to say about their experience:

> "I feel like a lot of introverts, like, we don't value community as much just because we know it's exhausting. So, [I'm] allowing for that little bit of skepticism of 'Do I have to interact with people, is this actually going to make things better?'" (L)

Student 'A' saw college as an opportunity to transform themselves. In response to a question about how college had impacted their motivation to develop as a leader, 'A' responded:

> "Just a sudden shift that I'd say I had more so in my identity. And so, when I think of questions like that, it was not more so that I came with the idea that I'm going to be a leader now because I wasn't a leader in high school. It was more so that I'm going to use this new opportunity to kind of really show that I can provide a lot to the team…. Coming from high school to college, it's a whole new environment, with whole new people that don't know you, and so you could really become anyone that you wanted to be." (A)

This opportunity for a change in environment emboldened 'A' to take on more opportunities for leadership:

> "I wasn't that much of a leader in high school. And so when college came about, I wanted to kind of—I kind of played the 'fake it till you make it' role as a leader, kind of, especially my first years. And then I noticed that the only reason I wasn't stepping up to be a leader in high school is only because of how shy and how scared I was, and so [I was] coming to college and gaining all that confidence. And then really taking on these leadership roles has made me really admire college in a sense and kind of the whole atmosphere of what college brings. And [it] just, kind of, has really changed my outlook on things, and kind of more so my identity in a sense—in the sense that I'm now a leader in most group activities that I do. And just that sudden, swift, sudden switch from high

> school has definitely been noted. So, to answer your question, I don't know if it was more so an expectation into going to college, but that new environment definitely played a role in me, kind of, making that switch to becoming more of a leader." (A)

The pursuit of leadership was enabled by opportunities to lead others; though for many, these opportunities were not expected when they entered college. As student 'L' reflects on her leadership growth:

> "It's just something that's kind of happened. I think it's something that I started to expect after the first like two months of college, where I was like, oh, okay, people are leaders here.' I knew I wouldn't be like a big leader across campus. Like, I have those people in my head, the people who are in the student government and run for homecoming and are part of the class council and stuff, like those people are like the real leaders. And I'm kind of a leader, and I get to work a little bit more in the background, where I'm not constantly having to lead a team of people. I'm able to do some independent work, and the way that I lead and work [is] a little bit behind the scenes—especially in Thrive (LLP) and in my current internship too. I'm able to do a lot of behind-the-scenes work, and I'm still doing public speaking stuff, but I feel like my impact [is] more broadly from the sort of training I've done with the faculty and conversations I've had with students." (L)

The transition to college provided an opportunity for these students to make a new start and for these students that change prompted them to challenge themselves to assume more of a leader role. Students have navigated this opportunity by recognizing their leadership can be applied in different contexts.

Stress from Challenging Leadership Tasks

Some students noted stresses that arose from biases that they found in college as an introvert. As an example, one student who served in a student leader role in a residence hall was given the task of knocking on doors of their residents unannounced and introducing themselves at the start of the year. This student felt this was challenging for them as an introvert, though perceived that this task might be easier for more extraverted students:

> "I do feel like a lot of stuff is more catered towards extroverts. And I think that's very silly, because I mean, not—again, I'm coming at this from thinking about student leaders—not all the residents are going to be extroverts. That's not going to work for them as well, if you're like that. I don't think it makes sense to have a one-size-fits-all kind of training and requirements, when the students aren't one size fits all themselves. So, I think it's important to kind of emphasize different ways of doing things, as I've previously said, because that way more people can be reached and leadership itself can be more effective." (B)

Another student also expressed frustration at training sessions that tended to put participants on the spot in role-playing situations:

> "Something I dislike that we do for our student leader training that was the most stressful for me: We go into groups into these situational practices, and I really dislike being put on the spot, and I guess maybe it's an introvert thing or just a me thing, but I dreaded that part of training every time it comes up, because I don't want to be put on the spot." (N)

Students seem to perceive ingrained biases and that they need to adapt to social expectations. For example, one shared:

> "I have known for a very long time that I am an introvert, and nobody seems to care about us. And so I haven't gotten over—you can't get over introvertness, but I've gotten—[or] I've worked with it very well over the years." (A)

For some students their reducing stress as an introvert revolves around structure and predictability. While this need for structure may not be purely correlated to their introverted personality, they do seek structure to reduce leadership related stress. For various student leadership roles, structure and predictability varies depending on their group situation. Student 'B' is both president of a student organization and a student leader in a residence hall who works shifts of being on-call to respond to problems.

> "Least stress is when I have a structured schedule—when my leadership opportunity [or] when me being a leader doesn't need to be turned on at the drop of a hat—when I kind of [know] there are specific times that's very specific. That's good because I can be a leader if I'm in a club meeting and I have to lead that, but then I can go back to my room and not be around people. But then on the flip side of that, it's stressful when I'm going to get a phone call being like 'there's somebody on the ground bleeding.' Yeah. And suddenly I have to be a leader again, and I can't unwind, and I probably won't be able to make it to class the next morning." (B)

For student 'G' the recognition that leaders will sometime find themselves in conflictual situations is a stress that she laments:

