Understanding the Leadership Construct of Young Women Leaders

Eda Lou I. Ochangco
Department of Psychology, Far Eastern University, Philippines
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ABSTRACT

This study, the first part of a four-part dissertation, investigated the leadership construct of eight young women student leaders, four in middle adolescence and four in late adolescence from Metro Manila Philippines, using the multiple case study approach. Four were from sectarian schools, and four were from non-sectarian schools. Results show four major themes: positive values, positive identity, guide and source of inspiration, and collaboration skills. Participants' leadership construct included both traditional female and male leadership qualities. Compared to middle adolescent participants, late adolescents' leadership constructs reflect more themes of positive values and identities. Compared to non-sectarian school participants, sectarian school participants reflect more collaboration skills themes. This study argues that understanding young women's leadership construct should be included in a complex leader identity formation process that identifies explicitly and integrates young women's leadership values or behavioral standards.

Keywords – Female Youth Leadership, Leadership in Schools, Female Adolescent Development, Positive Development, Youth Leadership Construct

INTRODUCTION

How do young women conceptualize leadership? What are the leadership stereotypes, challenges, and needs that young women leaders have to contend with? Understanding young women's conceptualization of leadership might be the missing piece in identifying some factors why they are underrepresented in leadership not only in adolescence but also in adulthood. Social stereotypes can discourage young women from taking leadership positions, and their gender can influence how they are judged by others (Giacomin et al., 2022). Moreover, the leadership characteristics of young people differ according to gender (Dagyar et al., 2022). Adolescence is a critical developmental period for the emergence and growth of leadership (Tackett et al., 2022). Conversely, lifelong learning skills acquired from leadership roles are crucial in the growth of young people and may even promote positive development in adulthood (Dagyar et al., 2022).

A clear construct or conception of leadership and following practices based on unclear and unexamined assumptions about leadership have been some of the problems identified in earlier studies on youth leadership (Hine, G., 2011; Klau, M., 2006). This matter points to the limited knowledge about effective positive development practices for youth. Other student leadership studies focused only on possible followers' perspectives or preferences where for instance, leader prototypicality can act as a substitute for fairness (Ullrich et al., 2009). As long as the leader is seen as a good representative of a group, fairness concerns can take on a secondary consideration. Similarly, the accountability of leaders becomes a primary consideration only for group non-prototypical leaders (Gessner et al., 2013). When it comes to leadership charisma, it is something bestowed on the group representative by group members, contrary to the notion that leaders must be distinct or different from the group itself (Platow et al., 2006).

Research Question

This research investigated eight adolescent females' construct of leadership. This investigation rested on the assumption that adolescent female leaders have their conceptualization or understanding of Leadership

(Archard, 2013). They appreciate a leader's visions, objectives, purpose, or function. They are also familiar with what constitutes a leader's traits or qualities and the critical role leaders play in groups. Girls learn about leadership from different school programs and activities and their personal experiences (Archard, 2013). However, in some cases, female student leaders' identity develops slowly. It initially evolves from understanding leadership as external to the self, then gradually embracing the self as a leader whether they were in leadership positions or not. They also gradually realize the importance of recognizing the role of gender, particularly in taking a stand on social issues related to gender (McKenzie, B., 2018).

This study was guided by the Developmental Assets framework developed by Peter Benson and his colleagues at the Search Institute to highlight the necessary concepts related to youth development and their contexts (Benson et al., 2011). More specifically, the Search Institute has identified 40 assets that young people need to have better outcomes in life. Strengths or supports that focus on relationships and ties with families, schools, and communities are called external assets. Major categories include support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time.

