

## **Students' Self-identified Long-term Leadership Development Goals: An Analysis by Gender and Race**

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### **Abstract**

Leadership development goal statements of 92 undergraduate students enrolled in a multi-year self-directed leadership development program were analyzed using content and thematic analyses to investigate patterns of similarities and differences across gender and race. This qualitative analysis utilized a theoretical framework that approached leadership typed traits, skills, or behaviors (Northouse, 2009). Significant differences emerged by gender; women were more interested in developing leadership-oriented traits while men displayed more interest in developing specific skills. No differences emerged across racial groups.

### **Introduction**

The development of leadership skills within the undergraduate college student population has long been a central mission within higher education (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Dugan & Komives, 2007). Accordingly, leadership development initiatives designed for college students have been steadily increasing (Astin & Astin, 2000; Riggio, Ciulla, & Sorensen, 2003; Schwartz, Axtman, & Freeman, 1998; Spralls, Garver, Divine, & Trotz, 2010). Even as leadership programs continue to increase in numbers, a lack of consensus persists regarding what these programs should be designed to teach (Eich, 2008) and what students should gain from participating within them (Allen & Hartman, 2009), particularly within divisions of student affairs (Owen, 2012).

This lack of agreement may also be related to a diversity of conceptualizations of "leadership." Northouse (2009), for example, describes leadership as, in part, a collection of

traits that an individual possesses, a combination of certain skills and abilities, and a series of behaviors an individual exercises, all with the goal to create influence within a group of people concerned with achieving common goals. Given the variation in how leadership is conceptualized, students who choose to participate in co-curricular leadership programs may differ in what they are interested in learning within the context of their own development. The research we describe was designed to investigate students' self-identified leadership learning goals as these students entered into a multi-year co-curricular leadership certificate program in college, with a particular focus on examining similarities and differences in goals across students' race and gender.

### **Goal-setting for Leadership Development**

Developing an understanding of students' self-identified leadership development goals is significant; research highlighting the difficulty of effectively educating students without understanding their goals was established a generation ago (Entwistle, 1987), yet gaps continue to exist today (Kaufman, Israel, & Rudd, 2008). These gaps may be even more significant in the field of co-curricular leadership education. A recent study of leadership programs (Owen, 2012) revealed the prevalence in teaching of prescriptive models of leadership such as the Relational Leadership Model (RLM) (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007) and the Leadership Challenge (Kouzes & Posner, 2008). Students experience curriculum which seeks to inform them not only in how to be effective, but defines effectiveness for them. For example, students in programs that espouse popular models like the RLM are taught that leadership is not simply the exercise of power or control, but a process of influencing a group towards common positive goals. In programs that utilize these models, effective educators should presumably approach students who are interested in learning leadership as "command-and-control" differently than a student interested in learning group process skills, for example.

A vast body of over 1,000 research articles in goal-setting (Kaufman, Israel, & Rudd, 2008) shows the significant degree to which individuals' goals affect their motivation for learning and later performance (Locke & Latham, 2002). Specifically, goals help direct and energize, as well as aid in task persistence and skill acquisition (Locke & Latham, 2002). However, goal-setting theory has been underutilized in the field of leadership development (Kaufman, et al., 2008) and specifically in leadership programs within student affairs in higher education. Little research has been conducted that examines a broad population of students and their interest in developing their leadership competencies. Without a more systemic understanding of what students hope to gain by participating in leadership programs, educators are left guessing as to how to best support students in their development and most efficiently educate them. The process of understanding students' goals may be made more difficult given how differently groups of students from diverse social identities practice and understand leadership.