> "I think as a leader, when you're trying to delegate tasks and the people that the tasks are assigned to, they aren't doing the work. So, I feel like it's really hard, especially as an introvert, to talk to the person not doing the work and say, 'hey, can you get on this?' because you don't want to sound pushy. You don't want to hurt their feelings. And it's also really hard to be confrontational to someone, especially when they agree to the rule and or whatever the work is and now they're not doing it, and now you have to talk about it to them, which is so stressful." (G)

In these conflictual situations, student 'G' finds her heightened awareness to the non-verbal cues of others in conversation to be a challenge to navigate:

> "Yes, I think… I pick up on those things really easily. But also, I think there comes a downside to that, like being so observant, and you see like a slight change in their expression; and then in your head, you're like, oh no, I said something wrong.' And then you get more discouraged, like, 'I should probably stop talking now.'" (G)

Student 'I' is a peer mentor in an academic department and leads help sessions. She reflected on the challenge of engaging with students for a long period of time and how this drains her emotionally:

> "I was teaching two classes back-to-back for a total of about two and a half hours or so. I walked out of that class, and I basically walked straight to my boyfriend's room and was like, 'I need a hug.' And then I just stood there for ten minutes. I just wanted to be near someone who made me feel safe. Not that my students don't make me feel safe, but just like the recharging, I guess. And I just wanted to be near him for like 10 to 20 minutes or so. And then after that I was fine." (I)

The size of groups in the moment for some students can dictate how much stress they feel as a leader and how much they can maintain organization and order in the moment. Student ‘F’ noted:

> “Most stress is definitely in big groups, where you're in charge of a lot of students—but also there are students outside your group—and it can get unorganized really quick[ly], if you're in charge of too many students. And then least stressed probably [is] just [with] really small groups. Yeah, really, I would just say it's based on group size, to be honest.” (F)

Student ‘H’ spent much of his time involved in work environments where he has been an employee and then ascended to positions of managing other employees and interacting with more senior managers within a corporate structure. He shared:

> “I think you'll find the most stress when you can't get the team you're with on the same page. I think that's when you can have the most stress—or at least when I've had the most stress, or when I just simply cannot figure something out that I know I need to figure out, because I will constantly strain myself until I figure it out or make a way, and then that can just overwhelm me to the point where I feel like, ‘all right, I just need to let this go for a second,’ just to get my mind clear and relax and come back to it. But for me, I think that's when I've been most stressful: when I'm working with people, and we can't get on the same page, or just as a leader, I just can't figure something out for the team, and I know I'm supposed to.” (H)

For a member of the Corps of Cadets, he notes how the program includes specific preparation for dealing with stressful leadership situations:

> “In stressful situations—and that is part of our training as well that they're trying to give us like just being locked down versus locked off in certain scenarios—and I've seen this in all areas of the military too, where it's like, if you're in a stressful situation, like, you know, if you're in combat, you're locked on. They're serious, right, like you know, you're telling people what to do, you're doing things efficiently, and you're concentrated, right, and you're confident—that's the big thing.” (M)

Just as students navigated a change in environment, this change in environment comes with new leadership challenges. These challenges usually include the stresses of working with others and navigating collective activities. In some cases, organized approaches aided students to deal with these challenges.

Communication Challenges

Many students noted challenges they faced in communicating, and those challenges presented moments of discouragement. Student ‘J’ shared their frustrations with how judging communication skills impact their perceptions of how they are viewed as a leader:

> “For me personally, I've had a lot of fears about, you know, like stuttering or not being well spoken. And I think sometimes people will hear people's speaking skills or people's abilities to have more interpersonal relationships, and they'll judge their capacities as a leader and as a teammate based on that, when maybe somebody just has a hard time expressing themselves verbally, and maybe that's why they don't tend to gravitate towards leadership positions.” (J)

Student ‘F’ led tours on campus and has been grouped with other students, including some with a much different personality than their own:

> “When I was the tour group guide, I was there—and there were like four of us—and I remember like two of them were very extroverted and people had no problem following them. Like, they just seemed to radiate energy that people could pick up on. And I remember it was a little discouraging when I realized I didn't have that. So, [I’m] looking for other ways for me to channel the energy, really.” (F)

Student ‘G’ discussed their apprehensions in engaging in group situations:

> “I think I'm an introvert, because I think (pause) I prefer to observe and just I'm quiet generally. And also, when I'm in group settings, especially when there's a professional there, I really struggle to ask questions, even if I have one. I see other people raising their hand[s]. Like in Hypatia [a living-learning community], when we have someone come in and talk about their research or anything they're doing, and then I see everyone asking questions, I really want to ask something, but I feel like everyone's judging me somehow, so I don't.” (G)

Student ‘F’ likewise reflected on the environment in college where they feel their leadership is most impactful:

> “I think it's definitely focusing on the small groups, because I find it very hard to connect to large groups of people—there are just too many people to talk to—and finding connections between each person to figure out what their motivation would be for that

> common goal, and making sure they feel valued and they're able to also work for that." (F)

Similarly, student 'L' shared their challenges in connecting with new people:

> "I guess because socializing exhausts me even to this day, but I've been described as shy since I was four. And I (pause) just struggle to talk to new people. I've always struggled to make friends, and (pause) yeah, I just—I'm not the kind of person to go out and say 'hello' to a new person." (L)

Student 'D' noted their desire to contemplate responses or plan communication and their frustrations when there is not time to consider communication:

> "It's easier for me to respond if I think about it. Yes. I don't really get the option—like the chance to get the question usually goes pretty fast. I think people understand what's going on quicker, where I don't." (D)