Moreover, internal assets are called strengths or support that focus on values, commitments, and competencies. Major categories include a commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. When the strengths (internal assets) of youth are aligned with the strengths of the context (external assets), positive outcomes for young people are more likely. In this framework, leadership skills are indicators of thriving (Benson et al., 2004, p. 784). More specifically, this study looked into how middle and late adolescent stages lead to possible different conceptualizations of leadership. Late adolescence, around 18 years old and until the early '20s, is a period of marked changes— "a developmental transition between childhood and adulthood that entails major, interrelated physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes" (Papalia et al., 2001, p.410). Young people at this stage already look and think significantly differently from young children. "Although their thinking may remain immature in some ways, they are capable of abstract reasoning and sophisticated moral judgments, and they can plan more realistically for the future" (Papalia et al., 2001, p. 425). Because of their capacity for abstract thought, Piaget claimed that "adolescents enter the highest level of cognitive development—formal operations… [which] give them a new, more flexible way to manipulate information" (Papalia et al., 2001, p. 425). This cognitive development opens new cognitive abilities that were once beyond the capacities of adolescents— the capacity to think about possibilities, think in a hypothetical-deductive manner, and form and test hypotheses. Given these considerations, it is important to investigate possible improvements in the conceptualizations of leadership among female leaders in middle and late adolescence or those whose ages range from fifteen to seventeen and eighteen to twenty-one.

METHOD

Research Design

This study was the first part of a four-part dissertation investigating leadership among female student leaders using the multiple case study approach. Studying leadership development among adolescent females is of unique interest because, first, more qualitative studies on female youth development must be conducted. Second, there must be more studies on adolescent female leadership since leadership roles are stereotypically for male adults. Existing studies on female leadership mainly include adult participants (Carbonell, 1984; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 1991; Eagly & Makhijani, 1992; Heilman et al., 1987; Jago & Vroom, 1982). This multiple case study method utilized qualitative interviews to account for participants' leadership ideas and constructs.

Research Participants

Guided by purposive sampling, participants were from private, coed junior and senior high schools in Metro

Manila. Half were from sectarian schools, and the other half were from non-sectarian schools. All participants were elected leaders of their school organizations for at least one year. All participants were selected by their school council advisers. Their ages ranged from 12-16 (middle adolescents) to 16-18 (late adolescents).

Each participant was assigned a code name. At the time of the interviews, two middle adolescent participants were 12 years old, and the other two were 13 years old. Three late adolescent participants were 17 years old, and one was 18 years old. Two participants have five years of leadership experience, one with six years of leadership experience, four with eight years of leadership experience, and one with ten years of leadership experience. Regarding the school setting, four participants were from sectarian schools, and four were from non-sectarian schools. (See Table 1 below for the demographic profile of case study participants in which each column identifies their code name, age, length of leadership experience, and school type).

Table 1 Demographic profile of case study participants

Code Name	Age	Leadership Experience	School Setting
Carla	12	Five years	Sectarian
Shaina	12	Six years	Sectarian
Hera	13	Five years	Non-sectarian
Lisa	13	Eight years	Non-sectarian
Nene	17	Ten years	Sectarian
Raiza	18	Eight years	Sectarian
Dominic	17	Eight years	Non-sectarian
Agape	17	Eight years	Non-sectarian

Key Informants

Key informants were also recruited from each school setting. Four students and three student council advisers were interviewed about the selection criteria for female student leaders in their respective schools.

School Setting

There were three school settings for this study. The first school setting was a sectarian school and a private coed institution offering instruction for preschool, kindergarten, elementary, and high school levels. The second school setting was a private, non-sectarian, coed educational institution providing senior high school, college, and post-graduate education. The third school setting was a private, non-sectarian, coed, non-stock educational institution providing complete education services from preschool to post-graduate. The decision to differentiate between sectarian and non-sectarian schools was partly to investigate the possible differences in school climate and support systems regarding leadership conceptualization and appreciation among case study participants.

Data Collection

The interview guide and objectives of the study were initially presented to school officials, together with the data-gathering procedure and inclusion criteria for participants. The school principals then tapped the school student council advisers to select participants. The student council advisers identified and invited qualified participants to conduct the study upon approval.