### **Demographic Differences in Leadership Practices**

Consideration for culture and social identity as factors in how students conceptualize, develop, and practice leadership is noteworthy (Ostick & Wall, 2011). Outside of higher education, emerging bodies of evidence exist regarding the differences between the leadership-

oriented goals and actions between men and women (Eagly & Carli, 2003) and across different races and ethnicities (Bordas, 2007). Within the context of colleges and universities, research shows that differences exist by gender in student perceptions of capacity gains through leadership development programs (Yarrish, Zula, & Davis, 2010). Another study showed male students rated themselves higher than females, and Caucasian students higher than Students of Color, on a general measure of leadership ability (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000). However, using the framework of the Social Change Model of Leadership Development, which is explicitly relationship-oriented and focused on positive community change (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996), women tend to score higher than men on quantitative measures (Dugan & Komives, 2007). This may reflect the predominance with which women are motivated to lead based on their connection to the groups to which they belong and the purposes for which those groups exist (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003).

Arminio, et al. (2000) was one of the first scholars to focus on the perceived differences in leadership practices between Caucasian students and Students of Color. They found that Students of Color in the United States often disdain the role of “leader,” recognizing the potential social cost in their community for holding a position of leadership. More recent evidence suggests that Students of Color display vast differences in self-reported leadership capacity based on their specific race and the construct of leadership being measured (Dugan & Komives, 2010). These differences presumably influence student goals in participating in voluntary co-curricular leadership development programs. For example, a student who conceptualizes leadership as a relational process dedicated to group success might create a goal to develop competency in collaborating with others, while a student who believes leaders win others over to their way of thinking may work to achieve better public speaking skills.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Northouse (2009, 2010) summarizes several approaches to a comprehensive conceptualization of leadership, including approaching leadership as a trait (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Stogdill, 1974), a skill (Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly, & Marks, 2000; Yammarino, 2000), a behavior (McGregor, 1960), and a relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). While a multi-level examination of leadership (Day, 2001; Murphy & Johnson, 2011) would include a “leadership as relationship” conceptualization, our research examines individual students about to participate in a long-term leadership program divorced from the groups to which they belong. Therefore, we focused specifically on the individual attributes associated with effective leadership actions – attributes that are often commonly emphasized in leadership development programs in higher education (Owen, 2012). These attributes are often divided into three categories: traits (e.g., confidence, extraversion), skills (e.g., multicultural competence, public speaking), and behaviors (e.g., encouraging others, listening to others’ ideas).

Research focusing on leadership as a trait has recently re-emerged (Antonakis, Day, & Schyns, 2012) with a focus on charisma and the relational skills requisite for success within transformational (Bass, 1998) and authentic (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) leadership frameworks. Northouse (2009) identifies intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability as most popularly associated with individual leadership effectiveness. Presumably, students who feel they currently lack these attributes may seek them out through participation in leadership

programs. Leadership skills can be contrasted with traits in that while traits are commonly thought to be “innate and largely fixed,” skills can be learned and developed. Katz (1955) is most commonly associated with a skills approach, and categorizes leadership skills as primarily administrative [e.g., process coordination], human [e.g., supervision], or conceptual [e.g., strategic thinking]. Given the diversity of students interested in their own leadership education (Dugan & Komives, 2007), we broadly defined leadership skills as any proficiency that could be developed through a combination of instruction and practice, and which could be applied for greater leadership effectiveness. Lastly, leadership behavior models focus on what leaders do and how they act Blake and Mouton (1964) first described behaviors through their “managerial grid.” The managerial grid describes the task-oriented and relationship-oriented actions of effective leaders. A summary of these three categories can be found in Table 1. These three approaches to the practice of leadership – trait, skill, and behavior – represent the framework for our investigation into students’ goals in participating in leadership programs.

Table 1

*Three approaches to the practice of leadership (Northouse, 2009)*

Trait	A focus on personal qualities generally considered present in the individual practice of leadership, such as confidence and intelligence.
Skill	A focus on developing competence in a general set of actions associated with effective leadership, such as interpersonal communication or self-management of emotions.
Behavior	A focus on specific, discrete conduct that, if practiced, would lead to an effective leadership outcome, such as providing feedback or engaging in mentoring behaviors toward others.