Student 'G' reflected on presentations she had to give and the anxiety that came with presenting in front of advisors:

> "I remember during those practices, I wouldn't be able—even though I memorized the script—I wouldn't be able to say it in front of my advisors, because I felt so judged. I felt so insecure. I was so nervous. I would stutter, and every single word I was saying—even though I knew the script. I knew it; I practiced it for so long. But I could do it when it was just me and my partner alone; I could do it with just me and her, because she was my friend. But when I was in front of an advisor, I couldn't say anything." (G)

Verbal communication provides a challenge for students that complicates their actions as a leader. Students showed a strong awareness of these challenges as well as a determination to improve their performance in this area. None-the-less, these challenges impact their emotional state as they add to their anxiety in both formal and informal social settings.

Need for Solitude

Many student comments supported the premise that introverts are overstimulated in group settings, often resulting in physical and mental exhaustion. It was common for students to indicate that they felt a need to recover from group or public engagement by retreating to a solitude of music or quiet time to maintain a healthy emotional state. This routine of recharging and reflecting was adopted by several students. For these students, it was recognized that engaging in leading others was mentally tiring and required a plan for recovery; and students shared their approaches to recharging. Student 'K' shared their concept of a "social battery":

> "Whenever I'm out, I notice I have a social battery; and when that's done, I really don't want to interact with anyone. I don't mind spending days by myself and just being alone. Sometimes I even prefer that to being around people. So, I just prefer to be alone more than I prefer to be around people." (K)

Student 'N' also felt that they needed to retreat quickly after engaging in their work as a leader of students in a residence hall. They noted their ability to recover alone after normal situations; but if they dealt with a more stressful situation, their time alone included a call to a close relationship:

> "To wind down, I find I want to get away as soon as possible, like finishing up conversations after the group and then coming back alone in my dorm room. If it's just a normal group thing, like I can handle that alone—getting my energy back through usually just watching a show or social media, something like that, [or] just laying down for a while. If it's something more, those really stressful situations from SL [student leader] rounds or something, then it would be getting alone and then calling like my dad or boyfriend." (N)

Student 'O' discusses a similar concept of becoming drained after engaging with crowds over an extended period of time:

> "I do like having my own private time, because I get overwhelmed when I'm out with people like for a long experience—extended amount of time—and like there's a massive crowd. Like, I get sweaty, my head starts to spin a little bit, and I just kind of shut down." (O)

Student 'L' talked about how they consciously prepare for interactions:

> "I know after teaching my classes, sometimes I get really, really drained. Which is, I'm a little nervous for that, but I'm going to figure out how to not be totally drained by the end of the day after educating. I'll get practice; it'll be fine. I usually have to do something quiet—do something for myself for a little bit, maybe like an hour—no chaos, no stress, and then I'm fine." (L)

Student 'F' talks about their need for nature and how they engage with natural elements at the university for recovery:

> “Mainly I like going on walks. I've grown up in a very naturey spot, and then at VT we have the duck pond and stuff. So, I like going and just sitting by the water or taking a walk, usually.” (F)

Like many students, student ‘H’ retreats to favorite hobbies and solitude as a source of rejuvenation:

> “My go-to is music. Music has been my go-to for stress since I was a kid. I don't know what it is, but my favorite genre is R&B. So anytime I feel like I need to unplug or just disconnect from things that are stressing me out, I'll go get some headphones or listen to music. I'll go in my room, turn my speaker on [and] listen to music; or I'll go to the gym, and I'll be listening to music while I'm at the gym. And it's just, for me, it's therapeutic. It'll calm me down. Get me back to the person I know I am, and then I fly.” (H)

While many students utilize solitude as a strategy for recovery from stress, student ‘L’ developed a routine that involves preparing for the stresses of speaking to others:

> “I have really long mornings. So, I have to wake up about three or four hours before I start my day. Because I will sit there with my coffee, and that's my ‘me time,’ where I'm in my head—I'm maybe listening to music. But if I don't do that, I can't talk for the rest of the day. So, in order to talk to people, I kind of need those three hours, which sounds a little bit insane, but I definitely need those three hours in the morning—like that's the only way to start my day, so I can function correctly and functionally speak to people.” (L)

Students were attentive in being proactive in managing the emotional strain that comes with their leadership efforts. Students sought time alone in solitude to be a time to refresh and recharge emotionally and physically.

Chapter Summary

Using the construct of Bandura's Theory on self-efficacy, this study sought to better understand the experiences of students with more introverted personalities than their peers as they developed as a leader in college. As task accomplishment is a component of leadership-efficacy, many students discussed their pride in assuming a role of akin to a teacher among their peers as their proudest accomplishments and equated that role to their aspirational type of leadership.

As students reflected on individuals who influenced their leadership development, students pointed to close relationships they had which included family, teachers, and peers. From these examples students observed habits they equated with leadership and desired to emulate as they grew as a leader.

Many of these same influential individuals were also sources of verbal encouragement and student interviews identified family and close friends as being influential in encouraging students to pursue potential opportunities for growth as a leader while at the same time being available to support students in times of challenges or stress.