The first interview session with the case study participants was scheduled upon the return of the signed Informed Consent form from their parents. Participants were then asked to sign the Informed Assent form.

The first interview lasted for about 40- 60 minutes. The second interview was scheduled based on the availability of the student participants, which lasted approximately 40-60 minutes. There was also one interview session with each key informant, which lasted for about 20-40 minutes. All the interviews took place inside the school campuses and were all recorded with the participants' permission.

An interview guide was constructed based on the research questions, theoretical considerations, literature review, and result of the pilot test. Three adolescent student leaders were selected as participants for the pilot test.

Data Analysis

For data familiarization, each transcribed interview was organized and read several times. Preliminary ideas and concepts were identified and encoded from each transcribed interview, with specific attention to ideas and concepts relevant to the research questions. Member-checking was conducted after each initial interview and data familiarization. Consultations and negotiations of meanings and main ideas were conducted during the second interview session with participants. Once member-checking was complete, two advanced Ph.D. students in Developmental Psychology were enlisted as interraters to help the researcher identify themes or sub-themes. Matrices with participants' responses were given to the interraters with a copy of the Developmental Assets Framework from the Search Institute as a guide. Secondary themes were then identified after the initial classification of responses. Conformability and trustworthiness were ensured by moving back and forth reflexively from the themes to the preliminary ideas and concepts and even back to the transcribed interviews whenever necessary. Possible secondary themes were reviewed thoroughly against the data and the research questions to determine whether the themes presented a meaningful and cohesive account of the data. Codes from the researcher and interraters were compared for similarities and differences. The researcher and the interraters debated their codes until a certain degree of confidence had been reached. Finally, a thoughtful interpretation of themes through an integrative discussion was made possible through thick descriptions with an audit trail to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis. The interpretation was also integrated into or against existing literature on female adolescent leadership and the layers of influences in the participants' lives from social to cultural or political institutions.

Ethical Considerations

The dissertation proposal defense panel examined the data-gathering procedure and interview guide questions before the actual data-gathering phase. During the data-gathering stage, permission to conduct research was submitted to the respective high school principals. The interview guide questions were examined by their school officials and school psychologist. The complete research proposal manuscript had to go through rigorous Ethics Board approval with protocol no.2019-33.

During the initial meeting, the research objectives, informed consent, and informed assent forms were all presented and explained to participants. They were also briefed about the voluntary nature of their participation and about their right to discontinue should they feel discomfort or unease. They were also informed about the confidential nature of the interview.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis of participants' responses clustered around four themes: (a) positive values; (b) positive identity; (c) guide and source of inspiration; (d) collaboration skills.

Positive Values

Leadership is about values and principles. Leaders know who they are and are firmly grounded in their

values ("Leadership," 2004). A leader has well-developed psychosocial abilities and demonstrates virtuous character in challenging ethical contexts (Bier & Sherblom, 2020). In this study, participants described a leader as responsible, with a good work ethic, practical, level-headed, moral, and with a strong sense of community.

Raiza stated, "Dedication and responsibility [are] the key to becoming a good leader." Agape's idea about responsibility concerns a leader's desire to implement what they think could help others. Similarly, Nene said that good leaders are genuinely interested in fulfilling their responsibilities and embracing hardships. They know how to resist unfair practices and make personal sacrifices whenever necessary. In addition, Nene reported that leaders derive fulfillment from such sacrifices and the group's success.

Related to this sense of responsibility, Agape added that an ideal leader has a good work ethic. She specified one city mayor as her ideal leader because how, for instance, she noted that he was the type who does his work even at night time. In cases of accidents, one can depend on him, unlike other government officials who sit around all day signing documents and giving orders. Similarly, Shaina described her ideal leader as someone who exhibited a good work ethic and uprightness. Shaina identified the same city mayor mentioned by Agape as an excellent example of this kind of leader, noting that he was hardworking and upstanding, and trustworthy as a public servant.

