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2. Title: Defining Leadership: Social Integration of First Year Female Students
3. Presentation Track: Research Paper
4. Abstract: (50 words)

The researchers employed qualitative methods to evaluate first year female students' definition of leadership through involvement in the Women's Learning Circle. The findings of the study revealed students defined leadership in two dimensions, traits and behaviors. The qualitative findings explore a multidimensional approach to the voice of fifty-four female students.

5. The proposal can be considered as a poster.
6. Bios:

Tammie Preston-Cunningham currently serves as the Coordinator of Leadership and Community Involvement at Texas A&M University in the Department of Greek Life. She has worked in the Department of Greek Life for eight years and higher education for a total of eighteen years. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Poultry Science, Master of Science in Higher Education Administration, and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication at Texas A&M University. Ms. Preston-Cunningham has held numerous professional in positions in higher education, to include positions in recruitment, research, and academic advising. She is a member of NASPA and ACPA. Her research interest lies with leadership within underrepresented student populations.

Kim E. Dooley is a Professor in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications at Texas A&M University. She has conducted professional presentations and numerous distance training programs around the globe. Her publications include 50 refereed journal articles and a book titled *Advanced Methods in Distance Education: Applications and Practices for Educators, Administrators, and Learners*. She was the 2005 recipient of the regional award for excellence in college and university teaching in the food and agricultural sciences given by the United States Department of Agriculture. Dr. Dooley

was the 1999 recipient of the Montague Teaching Scholar Award and the 2002 International Excellence Award at Texas A&M University. She received the Distinguished Research Award (2008) and the Outstanding Young Member Award (2002) from the Association of Agricultural Educators, Southern Region. She currently serves as co-editor of the *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*. A USDA funded project in which she was Co-PI received the Gold Award for an Educational Project and the Outstanding Professional Skill Award from the Association for Communication Excellence in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Life and Human Sciences.

Chanda D. Elbert received her Ph.D. in Agricultural and Extension Education from The Pennsylvania State University in 2000. She joined the Department of Agricultural, Leadership and Communications at Texas A&M University in 2000. Dr. Elbert has worked on integrating teaching, research and service by exploring and working on various topics such as women's leadership, multicultural leadership, program evaluation and organizational accountability. She serves as a joint faculty member with Texas Tech working with the Doc@Distance program offered in the department. Dr. Elbert is a member of the Association for Leadership Educators, Southern Association of Agricultural Education, American Association for Agricultural Education, and the Society for Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences.

# Defining Leadership: Social Integration of First Year Female Students

## Introduction

According to Chickering (1993), the transition to college is a time for students to explore themselves and develop an identity. However, college students develop identity in multiple layers and through various outlets, such as sorority membership. In a study conducted by Adams and Keim (2000), it was found that sorority chapter presidents more so than their male counterparts, took a more participatory/collaborative approach and practice of developing a trusting and supporting environment while encouraging others to develop leadership skills. Sorority membership for many women has become a successful method of social integration and creation of support systems. For instance, sorority membership has been observed as a method to meet other women that share common goals and values.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the perception of leadership among female freshmen sorority members in higher education. According to Thorp, Cummins, and Townsend (1998) greater amounts of exposure to leadership courses and prior leadership activities in high school leads to increased confidence in female's perceived leadership skills in college. Therefore, the authors discuss findings concerning the definition of leadership among freshmen sorority women upon entry to college. This issue is important as the number of women attending college continues to grow making it necessary to develop effective leadership training programs that increase leadership role attainment among women.

## Literature Review

In the field of student affairs, the co-curricular plays an intricate and important role in the overall success of the college student. This study utilizes the social integration framework as a guide to understanding the perceptions and expectations of leadership within a sorority centered

student program. However, because there are numerous terms and/or constructs used throughout the document some explanations are in order. The following terms are integral to assist the reader's clarification and understanding of the subject matter; social integration, leadership, behavioral leadership traits, transformational leadership, and gender based leadership.