The availability of these relationships in times of stress aided students in navigating the changes to a college environment and in facing leadership challenges in college. Common themes of emotional challenges include the stress of speaking and dealing with larger groups that

are taxing to the energy levels or “social battery” of students. In addition to the support of close relationships, students sought strategies of solitude and solitary activities to recharge from the stresses of their leadership roles.

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, & RECOMMENDATIONS

In the United States, confidence in leaders is at a historically low point (Smith-Schoenwalder & Jeffrey-Wilensky, 2025). To restore confidence in leadership, those who seek to develop a new generation of leaders should be attentive to strategies that prepare broader populations to be engaged in leadership processes. Such strategies can be strengthened through greater introspection as to whether long-held biases hinder the development of some who seek to grow as leaders. While historical studies of leadership reflect perceptions of extraversion and leadership as being connected, a review of recent studies continue to show introversion as being viewed negatively (Blevins et al., 2022). Concurrently to these studies, a best-selling book on introverts suggested that many institutions within our society have an ingrained introverted bias (Cain, 2013). If biases, whether intended or unintended, are latent in our leadership development programming, these biases will likely hinder attempts to develop new and capable leaders for the future.

This study sought to better understand the perspective of students who are more introverted than their peers as they pursued their own development as a leader. Understanding their leadership development through their lens as an introverted personality, we can gain more clarity and insight as to the relationship between personality and leadership efficacy.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

Using Bandura's (1997) model of self-efficacy, this study explored the experiences of students who identify as introverted as they consider their growth as a leader in college. The purpose of this study is to learn about approaches that best fostered their confidence as a leader

as well as experiences that served as de facto barriers to their development. The specific research questions guiding the study include:

1. Performance Accomplishment: How do introverted students define success in student leadership scenarios?
2. Vicarious Learning: How are introverted students affected by observations of leadership scenarios in the college environment?
3. Verbal Encouragement: How do introverted students receive encouragement on their participation in leadership development activities?
4. Emotional States: How do introverted students manage emotions as a result of their leadership development opportunities in college?

Overview of Methods

This qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews of 16 students who self-identified as being introverted and as being involved or interested in leadership. These students were recruited via broadly distributed emails sent through leadership of living-learning programs and student leaders serving in residential well-being at Virginia Tech. Because living-learning programs have intentional programming to develop students as leaders, recruiting interviewees through these programs reached a broad swath of students who have been afforded opportunities to assume leadership roles and/or grow as a leader.

Interviews were conducted via virtual tele-conferencing using Zoom software. Students who were unsure if they had an introverted personality were invited to take a free personality assessment on a website managed by author Susan Cain prior to the interview. The interviews lasted no more than one hour and were transcribed by Zoom software. Transcripts of interviews

were then moved to software for coding purposes. Coding was aided through a combination of scanning by the software and through direct review by the researcher. Field notes aided the determination of themes and identification of insights from various interviews that supported these themes.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The interviews in this study suggest that, for introverted students, life in college presents a prime opportunity to assume leader roles and improve in various aspects of leadership. Summoning the courage and sustaining the confidence to serve as a leader provided challenges for these students. To meet these challenges, students buoyed their confidence through a variety of individual adaptations to handling the stresses of leadership in college. The themes derived from this study suggest that the leadership-efficacy of students is largely built upon a scaffolding of support and encouragement from close relationships and individualized coping strategies to replenish energy depleted from leading others. One student referenced their “social battery,” and this concept of “battery" provided an appropriate analogy, as students were particularly cognizant of a store of energy that they believe is greatly taxed by their leadership roles and requires consistent recharging. Table 3 provides a thumbnail sketch of the themes derived from this study.

Table 4

Introverted Leader Development Findings by Self-Efficacy Category and Theme

Category	Theme
Performance Accomplishment	• Comfort with Public Speaking: Students overcome anxieties with public speaking. • Assuming Role of Teacher: Students value achieving the role of "teacher" among peers.
Vicarious Learning	• Learning from Family: Family members provide early and enduring examples of leadership. • Influence of Teachers: Pre-college teachers provide examples of successful leadership. • Influence of Peers: College peers model behaviors of involvement and leadership that inspire students.
Verbal Encouragement	• Encouragement from Family: Family members are regular consultants for introverted students in leadership. • Encouragement from Close Friends: Close friends are regular consultants for introverted students in leadership. • Potential-Focused Encouragement: Close relationships encourage pursuing new opportunities.
Emotional States	• Change in Environment: Changes from high school to college impact attitudes toward leadership. • Stress from Challenging Leadership Tasks: Students find certain types of leadership tasks to be particularly stressful. • Communication Challenges: Students find verbal communication to be stressful. • Need for Solitude: Students utilize solitude to support their emotional resilience. • Importance of Close Relationships: Close relationships are available for moral support to introverted leaders.

Close Relationships

Close relationships were a central part of the support structure surrounding students as they navigated their growth in leadership. Of the students interviewed, all referred to either a family member, teacher, or peer in college or high school as being a guiding model of leadership, again affirming Bandura's theories on vicarious learning, which were first offered in his work on Social Learning Theory: "Parents, siblings, and peers are the principal sources of observational learning in early life" (Bandura, 1977, p. 39). Bandura would later affirm the importance of teachers in creating learning environments that promote students taking personal agency in their learning and developing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993).