He even had to patrol the city streets at night to maintain order, and whenever there was a fire somewhere, he would go there personally…Unlike other government officials, he is very much action-oriented.

He is very hardworking, unlike others who are corrupt and take money that was supposed to be for the city government

Another example of this kind of leader was a former senator. Shaina emphasized how this senator, during his presidential campaign, advocated fighting for the straight and moral path.

Meanwhile, an ideal leader for Lisa is practical because they know how to handle many things and apply what they learned from experiences in life. They know how to change and grow from mistakes. Agape added that her ideal leader was someone focused on values that can be applied to students' lives. In line with this, Agape talked about her high school Science teacher, whom she described as someone who emphasized the value of learning and the importance of applying what students learn in real life.

Furthermore, a leader is level-headed. In misunderstandings or conflicts, a leader knows how to control her anger and recognizes that her anger does not help resolve issues. Lisa explained that a leader understands that anger is counterproductive. They know how to prioritize their duties and recognize their limitations. Liza also shared that a leader knows when to set aside anger for one's work or duties. For Agape, a leader knows how to manage her leadership duties and personal problems. At the same time, a leader is good at considering how personal concerns affect one's work and others.

Moreover, a leader has a sense of community. They exhibit strong connection, care, and fellowship with others. Carla described her ideal leader as selfless and willing to help regardless of the situation. She considered Jesus Christ the perfect example of selflessness, "A good leader to his disciples and his people." Carla also shared that she was moved by Ms. Universe Catriona Gray's advocacy regarding the welfare of orphans. Carla considered this kind of selflessness an essential quality of an ideal leader. For Nene, a leader is considerate, open-minded, and listens to others' suggestions. She added that a leader understands that ideas can come from all sources that's why they know how to ask for opinions or suggestions from members. For Raiza, a leader knows how to listen to others, sets a good example, and leads positively. A leader is sincere about helping others. He or she can handle pressure and is capable of building a community.

Positive Identity

Positive identity may have to do with a sense of control, purpose, optimism, and solid self-esteem (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011). In this study, participants described a leader as self-disciplined, motivated, confident, persevering, intelligent, and courageous. Arguably, many of these qualities go beyond traditional female leader stereotypes and may be more in line with agentic-instrumental rather than communal-social leadership style (Pratch & Jacobowitz, 1996). For Carla, a leader is self-disciplined and motivated, "Leadership starts from your self-discipline and motivation because in that way you [can] make others follow you because they see the advantage of being a good role model. A leader must be self-disciplined, self-motivated, and a good role model for all to see and follow." Carla added that discipline must start with you when one is a leader. She argued that if a leader does not have self-respect, others cannot possibly respect them. A leader should know how to discipline herself and must know her limitations. A leader should also be highly motivated to keep functioning as a leader.

According to Shaina, a leader is confident and persevering. Leaders should be confident to accomplish things and persevere to improve their skills and capabilities. Moreover, leaders are aware that their leadership dramatically depends on the support of others. Shaina argued that it is hard to be a student leader if no one from your class supports you. She added that being a female leader has its unique challenges because of gender, but females must embrace their roles nonetheless. Being a female leader is difficult, but it should be embraced. Similarly, a leader can remain calm and confident in facing criticism and hatred for Nene. She argued that a leader must take control of the situation by keeping in mind what matters most, like knowing the right course of action and not doing anything wrong to deserve criticism or hatred:

We should not get affected by gossip or criticism and should not allow these things to lower one's self-confidence. These things are normal whether one is a student leader or not. What should matter is that we know that what we are doing is not wrong. We know what is right, and we give our best. Leaders must consider what they can do for others. Leaders have a strong sense of self, know what they are doing, and should not be afraid of criticism or hatred from others.