## Research Questions

We investigated a multi-year, co-curricular leadership certificate program that required students to identify two leadership-oriented “learning goals” at the outset of their participation. Using a framework of the three categories described above, we examined emerging themes in these goals. Our research focused on the following questions:

1. Do students differ by gender or race in their identification of trait emergence, skill development, or behavioral commitment as central goals within their leadership development plan?
2. Where differences do exist, what themes emerge in a study of individual goals that might inform how these groups approach their leadership development differently?

Increasing our awareness of how demography may predict preferred outcomes would lead to more nuanced, and potentially more effective, curriculum development and communication efforts across campus.

## Methods

### Population and Sample

The research was conducted at a large, research-intensive university located in the Midwestern United States. All undergraduate students have the option of participating in a non-credit Leadership Certificate Program, a self-directed experience that involves participating in a series of elective leadership development initiatives. During the period in which the research took place, 249 students enrolled in the program. Within this population, 67% identified as female, 57% as Caucasian, 31% as Asian/Asian-American, 4% as Latino/a, and 8% as African-American. Given that the study was focused on examining race and gender characterizations, a sample of 92 students was drawn using stratified random sampling to approximate more equal sample sizes in regard to racial grouping. This sample included 52 women (57%) and 40 men (43%), 19 African-American students (21%); 30 Asian-American students (33%); 34 Caucasian students (37%); and 9 Latino students (10%). Compared to the overall campus undergraduate population, women and Caucasian students were underrepresented, while African-American and Asian-American students were overrepresented within the sample. Latino/a students were slightly underrepresented.

### Data Collection

In the first semester of their enrollment in the long-term leadership certificate program, all students create a *Personal Development Plan* (PDP). The PDP documents for the 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012 academic years were scrubbed of individually identifiable information and provided anonymously to the researchers by campus administrators. As a part of their PDP, students developed two significant and independent learning goals – two separate specific and measurable areas of leadership development that students commit to learning about, developing in, and/or practicing while enrolled in the certificate program. Students were prompted to begin with a sentence summary of each goal, and then expand the statement by describing what the goal meant to them and how they will commit to measuring their success. These 100-200 word statements were extracted from each PDP and entered into a spreadsheet. Each goal was assigned an identifying number and coded as to the student's gender and race. An example of a PDP, written by an African-American female, was:

I want to increase my multicultural competence. I want to become more socially aware of different cultures, communities and people. I once read somewhere that America should not be thought of as a melting pot, but rather a stew. It should be thought of as a stew because everyone has distinctive characteristics that make them unique, but all of these different combinations of people bring different and important flavors to the stew. It is important to remember that not everyone is the same and everyone brings something different to the table. People should not be "melted" into one identity, but rather the tomato, pepper, and potato should be appreciated for their own identity and recognized for how their individual characteristics contribute to the stew (Goal 43).

## **Data Analysis**

The authors conducted a content and thematic analysis of each student's learning goals within the program. Klenke describes content analysis as "a tool used to determine the presence of certain content within texts" (2008, p. 89). It is used to reduce data and make sense of a large volume of qualitative data (Patton, 2002). Content analysis can take either quantitative or qualitative form. Quantitative analysis of qualitative data, such as text, may even be conducted (Morgan, 1993). Content analysis involves coding data by breaking it down into manageable categories. Categories may be either pre-determined or allowed to emerge. Lincoln and Guba (1985) use Holsti's five characteristics to describe content analysis:

- Rules and procedures are formulated beforehand
- Content analysis is a systematic process
- The process aims for generalizability
- The process takes context into account
- Content analysis is implicitly both a quantitative and qualitative process