### *Social Integration*

According to the works by Tinto (1993), individuals may struggle to integrate into both the academic and social realms of the university while integrating smoothly into only one realm. Presumably, students who have integrated into both the university's social and academic realms will have greater institutional commitment than those who have not integrated into the institution. The goals and intentions that are related to the attainment of a college degree will be reaffirmed by successful integration. Tinto (1993) argues that the vast majority of departures are tied to the quality of the experience that the student has after entering the university, in others words, the extent to which experiences serve to integrate the student into the academic and social realms of the institution. He also postulates that social integration can be met by a myriad of methods but is primarily met through involvement with student organizations. As students become involved in an organization it is a natural progression for those students to become leaders.

### *Leadership*

According to Northouse (2007), leadership is a process whereby one individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Taking into account the context of leadership within an organization, Nahavandi (2006) describes a leader as a person who influences individuals and groups within an organization, helps them in the establishment of goals and guides them toward achievement of those goals, thereby allowing them to be effective.

As researchers continue to delve deeper into the process of leadership, Kouzes and Posner, (2008), identified Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership: 1) model the way, 2) inspire a shared vision, 3) challenge the process, 4) enable others to act, and 5) encourage the heart. These practices have been characterized as personal leadership experiences. For instance, while modeling the way, one should behave in a way in which they would expect others to behave. In order to inspire a shared vision, one must see further than the present and have knowledge about others dreams, hopes, aspirations, visions, and values. In challenging the process, when obstacles arise a leader continues to strive to succeed. When enabling others to act, one must first build trust as a team and encourage others to become leaders. To encourage the heart is to show an appreciation for others contributions and celebrate their accomplishments. As the practices of leadership were discussed, behavior is an essential feature that intertwines within all five practices. The five practices echo the behaviors seen in the theory of transformational leadership.

#### *Leadership Behavior Based on Traits*

While identifying leadership based on traits, Nahavandi (2006) expressed that behavioral theorists focus on the behaviors and thus it is important that a leaders' behavior is based on their traits and skills. In this regard, Lussier and Achua (2007) have identified nine traits of effective leaders: 1) dominance, 2) high energy, 3) self-confidence, 4) locus of control, 5) stability, 6) integrity, 7) intelligence, 8) emotional intelligence, and 9) flexibility and sensitivity to others. Similar research by Northouse (2007) identified a set of behavioral traits based upon a historical perspective. These traits were intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. The review of the literature related to practices of leadership and behavior led the authors to the similar framework of transformational leadership.

#### *Transformational Leadership*

Elias, O'Brien, and Weissberg (2006) describe transformative leadership as a "leadership that is willing to realign structures and relationships to achieve genuine and sustainable change.

Northhouse (2007) states transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people. Likewise, Elias, O'Brien, and Weissberg (2006) describe transformative leadership as "leadership that is willing to realign structures and relationships to achieve genuine and sustainable change" (p.11). According to Lussier and Achua (2007) effective transformational leaders see themselves as change agents, visionaries, and risk takers with the ability to articulate core values; they possess cognitive skills, are able to show sensitivity, flexibility, and are open to learn from experience. Bass (1974) expressed it best, stating:

Transformation leaders asks their followers to transcend their self-interest for the good of the organization; to consider the long term needs to develop themselves, rather than their needs of the moment; and to become more aware of what is really important. (p. 53)

### *Gender and Leadership Issues*

Bass (1990) states women in the past had limited leadership opportunities; typically women were relegated to women's issues and jobs in institutions such as sororities, nunneries all girl schools, and telephone operators or supervisors. Currently, leadership opportunities for women have increased; however, the glass ceiling continues to exist between upper-middle management and the executive level (Lussier & Achua, 2007). In relation to gender and traits, Hoyt (2007) has concluded that it is unclear how important traits are to leadership. However, he expresses that gender is integral to contemporary notions of effective leadership styles that have morphed from a traditional masculine, autocratic style to the more feminine and androgynous styles of democratic and transformational leadership. Although gender was not found to explain differences in the impact of participation in leadership development programs (Endress, 2000) or to account for differences in leadership behaviors (Posner, 2004), others have reported that males

and females respond to different leadership paradigms (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Dugan (2006), for example, found that college women scored higher than did their male counterparts across all eight of the constructs associated with a social change model of leadership.