Often these same connections were sources of verbal encouragement and inspired students to be successful in their leadership endeavors. The regularity with which students communicated with family affirmed the continued influence of family in providing verbal encouragement to the students even as they navigate leadership in college. As Bandura states, "Parents convey efficacy information to their children by the manner in which they respond to their successes, failures, and efforts" (Bandura, 1997, p. 246).

Additionally, roommates and close friends also played vital roles in encouraging students and supporting emotions. These close relationships provided solace to students and reflect research on how introverts recharge and support their emotional wellbeing. For introverts, close relationships provide emotional security. Research on personality shows that introverts recharge through emotionally secure relationships rather than frequent social contact (Cabello & Fernández-Berrocal, 2015).

The type of encouragement offered by these close connections reflected a belief that the students interviewed could succeed as they branched out into new opportunities in college and subsequently when students faced stress or challenges that verbal support buoyed students in navigating these challenges. Reflecting Wong's (2014) model of encouragement the themes of challenged-focused encouragement and potential-focused encouragement occurred with the source of the encouragement coming from a perspective of credibility as being trusted by the student.

Affirming this research, the interviews reflected students who maintained familial connection and leveraged roommates and close friends. In this sense, the environment of college provides an interesting double-edged sword. On one hand, campuses feature both the stress of group activities and bustling campuses, while at the same time offering the opportunities for one-on-one engagement with roommates or the solitude of quiet spaces. Aware of these personal challenges, students adapt with scaffoldings of people and practices that support their persistence in their leadership roles.

Social Battery

The reference of one student to their "social battery" provides a great metaphor for a personal conundrum that exists for many introverted students who desire to lead others. Students need energy to engage with others, but engaging with others taxes their energy. For introverts, social situations are over-stimulating and therefore introverts find their energy depleted quicker in group situations when compared to extraverts (Eysenck, 1967). Social interaction, which requires emotional regulation and attention, can use up that resource—analogous to a social battery running low. People high in sensitivity or introversion process social cues more deeply,

leading to quicker “social depletion.” Time alone helps restore equilibrium and replenish emotional and cognitive resources (Aron & Aron, 1997). Ultimately students need to find ways to recharge their battery to continue to engage with others.

When thinking about a typical car battery in an internal combustion engine, we have a positive terminal and a negative terminal. A positive terminal pushes out electricity, enough to start an engine to run. However, this battery must be recharged from the energy it expended; and so, a regular function of a running motor is to regenerate electricity back into the battery to keep it charged via the work of the alternator. In reflecting on students' comments on their leadership experiences and efficacy, we see that there are aspects of leadership that draw from their internal stores of leadership efficacy. These draws include the stress of communication, engagement with large numbers of people, or navigating a difficult subject matter or task. As student ‘L’ comments, “I know after teaching my classes, sometimes I get really, really drained.” Likewise, student ‘N’ recognizes that after group engagement they have to immediately recharge, “To wind down, I find I want to get away as soon as possible, like finishing up conversations after the group and then coming back alone in my dorm room.” Finally, student (O) gave a vivid account of the physical toll that public experiences have on them:

> “I do like having my own private time, because I get overwhelmed when I'm out with people for a long experience—extended amount of time—and like there's a massive crowd. Like, I get sweaty, my head starts to spin a little bit, and I just kind of shut down.” (O)

At the same time, energy is regenerated through maintaining close family members and friends as a sounding board, through positive feedback, through assuming roles that support

others, and through retreating to environments of solitude. Just as an alternator returns energy through consistent action, these habits of regeneration are part of a routine of recharging that these introverted students find necessary to maintain their resilience as a leader. In considering the development of introverts as leaders, an essential part of their development is a self-inventory of the support systems and practices of self-care that may aid them in re-charging.

Teaching as a Task Mastery

Additionally, it is important to elevate the diversity of thought around defining leadership. During these interviews, students consistently referenced satisfaction in leadership roles that were not necessarily recognized as positional leaders. For many, these were in roles of being a peer leader or mentor. Student (L) received an award for being the most outstanding student leader in Residential Well-Being (a role traditionally referred to as a Resident Advisor) and had this to say:

> "The people who are in the student government and run for homecoming and are part of the class council and stuff, like those people are like the real leaders. And I'm kind of a leader, and I get to work a little bit more in the background." (L)

This quote illustrates the dissonance between a "real leader" and someone who may work effectively in valuable though less visible roles. The delineation of a "real leader" as being in a highly visible role suggests a need for greater understanding of followership and leadership as a construct of groups.

For many students, the value of the role of teacher or mentor as being a leadership ideal was apparent in this study. This viewpoint of leadership as being characterized by beneficial

relationships as opposed to a commanding style of leader is evident in many students' quotes, including student ‘F’ who talked about how they enjoyed working effectively in small groups:

> “I’m most proud of when I'm leading and I'm able to teach people things. So, with the marching band, I was able to take small groups of instrument sections and just work on a piece of the music with them; and I was able to really teach them how to get it better and better and do repetition.” (F)

While teaching certainly has aspects of positional leadership, the previous quote illustrates how the act of teaching is rewarding and the type of leadership the students seek to perform well.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study center around the overall scope of this study and the inability of these results to be generalized to represent the experiences of all introverted students or to suggest definitive correlations. As a qualitative study, the study identified themes and concepts that merit further study to determine their salience to the broader concept of personality traits and leadership efficacy.