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is the qualitative analysis that gives the quantitative data deeper meaning. Qualitative analysis helps researchers understand the meanings that people have constructed or how they make sense of their world. Using the theoretical framework described above, the authors developed detailed descriptors for what constituted a skill, trait, or behavior to guide the coding process. To develop inter-coder reliability, the three researchers first coded a small sample of student goals and compared results to develop a common understanding of the descriptors used for each of the three leadership concepts. For example, a goal statement that is summarized as, "I would like to take more initiative to make change in my student organization" would be coded as a "trait," as "initiative" is commonly considered a trait-like personal attribute. A statement summarized as, "For me to achieve my career goals, I will need to be able to communicate to groups, and therefore I want to become a better public speaker" was coded as a "skill," as public-speaking can be described as a broad set of actions that can be developed through training and practice. A goal such as, "I need to begin using personal introspection every night before I go to sleep" was categorized as a "behavior" since it described a discrete action applicable in only certain circumstances and did not imply a need to develop competence before its practice. The researchers then independently coded each student's goal statements. Inter-coder reliability (Klenke, 2008) was established by comparing coding between the researchers. This comparison resulted in an initial 90% reliability. Disparities in coding between researchers were then compared to the leadership concept descriptions and discussed between the researchers until consensus was reached.

## **Results**

### **Frequency Analysis of Goals by Race and Gender**

From the sample of 92 students, a total of 183 learning goals were collected. One student listed one goal instead of two. From these 183 goals, the researchers characterized 53% (n=97) as a "skill," 32% (n=59) as a "trait," and 12% (n=22) as a "behavior." The remaining learning goals were ambiguously written and could not be classified as one of the above. The sample was

then sorted by gender, creating a set of learning goals identified by women, and another set by men. Within the female sample, the researchers characterized 43% (n=45) as a “skill,” 39% (n=41) as a “trait,” and 14% (n=15) as a “behavior.” Within the male sample, 65% (n=52) of learning goals were labeled a “skill,” 23% (n=18) as a “trait,” and 10% (n=8) as a “behavior.” The sample was then sorted by race and the learning goals within each racial category were counted. A summary of these data can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Leadership Learning Goals by Gender and Race*

Learning Goal	Overall	Male	Female	African-American	Asian-American	Caucasian	Latino/a
Skill	97 (53%)	52 (65%)	45 (43%)	18 (47%)	35 (58%)	34 (50%)	10 (56%)
Trait	59 (32%)	18 (23%)	41 (39%)	15 (39%)	15 (25%)	24 (35%)	5 (28%)
Behavior	22 (12%)	8 (10%)	15 (14%)	2 (5%)	9 (15%)	9 (13%)	3 (17%)

Chi-square analyses examining students’ self-identified learning goals were then conducted, first with respect to gender, then with respect to race, and last with respect to both gender and race, to compare the differing frequencies with which these sub-populations identified traits, skills, or behaviors as personal leadership development goals. A significant difference was found with respect to gender:  $\chi^2(2,179) = 8.79, p = .01$ . We calculated Cramer’s phi to assess the size of the significant effect (Ellis, 2010), and found it to be .22, considered a small-to-moderate effect. No significant difference was found with respect to race:  $\chi^2(6,179) = 4.73; p = .58$ . We then conducted a series of chi-square tests that included both gender and race. Because a significant difference was found by gender, but not race, we first divided the sample by race, and then conducted separate chi-square tests by gender within each racial category. We found a significant difference in leadership development goals by gender only within the Caucasian sample:  $\chi^2(2,67) = 7.21; p = .03$ , where Cramer’s phi demonstrated a moderate effect, at .33. Specifically, Caucasian women identified traits in their leadership goals more often than men: 15 out of 34 total goals (44%) for women, compared to 8 out of 34 total goals (24%) for men. Caucasian women also listed behaviors more often than men as well: 7 goals (21%) to 2 goals (6%). Caucasian men identified skills more often than women: 22 goals (65%) to 12 goals (35%).

Due to the moderately differing frequency with which Caucasian men and women identified traits, skills, or behaviors within their personal leadership development goals, these goals were then analyzed more closely to determine if themes emerged that might inform leadership educators of differences in how these groups conceptualized their idealized practice of leadership. Because no statistically significant differences emerged within the other populations, the leadership development goals of the other groups were not analyzed more comprehensively.