### Methods and Procedures

The current study utilizes qualitative methodology to evaluate the emerging themes and capture the nuances within the population (Hughes & DuMont, 1993). In qualitative research, the possibilities for generating new ideas and paradigms as well as lending a voice to the research participant ensures a more complex and multifaceted exploration of the topic. Thus, the researchers focused on the question related to how participants define leadership. The definitions were gathered from a pre-program application that served as a baseline of the initial concept of “leadership” before participation in this program. A content analysis was conducted from this archival data. “Content analysis is a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior in an indirect way, through an analysis of their communications” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1999, p. 405).

### *Participants*

The researchers used women from the Women’s Learning Circle (WLC), an annual event hosted by the Collegiate Panhellenic Council (CPC). CPC hosts recruitment activities prior to the first week of classes and traditionally accepts only first semester freshmen women who have been involved in high school organizations and held leadership positions prior to enrolling in the university. The population consisted of 54 first semester women, approximately 8% of the freshmen women involved in CPC sororities. The WLC members were reflective of the general population of TAMU with sorority members comprising approximately 7% of the undergraduate female student population. Female students were selected and encouraged to apply to the

program by chapter presidents and organization advisors. The women were selected based upon their application and interest in future leadership positions. However, none of the participants held leadership positions at the college level.

### *The Program*

WLC was developed as a peer mentoring program that provided opportunities for freshmen CPC sorority women to meet regularly to discuss issues pertinent to college life, leadership, and involvement. The WLC program utilized critical reflection and experiential learning through the medium of conversation and media. Each learning circle contained six women from various chapters. The groups were formed based on the applicants stated interest and hobbies. The students received various modules discussing topics ranging from leadership, body image, to self-esteem. The small group learning circles viewed an assigned film associated with the module topic and utilized a literature circle method to explore the information (Stein & Beed, 2004). The literature circle assigned individual roles (i.e., connector, illustrator, passage master, questioner, and summarizer) based on the task required to influence learning and synthesize the information.

### *Analysis*

The qualitative data will be analyzed by using a deductive approach with a set of archival data responses. Data was de-identified, coded, and sorted according to the learning circle groups. A confidential code number using a letter to denote the small group (A-H) and a number corresponding to the total number of participants in each group was provided on each respondent card. First –level coding, meaning carefully examining the data and selecting phrases, words, or stories which taken individually contain a single meaning. For the purpose of this study, first level coding involved reading half of the applications and making line-by-line notations in the margins. The notations indicated key words or phrases. The coding was manual with hand-

written notes being made on the application. During the coding process, memos will be written to detail emerging themes or concepts, which required further exploration. The codes were then distilled, abbreviated, and written on individual note cards. The data cards listed the comments along with participant identification code.

During second-level coding, this means, examining and collapsing codes into categories or higher-level concepts. As data collection and analysis continued, comparison indicated commonalities and differences between categories. After review, data cards were created and sorted based on the common themes that emerged from the respondents. The researchers developed a master list of common themes and categories, and then compiled the themes accordingly. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the third and final stage of coding is defined as when relationships between categories are formed and ideas develop that lead to hypotheses. Further coding of the remaining applications tested the hypotheses. Theoretical triangulation was considered as final categories and representative quotes were selected to give voice to the participants.