For some participants, a leader needs to be intelligent. Lisa considered one former president an ideal leader and role model mainly because of his intelligence. She thought this leader was very competent even though the public had negatively criticized him in the past. Lisa thought of her ideal leader as praiseworthy mainly for his many contributions to his country. In the same vein, Raiza emphasized that her ideal leader, another late senator of her country, was:

Firm… she is straight to the point,… brilliant and informative… she is not afraid to tell the truth about what is happening to the government,… she is very transparent to everyone."

For Dominic, a leader is principled and fearless when speaking or standing up for what she is fighting for. A leader should be able to anticipate more significant problems. Dominic also described her ideal leader as persevering and dedicated to her advocacy. A leader fights for what she believes in despite strong opposition or threats to her life. In this regard, Dominic identified Malala Yousafzai as an example of an ideal leader:

What matters a lot is her perseverance and dedication to her advocacy. She persevered despite getting shot and continued advocating for girls' education rights. Her dedication is evident in how she kept fighting for her advocacy despite many people pulling her down.

Guide and Source of Inspiration

For many participants, a leader has two critical roles: guiding and inspiring their group. Whereas guidance

involves informing or directing the group towards the completion of group goals or resolving common problems, inspiration has to do with motivating or stimulating the group, usually to facilitate stronger work relationships. On the one hand, a leader directs her group and is a source of information and strategy. On the other hand, a leader also uplifts, motivates, or stimulates. Arguably, these actions are all necessary not only for task completion but also for group cohesion.

Four case study participants believe that a leader is a source of guidance or direction for group members. Carla stated that a leader is the brains of a group or organization, "The success of the group depends on you. Group members will also model after the leader. They will copy the actions that they see in their leader." Guidance must focus on and emphasize what is good. A leader does not only call attention to what is wrong or damaging but must emphasize what works well for the group. Carla emphasized, "The important role of a leader is to provide instructions, directions, and improvement for everybody's sake." The leader is mainly responsible for her team's success or failure.

Similarly, Hera asserted that although group members are expected to give their opinions or ideas, it is the leader's responsibility to provide clear guidelines or inform members what to do. Members give their opinions or ideas, and leaders must learn to listen and consider different ideas and opinions. In the end, however, leaders communicate what must be accomplished by the group.

Moreover, for Hera, an ideal leader provides guidance. In line with this, she considers her mother, some of her teachers, and her grandmother as her ideal leaders. She said, "My mama provides guidance, which motivates us to work faster on our tasks. The same is true with my teachers." As for her grandmother, "It is like she prepares me for a good future."

For Nene, a leader is in charge of planning and providing instructions for group action. She considers suggestions and opinions from members and makes decisions on behalf of her team. Moreover, leadership involves experience, knowledge, strategy, and productivity. A leader is responsible for dividing tasks among group members, but she added that "a leader's role has to be bigger than that of other members. A leader has to do more and contribute more." According to Nene, "a group leader, for me, should have experience. Moreover, they should be knowledgeable regarding strategies and productivity."

Dominic shared that a leader is similar to other members of a group. Both should be good at listening and understanding others. Between the two, the leader is expected to be in charge and stands as the organization's representative.

However, leaders not only guide members but also inspire them. Agape expressed that a leader knows how to bring out the best in others by influencing and inspiring others. She said, "you have to have an impact on others because your organization will not be successful if nothing good ever happens, and also, as a leader, you should be able to inspire others." Agape added that "A boss tells you to do things. A leader guides her members." She also said, "A leader has the responsibility to bring out the best of her group members…a leader should know how to guide their members because a leader is different from a boss." Agape further emphasized the critical difference between a boss and a leader "because a boss tells you what to do while a leader guides their members."A leader is a source of inspiration in a way that encourages members to give more of themselves, "being a leader does not mean that you have to inspire others with what you have. However, a good leader means you inspire your members to see what they can and to be more of what they are."

Collaboration Skills

Collaboration skills underscore the ability to work with others efficiently and harmoniously to achieve a common goal. Collaboration is about finding or creating ways to work together (Page & Margolis, 2017).