**Theme Analysis of Goals by Gender**

The analysis of the leadership development goals of Caucasian men and women yielded several noteworthy results. We describe each, first from an overarching perspective transcending the three approaches within our framework, and then within each approach. In general, the goals described by Caucasian women seemed more introspective (i.e., examining the status of their own effectiveness in a detailed way), often with the goal to improve the groups to which the women belonged. In contrast, Caucasian men were not as detailed in describing the current state of their leadership development, and listed goals that focused more on their own self-development, often not mentioning the benefits that might accrue on an organizational level. A comment typical in the group of goals created by Caucasian women, coded as a “behavior” for its focus on discrete action in specific circumstances, was:

I would like to acknowledge the accomplishments of others as well as my own achievements. All too often I notice all of the things that I do wrong, and completely let the annoyance of a minor failure usurp the joy of triumphs for which I have been successful. The same case goes for what I observe for other people. With my friends, when I find myself being angry at other people, it takes all of my will power for me to draw up all of the memories of the great things that they do for me to forget about the one issue I am having. I think a great way to solve this is to consciously look for the accomplishments that other people have (Goal 76).

This personal leadership development goal shows a degree of self-examination founded upon remembered past behaviors that, if practiced, will likely improve the organization to which the student belongs. A typical goal from a Caucasian man, categorized as a “skill,” was:

My second improvement [goal] is focused on sharpening my writing skills for law school. I have recently taken on a staff writing position for *The Gavel*, the Pre-Law Club monthly publication. In addition, I am taking many courses centered on reading and writing such as philosophy and political science. I want to familiarize myself with legal writing and expose myself to intense writing and critique so I am prepared for when I enter law school (Goal 28).

Goals like the one above, while specific and detailed do not include a critical examination of his current status, nor are they explicit in how such behaviors would benefit the groups to which he belongs. In contrast to the previous excerpt, this sample demonstrates a strong focus on self and skill development with an eye to personal career development.

### **Caucasian “Traits” by Gender**

The students’ leadership development goals were also analyzed within each “type” to ascertain differences between Caucasian men and women. Moderately more women identified trait-like leadership development goals, and while similarities existed between the goals of men and women in this category, important differences emerged. For example, students from both genders identified “confidence” and “initiative” as traits they would like to develop. However, many women defined confidence as the assuredness necessary to speak up in a group to share ideas or help the group make decisions, while several men defined confidence more as what is



necessary to risk making personal decisions that may fail. For example, a Caucasian woman's goal was to:

... demonstrate a higher amount of self-confidence. For some time, I have realized that this is an area of leadership I need to improve in and it is something that I have discussed with family and friends. As a leader it is important that I continue to grow in self-confidence, because it will lead to more opportunities to influence change. As I mentioned earlier, my level of self-confidence may impact the level of extraversion I display, and cultivating my self-confidence will help others join me in promoting a mission or message. (Goal 72).

In contrast, a Caucasian man defined his goal to increase his sense of confidence as:

... to be more self-confident and to not risk failing, but instead embrace it. I avoid risks because I fear failing and the consequences of it. I want to be more confident in myself and learn to take failure as a learning experience. I, like many pre-medical students, think of myself of a perfectionist. I feel the need to do everything perfectly no matter how long that may take or how difficult that may be. However when I fail, I beat myself up for days at a time and try to ignore and bury my failure. This undoubtedly leads to me repeating the same mistakes again, and failing once more. (Goal 36).

Similarly, while both women and men identified goals to increase their sense of initiative, men seemed more interested in developing initiative to overcome the opposition or complacency of others, while women were more interested in developing their own personal sense of their life's direction. For example, a Caucasian male explained a goal to develop his sense of initiative in the following way:

...during this academic year at the [fraternity] house, I became exposed to the first time [a] severely weak leadership [within the house]. Over the past year or so, I have been spoiled and been working with really good leaders. This exposure to a void of leadership was impressive seeing that I didn't know how to react. Now knowing this, I must work on finding a way to be an effective emergent leader even when there is no leadership and no interest in finding good leadership (Goal 24).