### Results and Findings

The participants were asked to “define leadership.” There were two overarching themes that emerged, which were related to a leader’s traits and behaviors. In particular, respondents stated that leaders needed to possess a certain set of characteristics that were maintained by their beliefs, morals, and value system. Within the theme of leadership traits, the subthemes were (1) belief in self/cause, (2) integrity (ability to do the right thing), (3) being genuine, (4) inspiring others, (5) selflessness, (6) passion, (7) mutual respect, (8) ability to unite a group and work with others, (9) ability to compromise, (10) dependability, and (11) confidence. One respondent emphasized several of these traits (emphasis added):

I define leadership as the occurrence of your own *belief in yourself* and your *ability to do the right thing*, being so *genuine* that it *inspires others* to look at you and look to you for help in their own struggle for self-worth and achievement. The greatest leaders are not the ones who went looking for power but the ones whom it was given to because of their *selfless* personal achievement as an individual (A4).

Other respondents mentioned this notion of selfless leadership but added subthemes of passion and working hard for others for a greater cause:

To be a good leader a person must be willing to *selflessly serve a cause* that they have an extreme *passion* for (G3).

A leader does not work hard to be glorified, but *works hard for others* and for something greater than themselves (A5).

The female respondents in this study believed that mutual respect was an important leadership trait:

Leadership in my mind is defined as *mutual respect*. You can lead people all you want, but how the people you are leading actually respond to you is the true test. You need to be respected as a leader; you need to respect the people you are leading (D2).

Other respondents focused on the ability to unite a group and to be someone others could trust and depend upon. This included that constructs of being able to work with others, listen, and compromise to accomplish a goal as a team:

Being able to lead means you must be able to *unite a group, create compromise, and be dependable*. A leader should never be controlling. As a leader, one should always be able to *work and listen to others* (B4).

Sometimes a leader has to exude courage and confidence and do “the right thing” even when it is not popular. Women leaders recognize the importance of speaking up—having a voice:

(A leader is) somebody who is *not afraid to step up and say something*, even if others may disagree, a leader does not care what others will think of them (E5).

The second theme was leadership behaviors. Respondents overwhelmingly spoke to the issue of leaders being role models or those who set an example for others to follow.

I believe leadership is being an active role model for another person. It is present in every facet of our lives and one must not be proclaimed a ‘leader’ in order to show leadership abilities (H2).

Some respondents believed leaders should be competent (knowledgeable), proactive and inspiring.

Leaders exhibit positive qualities so that people choose to behave like them, but are also able to take on the responsibility to being a *role model*. They are *knowledgeable* and *proactive* acting for a purpose. Leadership is about *inspiring others for a mutual goal* and direct everyone until the goal is accomplished (H5).

Interestingly, the respondents also associated leaders with being able to take responsibility, take charge, administer authority, be visionary, and be goal-oriented with their followership. Below is a sampling of respondents who lend voice to the behaviors necessary for leaders as well as the distinctions made between terms.

I think that leadership involves having a *clear destination in mind*, knowing where you are and where you want to be and *taking the steps to achieve that goal* (D6).

I believe leadership is the ability to *take charge* of a situation and administer the correct level of authority and *responsibility* that comes with the role of being a leader (F4).

The respondents illuminate several traits and/or active behaviors they believe are essential to be a good leader. For example, leaders are to be genuine, inspiring, and selfless servants who promote followership through role modeling. Leaders are to be mutually respectful with the ability to be uniting, a person who creates compromise in others, is able him/her self to be dependable, work well with others, and listen while stepping up and having something to say. In addition, leaders are not power seekers but rather take responsibility, are knowledgeable, proactive, goal oriented, and productive.

## Discussion

This study confirms findings similar to those Northouse (2007) put forth when capturing a set of five behavioral traits (e.g., intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability). Each of these dimensions was clearly identified within this study creating the

distinctive viability of continued study concerning leadership within this population. Moreover, while Hoyt (2007) found that gender was essential to the contemporary notions of effective leadership styles in its various forms the current study found definitions of leadership closely aligned with leadership theory. Interestingly, Hoyt (2007) concluded that it was unclear how important traits were to leadership while the current study found leader's traits to be an essential part of the respondent's ideals of an effective leader.