Identification of these themes and concepts are discerned by the researcher, yet researcher bias can influence these themes (Zahle, 2024). As the researcher considers himself to be introverted and has been involved in a collegiate environment throughout his professional life, such factors could influence the identification of themes from the data.

Likewise, participant bias can also limit the ability of this study to fully explain the dynamics of personality and leadership efficacy. Participant bias occurs when a participant

consciously or unconsciously responds to research in a way that they think the researcher would like them to respond (Brito, 2017). As a phenomenological study, the methods for this study were not intended to represent an empirical perspective on introversion and leadership but rather the perspective of a strategically chosen population that would have insights on the topic (van Manen, 2016). For example, the students have generally been in leadership capacities associated with formal college programs, as such, the types of opportunities and outcomes associated with this program differ from other leadership contexts. Student experiences in these contexts are not intended to represent the perspective of all introverted students nor all leadership opportunities in college. As this study recruited students through living learning communities, a broader study of introverted students who were not in intentionally designed communities could provide greater insights into the experiences of introverted students who may not benefit from the intentional programming and connections found in themed housing.

Secondly, this study sought interviews from students who had an interest in leadership. A study focused on introverted students who are not interested in leadership may elicit greater insights into barriers or perceptions that hinder their interest in leadership. A study of perceptions of campus leadership opportunities found that among students not engaged in leadership programming, a lack of time was the predominant factor in not pursuing leadership opportunities (Phillips et al., 2023). Another small but in-depth study of students who left leadership positions noted a variety of factors contributed to their disengagement from leadership including negative impacts on academics and personal health. Students in the study also noted lack of time, being in the public eye, and challenges with authority roles as reasons for stepping away from leadership (Pedroso et al., 2023).

Additionally, this study focuses on the concept of introvert verses extravert, suggesting a didactic construct. In reality, the concept of extraversion is a description of a personality spectrum with different levels of extraversion and thus introversion (Eysenck, 1967). We do not know from these interviews the level of introversion that these students have; and by relying on self-identification, the pool of those surveyed may not reflect all levels of introversion found in society. Similarly, as this study focused on traditionally-aged college students, we cannot assume similar reflections by individuals in non-college environments or in other stages of life. For example, studies have shown that older adults prefer more structured formal communication from leaders (Mather, 2016; Wagner & Rush, 2000). In contrast, young adults are more comfortable with frequent and informal feedback and expectedly are more comfortable with digital communication (Bolton et al., 2013; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Similarly, younger adults gravitate more toward leadership that is focused on change and taking risks (Sessa & London, 2006; Zacher & Frese, 2009).

Finally, the researcher noted that while engaging in coding it was often difficult to discern how an excerpt from an interview should be categorized. These "grey areas" of coding reinforce the interconnectedness of the self-efficacy influences but can also lead to mislabeling of themes. Campbell et al. (2013) note that conflicts in the coding process highlight how subjective and open to interpretation the coding process is and that examining the coding for themes is necessary to support reliability.

Recommendations for Future Research

Bandura's leadership-efficacy framework provided a framework for exploring leadership-efficacy for introverted students. Evolving technology and societal changes beckon further

research on how elements of Bandura's framework are relevant in these new contexts. For example, as Bandura's leadership efficacy framework was published in 1997, the collegiate and societal landscape features changes that impact how aspects of Bandura's framework are realized by students. These changes present opportunities for deeper exploration as to the specific means by which students gain self-efficacy.

Increased Demand for Counseling to Support Emotional States

A 2020 survey of campus counseling-center directors reported that nearly 90% of centers saw an increase in the number of students seeking services (Abrams, 2020). A review of campus-wide mental-health trends in the early 21st century found that demand for services at college counseling centers has increased substantially, and that "societal and institutional forces" have shaped expectations for care on modern campuses (Mitchell, 2023). As Bandura's model considers emotional states, there are opportunities to consider how the growing usage of mental health counseling on college campuses can impact student self-efficacy.

Increased Opportunities for Family Connections for Verbal Encouragement

Parental connections have changed over the past decades. The historical notion of a child "going away" to college has changed in that the opportunity to remain constantly connected to family is a reality. Surveys of American families report that due to cellphones, internet, texting, and social media, "families today have a variety of options for keeping in touch," regardless of distance — something that wasn't available (or rare) decades ago (Duggan et al., 2015). Social media apps such as SnapChat have become the most frequent methods of communication (LeBouef et al., 2023). As consistent communication becomes a norm for students, it is

appropriate to consider how verbal encouragement is delivered in an era when communication frequency is a norm.

New Platforms to Support Vicarious Learning

As communication technology allows for instant interpersonal communication at a distance, so too does this technology allow for learning to transcend historic barriers of space and time. Students can observe influencing behaviors at the touch of a fingertip through media such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Research shows that YouTube provides learners with access to demonstrations, modeled behaviors, and problem-solving processes that allow them to gain skills without direct hands-on experience (Burke & Snyder, 2008; Moghavvemi et al., 2018). Users frequently rely on the platform's tutorial and demonstration content to watch tasks performed by experts and peers, which enhances self-efficacy and supports skill acquisition (Khan, 2017). More broadly, video-based modeling has been identified as a powerful mechanism for vicarious learning in digital contexts (Schunk, 2012).