Initiative, for women in the sample, was described more as the ability to take initiative over one's own life and find a personal sense of direction within it. For example, a Caucasian woman stated:

I occasionally have trouble seeing the bigger picture when dealing with my life... I need to work on looking into the future and creating a sense of direction for myself. I like to focus on other people because that distracts me from looking at where my life is heading. My future is so important, and most of the time I don't like to look ahead because I am scared of change. As I get older and become more mature, I want to be more accepting of change. I am finally adjusting to living on my own at college, but I have realized that this change requires a lot of responsibility (Goal 79).

Fewer men than women identified leadership development goals categorized as traits. A category that emerged in the group of Caucasian women that was absent in the group of men we labeled as “emotional self-awareness.” Female students generally described this trait as the ability to see within oneself one’s emotional state, and possessing this knowledge, connect one’s behavior to it. For example, a Caucasian woman described one of her leadership development goals as:

... analyzing my emotions so I know why I am feeling those specific emotions along with connecting my feelings with my actions and words. Additionally, with analyzing my emotions I will be able to see how they affect my performance. The process and achievement of improving my emotional self-awareness is important in my growth as a leader. Leaders need to be aware of their emotions. (Goal 85).

Caucasian women who identified leadership development goals that could be categorized as traits seemed to focus more on group success that would follow from increased effectiveness, while men tended to emphasize the individual achievement expected to result from meeting their goals.

### **Caucasian “Skills” by Gender**

Three themes emerged in the category of “skills” within the leadership development goals of Caucasian men and women: communication skills, leading small groups, and time/self-management. Unlike within the “trait” category, no themes emerged in one gender that was not also represented in the other. However, more men were represented within each theme as men identified skills as goals to a greater extent than women.

Twice as many men as women listed leadership development goals related to increasing their communication skills, and consistently described these skills as the desire to convey one’s thoughts and actions better to others. For many, their goal was to become a better public speaker. The following comment typified the leadership development goals related to communication for Caucasian men:

If I ever plan to be in an upper management position I will need to deliver presentations to employees and investors. I will need to be a confident and effective orator. For this reason, I want to become a better public speaker. Growing up I was never really forced to take a public speaking class. Being an engineer at [institution], that is not something that is even thought about. [Institution] produces some of the best and brightest engineers in the world. I feel there would be many more, though, if engineers were also taught to communicate better. I don't want to be just another technically competent engineer. I want to be the one standing up leading the group of engineers. (Goal 29).

In contrast, women seemed more interested in developing their communication skills to better connect with groups to which they belong, and by increasing connections with their members, become a more effective leader; the perception was that this would lead to increased success within the group. For example, a Caucasian woman shared:

To continue my successful development as a leader, I will build upon my ... communication skills. I believe that communicating well as a leader is not only required but expected. Through the demonstration of strong communication skills, leaders are able to connect with their followers on all effective levels. It is important to connect to one's followers on all levels such as relationship and task because most people are not just focused on one (Goal 80).

Both Caucasian men and women were interested in developing their management of their time, recognizing that how their time is structured and filled is a key variable in becoming a more effective leader. Again, important differences emerged between the two groups. Men seemed to define time management as the ability to prioritize their formal responsibilities as a student and emerging leader. Women seemed more interested in developing an increased skill in balancing their responsibilities with their personal relationships. For example, a Caucasian male wrote:

This past semester, I have found it to be extremely challenging to strike a balance between schoolwork, work, Fraternity, extracurricular activities, and the extra responsibilities I participate [in]... Looking back at this past semester, I found that I overstressed myself about something that wasn't worth stressing about. Moving forward, I plan on and hope to develop my ability to worry less about "small things" and focus more on the important tasks (Goal 24).

Caucasian women seemed less concerned with the prioritization of tasks than with balancing tasks with relationships. For example, a Caucasian woman shared:

My first goal is to take on the responsibility of maintaining positive relationships with friends, peers and networking contacts. As many other college students, I sometimes feel as though I am overwhelmed and that if each day had only 5 more hours, everything would be perfect. As I near my final year here... I have found myself taking on more and more responsibilities. I want to accomplish and take part in so many different programs that I sometimes feel overwhelmed by the number of commitments that I have. I would like to learn how to balance all my commitments and school work with my personal relationships. I noticed that I consistently keep to myself and do not take time to maintain my personal relationships when I become busy... (Goal 75).