Women respondents in this study embody transformational leadership. That is, respondents described the traits and behaviors postulated by leadership theorists who study transformational leadership. For instance, leaders were to be the farsighted, risk takers, role models, and change agents much like Lussier and Achua, (2007) describe. Respondents found that a leader's beliefs, morals, and values needed to align with those of their followership particularly when making decisions for the group. Respondents ask would be leaders to put their beliefs into action. Self-esteem, achievement, willingness to work but not for glory or power was critical as well as embracing a higher purpose than one's self. In addition, leaders were asked to provide the voice for those who may be afraid to speak up for themselves without regard for self.

The current study confirms the research of Adams and Keim (2000), who found sorority chapter presidents took on a more participatory/collaborative approach and practice of developing a trusting and supporting environment while encouraging others to develop leadership skills. In fact, the TAMU sorority chapters who participate in the WLC program may serve as a model for other sororities and/or programs wishing to create transformational leaders.

According to Tinto (1993) as students become involved in an organization such as a sorority it is a natural progression for those students to become leaders. The current study features freshman sorority women with previous leadership experience who as first-year college

students have sought out a student organization (sorority). As seen in their responses, it is reasonable to assume these women have high expectations for leaders and likely are striving to acquire and/or maintain the type of leadership skills they expect from others. The leadership skills they appear to seek requires a certain amount of assertiveness, self-awareness, self-confidence, commitment, stability, integrity, intelligence, flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of others much like the traits Lussier and Achua (2007) identified and similar to those Northouse (2007) specified. The expectations may have far reaching implications when it comes to programming on a collegiate level for women.

### Implications, Conclusions and Recommendations

The respondents featured here expect their leaders and seemingly themselves to strive toward being transformational leaders. Elias, O'Brien, and Weissberg (2006) notes that transformational leaders use structures and relationships to achieve and maintain change. Likely, the respondents sought out the particular structure and relationships that a sorority offers as a way to become socially integrated into the academic and social environment as suggested by Tinto (1993). The implication here is that females entering college with leadership experience will intentionally seek out structures and relationships that foster leadership development. As such, institutions of higher learning and/or programs interested in creating change for women may consider what types of structures, programs, and student organizations foster the building of relationships and the development of leadership skills. As Tinto (1993) points out, a majority of early terminations from college are tied to the student's quality of experiences after entering college and having programs designed specifically for this population may lead to program and university sustainability and integration.

Further research should also be conducted with sorority chapter presidents who have had members participate in WLC programs to evaluate the students' performance over time. The influence of transformational leaderships and the relationship to female college student's perception of leadership should be further explored due to the many characteristics, traits, and behaviors that are consistent with transformational leadership descriptions.

Based upon the findings of this study, there is a need to determine how the traits and behaviors are transferred from leader to participant. Additional research is needed to tease apart the interplay of the dynamics at work. The current study focuses solely on first semester freshmen; continued enrollment and study organizational involvement may influence further perceptions of leadership over time. Longitudinal research that follows students throughout their collegiate tenure and focuses on how perceptions of leadership change over time may shed light upon the understanding of leadership dynamics. In addition, it is unclear how comments from the study participants may affect the future leadership selection for sorority chapters given that participants articulate their expectations of their leaders and how those leaders may or may not display specific characteristics, traits, and behaviors. Additional research concerning women leading other women and mixed gender organizations would also be enlightening.

As the number of women attending college continues to grow, it is necessary to develop effective leadership training programs that align its structures to promote relationships and leadership development. Attention must be paid to the intertwining of various leadership theories, gender, and social integration to create not only well intentioned but also well planned and implemented women's leadership programs. Women should be encouraged to become involved in campus sponsored activities, be exposed to other women in leadership positions, and assisted in the building of relationships and leadership development skills during their first year

of college. Thus, institutions should consider embracing the unique yet effective roles women assume as community leaders by addressing the different leadership expectations in the development of leadership training curriculum for student organizations.

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