

TITLE The Impact of Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Educational Background on the Development of Girls as Leaders

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Unpublished master's thesis: May 2017

OBJECTIVE The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of race, socioeconomic status and educational background on the development of leadership behaviors in girls, and whether early interventions are needed to help mitigate these factors.

METHODOLOGY

A cluster sampling approach was used to identify groups of adolescent girls between the ages of 14-18. Initially, internet searches were conducted of organizations that provide mentoring to adolescent girls and one in the metro Atlanta, Georgia area and another in the Minneapolis, Minnesota area agreed to participate. Eighteen girls from the first organization (45% response rate), eleven girls from the second organization (55% response rate) and six girls recruited through Facebook completed both the Student version of the Leadership Practices Inventory and a demographic survey. Most respondents were Black (86%), attending a public school (77%), whose mother's and father's had graduated or had a post-baccalaureate degree (56% and 43% respectively). Nearly half did not know their family's income (48%), and the remaining participants reported incomes below \$50,000 (17%), from \$50,001 to \$100,000 (23%), and above \$100,000 (11%). All but one participant reported that they participated in some form of extracurricular activity, which included sports, band, academic and social clubs. Nearly all of the students reported having academic grades that were mostly A's and B's.

KEY FINDINGS

The most frequent leadership practice was Enable, followed by Encourage, and then Model, Inspire and Challenge. This sample in comparison with Kouzes Posner's normative database on the Student LPI was in the lower 30 percentile for Model, Inspire, and Encourage leadership practices, and the 60 percentile for Challenge and Enable.

Because of the small sample sizes involved (race, school type, parent's educational level, family income) no statistical tests were applied to the leadership scores. Nonetheless, the author comments that "the survey did provide a number of interesting results. In this sample, the data showed that the minority participants' scores were higher than the White participants. Age contributed significantly into how well the girls scored on the S-LPI. The youngest participants had the lowest scores. The results also trended higher for students that were attending public schools in comparison to the students that attended private or charter schools. The findings showed that the mothers' education level has a greater influence on the leadership development of girls than their fathers' education level. The data that was collected on the participants' family

income indicated that socioeconomic background does not strongly influence whether girls develop as leaders” (p. 26).

The author concludes:

Although the results of this study did not find a direct correlation between race, education or socioeconomic status and the development of the five leadership practices, the findings provided further insight that strengthens the argument that there is a need for early intervention to help girls become leaders. The findings showed that the youngest girls in this study demonstrated the five leadership practices the least in comparison to the older girls. Early interventions at the preteen age level, when girls are still moldable but developed enough mentally and emotionally, can help them learn essential leadership skills that can give them a ten-to twenty-year head start (Nelson, 2010). Leadership programs designed specifically for pre-teen girls can provide them with the knowledge and skills that are needed to form a solid foundation in leadership, which the girls can use to build on and further develop, as they grow older (p. 27).