Collaborative leadership is about vision and values, interdependence and shared responsibility, mutual respect, empathy and willingness to be vulnerable, ambiguity, effective communication, and synergy, among other considerations (Lawrence, 2017). In this study, some of the collaboration skills identified by participants are: considerate, open-minded, encouraging members, adopting good communication strategies, assisting in completing tasks, listening well, and implementing time management.

All participants described a leader as someone attuned to her team members and their aspirations for the team. A leader can understand her teammates and guarantee successful collaboration within the group. Three participants emphasized that a leader listens well to group members. Shaina thought of a leader who possesses qualities that are useful for interpersonal relationships, such as understanding and patience with her groupmates, "A leader should know how to understand what her classmates want to accomplish and their suggestions ." A leader knows how to listen and carefully considers others' suggestions and actions.

Similarly, Hera believes that an efficient leader knows how to relate well with others. Although they are expected to provide guidance and instruction to group members, they must know how to listen to others' opinions, "…a leader provides direction regarding what should be done and should also listen to others's opinions." However, a leader should be skillful in weighing others' opinions in light of their own opinions, "A leader considers others opinions but should also be capable of making their own decisions." Similarly, Leadership for Nene involves being open-minded, considerate, and able to generate opinions from group members, "…a good leader should be considerate and open-minded because ideas should not only come from the leader. They should know how to solicit opinions and suggestions from members."

Four participants believe that a leader knows how to encourage group members, engages in open communication, and helps complete tasks. One of them said, "…not always should leaders give directives. There are times when leaders must also encourage members and find ways to bring out and make good use of members' skills." A leader is someone who is not merely interested in giving orders. He or she engages in open communication with members, willing to learn and grow as a leader. He or she gives her best as a leader. He or she is selfless and considers what is beneficial for everyone. Another participant emphasized a similar point: "leaders sometimes prioritize friendships and other relationship connections instead of their responsibilities."

Moreover, whenever the situation calls for it, "a leader assists and encourages her members to work harder." A leader is hardworking herself, "A leader should be patient when it comes to waiting for her group members and officers." Similarly, Nene asserted that a good leader is also a good follower "because you can only be a leader if you have experienced being a follower. … a leader will not simply assign tasks. Instead, she will also help to ensure the swift completion of tasks…she does not simply talk but act accordingly."

Finally, for groups to achieve their common goals, leaders should have good time-management skills. According to Nene, a leader must have time-management skills, which is essential in multitasking. She said, "…aside from having school work, of course, when you get home, you also have responsibilities that you must attend to, and then there are also student council projects." Nene added that a leader's big responsibility includes knowing how to handle or balance conflicting situations:

Sometimes we experience having to work on a group project and attend a family reunion simultaneously. However, as a leader, you need to weigh the situation because sometimes you need to sacrifice other things for you to be able to fulfill your responsibility and for you to be able to assess the situation appropriately.

Similarly, Raiza said that a leader is always available to others, "…has a 24/7 service and they should have time for their people to know their suggestions or concerns." Lisa also expressed a similar idea, "Time management. Responsible. When it comes to duties, you know what you must do, your limitations, and you understand that you should not be angry because anger is not helpful and can go away."

Key Informants

Key informants were asked about the selection of student leaders in their campuses to validate the responses of case study participants. The responses of school advisers and schoolmates were clustered into two themes: 1) collaborative and 2) positive values.

Collaborative Leader

A potential leader is respectful, cooperative, and open to suggestions from others. One school adviser shared the importance of "…the respect that she gets from her classmates and fairness in assessing things. At the same time, she knows how to handle her group, cooperate with others, and consider suggestions from others." A leader is also selected based on their excellent behavior as a "…good follower…open to all suggestions, responsible and can stand by their own decisions as well as know how to admit mistakes.." Moreover, leaders should know how to meet deadlines. One adviser asserted that a potential leader "…submits papers on time….and knows what to do." Furthermore, council advisers shared that recruitment and selection of student leaders usually go through a process that may begin with an interview of other teachers to find out about the potential leader's sense of responsibility, conduct or behavior, and previous leadership experiences.