Increased Experiential Participation to Support Task Mastery

Despite greater opportunities for virtual learning, students continue to explore first-hand experiences at a higher level. College students are also participating in internship opportunities at higher levels than in the 1990s (Shandra, 2022). As such, thorough studies on how internships, service-learning, apprenticeships and similar forms of experiential learning impact leadership-efficacy would aid our understanding of different opportunities for students to experience task mastery.

Life-Stage Changes in Leadership Efficacy

As this study was focused on college students, an examination of introverted leaders beyond the traditional college years would provide a great opportunity for comparison to see if leadership-efficacy changes with new life roles or experiences. Caprara et al. (2008) found that self-efficacy in early years sustained academic success as a student aged regardless of other individual factors. Specifically, with leadership-efficacy, studies show that I can ebb and flow depending on the situations of individuals. Developmental leadership theories emphasize that confidence grows through "leader identity formation" and real-world leadership challenges (Day & Dragoni, 2015). Bandura (1997) notes that without continued mastery experiences, leadership self-beliefs may fade over time. Research demonstrates that leadership efficacy improves through mindfulness and strategies to regulate emotions (Hannah et al., 2008).

Another specific area of interest would be focusing on the concept of family and friends. While the need for close supportive relationships may remain, the availability and nature of family and friendships change throughout life (Ajrouch et al., 2024; Liu, Venkatesh, et al., 2021). It would be interesting to consider how changes in family and friend support structures impact leadership efficacy for introverted individuals. Related to this, the concept of social battery also would merit long-term study to see how different leadership roles, personal responsibilities impact an individual's social battery long-term. Research has shown a relationship between friendship formation and the concept of social battery (van de Kieft & Timmer, 2023). As personal energy is an important commodity for introverted students, how do the stability or changes in friendships impact an introverted individual's willingness to engage in leadership scenarios?

Nature of Collegiate Environments

Students referenced collegiate environments of solitude, scenery, fitness, and personal escapes of music and social media. The extent to which built environments allow students to retreat from leadership duties may be an area for further study. Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (ART) proposes that exposure to nature can sharpen mental capacity and heighten focus, self-control, planning, and problem solving. The experience of being engaged with nature aids individuals in mental and emotional restoration by encouraging distance from everyday demands (Kaplan, 1995). Perhaps future research can explore how student emersion into natural environments can aid introverted students by supporting recovery from stressful leadership activities.

Self-perception and Perception of Peers

Also, while this study examined the self-efficacy of introverted students, an interesting tandem study would be to consider the perceptions of others who connect with the students to compare student self-perceptions versus the perceptions of others. Studies have shown that personality differences and sensitivity to differing personalities impact how peers perceive each other's performance (Erez et al., 2015).

Practical Implications

In conceptualizing practical ways to support the leadership development of introverted students, it is important to establish supporting systems that allow for individualized growth as opposed to a schematic approach that suggests definitive steps and types of programming to develop all students. This section outlines an educational scaffolding and an emotional support scaffolding that enables students to grow individually with available support and understanding.

Educational Scaffolding

A physical learning environment that is supportive of introverted students should include the development of quiet and low-traffic spaces in student areas (Eysenck, 1967; Helgoe, 2013). Academic scaffolding for introverted students includes ensuring predictability in learning environments by posting agendas, discussing questions in advance, and allowing ample preparation time before group work (Aron & Aron, 1997). Additionally, in student life settings, intentionally developing small cohort groups and peer mentor relationships can be helpful to introverted students (Wei et al., 2005).

Encourage Family Connections

Strong family connections have been associated with increased self-efficacy and reducing stress (Grevenstein et al., 2019). Alsubaie and Stain (2025) found that family and peer support significantly influence college students' mental health and life satisfaction. Therefore, encouraging regular communication with family could aid the leadership-efficacy development of introverted students.

The Impact of Mindfulness

Perhaps no one concept from this study is as broadly applicable as the concept of personal energy. The more we understand how different individuals maintain and recharge their energy, the more we can encourage and enable personal resilience that aids individuals to participate in leadership at their best. One recent report found that 56% of leaders in business say they are burned out (Brown, 2025). Among mid-level managers and entry level managers high emotional exhaustion has been noted as a problem (Wellhub Editorial Team, 2025). The benefits of mindfulness can be one approach that can aid in recharging the energy of those who are

involved in leadership efforts. Mindfulness is defined as a "nonelaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is" (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 232). The impact of mindfulness shows benefits to leaders and followers alike. Mindfulness training reduces aids reliance against emotional exhaustion and reduces stress responses in leaders (Good et al., 2016). Leaders who practice mindfulness show better emotional regulation, which is strongly protective against burnout (Reb et al., 2015). Organizations show benefits when leaders engage in mindfulness. Mindful leaders are rated by employees as more authentic and supportive (Reb et al., 2015). Mindfulness predicts higher-quality leader–member relationships (Amina et al., 2021).