Similarly, one schoolmate shared that students who are responsible, resourceful, compassionate, and able to endure are more likely to be chosen as leaders. Another schoolmate added, " The people who will lead already have experience. Those who are ready…to engage people and … they would stand up for the whole class." Students with leadership potential are "… responsible, committed to their work, can be trusted inside the classroom, and honest." Another critical informant shared that "Student leaders are identified or chosen by helping us improve the school… Responsible and organized. "

Positive Values

A student with positive values is more likely to get selected as a leader. One key informant shared that a potential leader is "a good example to his or her fellow students. By being responsible for the tasks that are given to them. Being a role model, a good listener inspires others." Positive values mean that the potential leader is a role model who is competent and able to balance school work with extra-curricular work. One key informant said, "…she should be a role model….knows how to treat people well and talk to other students, school personnel, and teachers."A potential leader is someone who has a strong school engagement. One school adviser shared that "…they also look at how one speaks in front of others. She should not look nervous…" Although popularity is not the primary consideration, confidence, and public-speaking skills are strongly considered.

In another school, political parties recruit willing or eager students to run as candidates. Recruitment happens during political party meetings. Student council officers identify suitable candidates and then get interviewed by the student council adviser. The student interview is necessary to guarantee that the potential candidates will be committed to staying in school and, at the same time, working as officers for the student council. One adviser shared that "… one of the requirements is to have many leadership experiences, with honors and high grades…because these are needed." As one adviser shared, high grades or being honor students are not required but preferred, "Good in her academics. She can balance academics and extra-

curricular activities." He or she must be achievement-oriented, as one informant stated, "…top students, I think, top 1 to 5…. Those who have potential among us…."

Similarly, another informant said, "among student councilors and class officers, there are nominations. Almost all those who get selected are honor students.".Another adviser shared that potential student leaders will be selected or nominated if they do not have failing grades and no minor and major school violations. She added that popularity counts less as long as the student is willing to participate in the student council.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with recent studies on adolescent female leadership development (Archard, 2013), case study participants have meaningful leadership constructs and demonstrated appreciation of leadership qualities and competencies. This study adds to the growing literature on adolescent female leadership development as it details how adolescent female leaders construe leadership. Such information may be helpful in guiding policy for girls' general development and leadership development in particular.

What are the participants' constructs of leadership? Responses from the case study participants show four themes: (a) positive values; (b)positive identity; (c) guide and source of inspiration; (d) collaboration skills. The first two themes are consistent with the Developmental Assets Framework's emphasis on internal assets. Positive values are defined explicitly regarding qualities like caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint. Moreover, positive identity in the Developmental Assets Framework is defined explicitly in terms of personal power, self-esteem, purpose, and a positive view of personal future.

Furthermore, themes related to guidance, sources of inspiration, and collaboration skills may be associated with the Developmental Assets Framework's focus on social competencies. These competencies include planning and decision-making, interpersonal competence, cultural competence, resistance skills, and peaceful conflict resolution (Benson et al., 2011). These responses show that case study participants see a leader with a more flexible set of capabilities drawn from both male and female leadership styles (ex., social-communal and agentic-instrumental). Note also that case study participants' interest in caring, selfless leaders and a sense of community resonate with early studies on adult women leaders who were into higher communal-social leadership qualities than men (Pratch & Jacobowitz, 1996). Participants' interest in such qualities may also reflect the importance of socially facilitative behaviors among young female leaders, consistent with studies on gender role theory and adult female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 1991). Also, being a source of influence and inspiration are qualities consistent with the results of many female leadership studies starting with Eagly and colleagues, where successful adult female leaders were more democratic/participative and less autocratic (Eagly& Johnson, 1990).