Summary

This study offered concepts of how introverted students could be encouraged in their growth as a leader via drawing upon the tenants of Bandura's (1997) Leadership Efficacy Model. This study shows that while students navigate uniquely individual paths, for introverted students there are common areas of their leadership journey that benefit from a scaffolding of personal, environmental, and emotional support. Through the availability of these scaffoldings, new leaders may emerge who contribute to new approaches to leadership that evoke greater trust in society.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Recruiting Emails

Dear Student

I am conducting a research study on how college students experience the relationship between introversion and leadership development, because I believe there may be opportunities to improve or enhance that relationship. If you are more on the introvert side of the introversion-extraversion spectrum, I would like to interview you as part of this study. (Note: If you are unsure how your personality aligns, the following quiz by Susan Cain may be helpful: https://susancain.net/quiet-quiz/.) The attached information sheet provides details on the study, including the rights of participants. You must be at least 18 years of age or older to participate in this study. If you are interested in learning more and potentially participating in an interview via Zoom, please reply to this email: pm@vt.edu

Sincerely,

Perry Martin

APPENDIX B

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Perry Douglas Martin

IRB# 24-318 and Title of Study: Perceptions of Leader Development Programming by College Students with Introverted Personalities

Sponsor: Dr. Eric Kaufman, Dissertation Committee Chair

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions. I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech, and I am conducting this research as part of my course work.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?

As part of the study, you will participate in an in-person interview about your experiences in developing as a leader in college. Questions will invite your discussion related to leader development experiences both in formal and informal settings before college and during college. Questions will also ask about your opinions and perceptions related to your development as a leader. The interview will be recorded and transcribed.

- ➔ **The study should take approximately 75 minutes of your time.**
- ➔ **We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality.

Any data collected during this research study will be kept confidential by the researchers. Your interview will be audio-recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed. The researchers will code the transcripts using a pseudonym (false name). The recordings will be uploaded to a secure password-protected computer in the researcher's office. The researchers will maintain a list that includes a key to the code. The master key and the recordings will be stored for 3 years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

WHO CAN I TALK TO?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Dr. Eric Kaufman, ekk@vt.edu. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office at 540-231-3732 (irb@vt.edu).

Please print out a copy of this information sheet for your records.

APPENDIX C

A Priori Propositions Used to Explore Leader Self-Efficacy for Introverts

Proposition	Supporting Literature	Interview Prompt
Vicarious Learning: Formal mentoring relationships are harder for introverted students to establish.	Bandura, 1997 Turban & Lee, 2008	Who are some of the leaders you knew personally, who you have admired in your life and what did you observe about their approach to leadership?
Vicarious Learning: Key advice or observed principles from close mentoring relationships will be valued.	Bandura, 1997 Kellerman, 2018	What were some lessons that you have learned from the leaders you admire?
Performance Accomplishment: Introverted individuals will show less experience with formal leadership roles	Bandura, 1997 McCormick et al., 2002	In thinking of previous experiences that you equate with leadership, what are you most proud of and why? What are some moments that encouraged you as a leader?
Verbal Encouragement: Verbal encouragement will be most impactful from individuals who are perceived as being similarly introverted.	Bandura, 1997 Selfhout et al., 2010	Have there been individuals who have encouraged you to be a leader? How were their personalities similar or different from your personality?
Verbal Encouragement: Large group interaction yields limited verbal encouragement for introverted students.	Bandura, 1997 Jacques-Hamilton et al., 2019 Hennessy & Evans, 2006 Walker, 2007	In what type of environments do you feel most encouraged to serve as a leader? What type of environments discourage you to serve as a leader?
Emotional Stress: Public or group work scenarios add stress to introverted students.	Bandura, 1997 Walker, 2007	In what situations as a leader do you find, or anticipate finding, the most and least stress?
Emotional Stress: Introverts will have a smaller/more intimate support system of peers or mentors.	Walker, 2007	Who provides you emotional support when you engage in a stressful leadership situation?

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Introductory Questions

- To start, please tell me about activities you have been involved with in college and before college?
    - Possible Follow-up: For example, were you involved in student organizations or intramural activities?
- Why did this study on introversion and leadership interest you?
    - Possible Follow-up: Why do you see yourself as having an introverted personality?
    - Possible Follow-up: Did you come to college hoping to grow as a leader? Why or why not?

Question Block 1: Vicarious Learning

- Who are some of the leaders you have admired in your life, and what did you observe about their approach to leadership?
    - Possible Follow-up: What have you learned from these leaders?
- What other lessons or insights do you gain from observing those around you?
    - Possible Follow-up: Do you see yourself striving to be like these leaders?

Question Block 2: Performance Accomplishment

- In thinking of previous experiences that you equate with leadership, what are you most proud of and why?
- What are some of the moments that have encouraged you as a leader?
    - Possible Follow-up: What are some moments that discouraged you as a leader?

Question Block 3: Verbal Encouragement

- Have there been individuals who have encouraged you to be a leader?
    - Possible Follow-up: How were their personalities similar or different from your personality?
- In what type of environments do you feel you are most encouraged to serve as a leader?
    - Possible Follow-up: What type of environments discourage you to serve as a leader?

Question Block 4: Emotional States

- In what situations as a leader do you find, or anticipate finding, the most and least stress?
- Who provides you with emotional support when you engage in a stressful leadership situation?
    - Possible Follow-Up: Do you seek the support of different people based on the stress you are experiencing, and if so, who are the people you go to?

Summary Questions

- Considering all we have discussed; how do you define leadership?
    - Possible Follow-up: Do you feel motivated to grow as a leader in college? Why or why not?
- Finally, I have a few demographic questions, just to help with my reporting:
    - What is your major and year in college?
    - What is your race and gender?

Closing

This study is designed to explore the experiences of introverted students in their growth as a leader in college. Are there any other thoughts or reflections that you would like to share as we wrap up this interview?