Note that middle and late-adolescent participants responded similarly to interpersonal competence themes, specifically collaboration skills. Both groups also described their ideal leaders in similar ways. However, older participants differed from middle adolescent participants in their responses which are more related to positive values and identity. Arguably, such emphasis on positive values and identity reflects older participants' more advanced cognitive development. As a function of maturation, they are in a better position to imagine or conceive more complex qualities of a leader in terms of values and identity, consistent with Piaget's formal-operational stage of cognitive development (Thomas, M, 2005). Such complex and more multi-dimensional leader definition could also be interpreted as attempts on the part of older participants to define standards for student leadership and to construct tools for self-evaluation (Papalia et al., 2001).

Moreover, participants from sectarian and non-sectarian schools also have similar responses related to interpersonal competence. However, participants from sectarian schools provided more responses

related to themes of care, selflessness, and community-building or the so-called social-communal style of leadership, which could be associated with collaboration skills. It could be that their religious-based school also helped emphasize these leadership qualities over other qualities. Studies on school culture, specifically in Catholic schools, emphasize the sense of community and "community of care" (Eccles, J., & Roeser, R., 2011). In contrast, personal power themes or the more agentic-instrumental leadership style were more common among non-sectarian participants. Based on the Developmental Assets Framework, personal power themes underscore young people's sense of control over their lives (Benson et al., 2011). With non-sectarian participants, the focus on a personal sense of control was likely more central in their socialization than dependence on external sources of control due to faith or religion, for instance. The social climate of non-sectarian schools could be more focused on students' achievements or goals than fostering group or community goals.

The information provided by the key informants supplemented many of the main points the case study participants provided. Key informants' responses regarding the selection of student leaders in their campuses validated two themes that emerged from the case study participants: a) collaborative and b) positive values. Their responses can be connected to internal assets like interpersonal competence, planning, and decision-making skills, sense of responsibility, school engagement, and achievement motivation.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that female adolescent leaders require a balanced approach to skill development, drawing from the best qualities of female and male–associated leadership styles. Considering the gender-neutral approach of the Developmental Assets Framework would be a good starting point specifically for adolescents. However, in line with the development of internal assets connected to the participants' leadership construct, there is a need to consider some gaps based on the Developmental Assets Framework. Missing or least mentioned internal assets include homework, bonding to school, reading for pleasure, integrity, honesty, restraint, resistance skills, self-esteem, and a positive view of the personal future.

More specifically, participants' leadership constructs could be interpreted as indicators of the values, strengths, or assets that leaders of their age and gender deem valuable and meaningful. Examining their responses through the Developmental Assets Framework shows which assets or clusters of complementary strengths are considered essential or salient to young female leaders. Consequently, what skills or assets they ignore may also indicate what will eventually require intervention or support because adolescents need essential support and strengths for positive development (Benson, 2008; Benson et al., 2011). Moreover, their responses need to be seen in the light of available research on positive youth development. For instance, attention to internal assets like the sense of responsibility and caring for others can be connected to prosocial values and social responsibility values, which are in turn also related to positive relationships within the family, school, community, social groups, and fair society beliefs (Wray-Lake et al., 2016). For example, missing internal assets, like integrity, honesty, restraint, resistance skills, self-esteem, and a positive view of personal future, could be looked into in future studies or program designs for youth interventions.

Finally, their responses could also be seen as a result of their critical considerations of what matters as leadership qualities to young female leaders or leaders in general. Responses show the extent and limitation of social or cultural influences on adolescent female participants' leadership construct. Participants' leadership construct could be interpreted as a reflection of their leadership aspirations and part of their process of leadership identity development. According to Erik Erikson, the chief task of adolescence is identity development. As it is, identity formation for adolescents is a complex process that partly involves considering and integrating values or behavioral standards in their lives. Thus, participants' leadership construct should be seen as attempts to define an ideal leader and to construct tools for self-evaluation or

self-identification as leaders (Papalia et al., 2001).

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