Lastly, both men and women in the Caucasian group identified leadership development skills that would assist in their supervision and management of small groups. However, while several men seemed more interested in learning how to delegate (e.g., "My goal is to learn how to delegate effectively and be confident in my team's abilities to get a job done."), women seemed more interested in the skills to engender a common purpose within a group setting, such as the woman who stated, "I have found that a lot of time, small groups are dominated by one person's opinions or that no one really feels comfortable contributing. With this goal, I hope to collaborate (sic) everyone's ideas when working in small groups."

### **Caucasian “Behaviors” by Gender**

Only two Caucasian men identified a leadership development goal that was coded as a behavior, and therefore, no themes could be drawn from their responses. However, several Caucasian women identified the necessity to better attend to the needs of the groups to which they belong. For example one woman stated, “I will need to focus on the attention I give each committee member. I will give group members individualized attention and ask them if they have any concerns about [speaking up]” (Goal 76). Another woman shared, “I do not create an environment where trust and collaboration grows. By becoming a mentor to others in my group, I can become a more flexible leader who supports and guides others...” (Goal 69). Statements such as these seemed to reinforce a theme that Caucasian women who participated in the study focused more on group success and the processes necessary to create it.

## **Discussion**

This study analyzed students’ self-identified long-term leadership goals by race and gender. Regarding race, no significant differences emerged across student racial groups, contradicting past findings (Arminio, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2007). Our findings indicated that moderate differences exist between the way male and female students conceptualize their practice of leadership and the goals they set for themselves. Men identified “skills” more often than women, while women identified “traits” and to a smaller extent, “behaviors” more often than men. When considering race and gender together, significant differences were found only between Caucasian men and women. Within the Caucasian sample, women were more attracted to developing the traits of leaders, while men seemed more attracted to developing discrete skills. A qualitative content analysis of the Caucasian students’ goal statements revealed several distinctions between the way males and females in this group perceived their practice of leadership and how they would like to further develop as leaders. Findings suggested that Caucasian women demonstrated a higher degree of introspection and were focused more on how their leadership behaviors would be integrated within the processes of groups to which they belonged. In contrast, Caucasian men focused more often on how achieving their goals would lead to a higher degree of individual success. These results add depth to previous findings that revealed differences between men and women regarding their leadership behaviors (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000) and aspirations (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003).

### **Traits vs. Skills**

Caucasian women identified trait-like leadership development goals more frequently than Caucasian men, who identified skill-like goals more frequently. Developing skills may be more straightforward than improving on one traits, which are often based on one’s values (Yukl, 2010). A more explicit value-focus may explain why women are now more frequent participants of co-curricular university leadership development programs than men (Dugan & Komives, 2010), especially since so many of these co-curricular programs utilize values-based curricula such as the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Owen, 2012). Further, our findings imply that traits students are frequently interested in developing are self-confidence and initiative, yet how these traits are potentially applied in a leadership context may differ by gender. Our findings suggested Caucasian men seemed more interested in developing

confidence and initiative so they could overcome opposition and/or risk failure, while Caucasian women seemed more interested in these two traits so they could fully participate in influencing change. Similar differences could be seen in the skills-focused goals students identified; men seemed interested in developing communication skills for public speaking to help convince others of their own views, while women seemed more interested in developing these skills to better connect with other group members. While both groups' goals overlap, their differences may imply that Caucasian men view leadership as more accepting of overt opposition than Caucasian women, a finding that has been shown in business settings (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

### **Internal vs. External Orientation**

Caucasian men identified leadership development goals that were more internally focused than goals identified by Caucasian women. For example, while students from both groups identified "time management" as a skill to augment, several men were more interested in how the skill would allow them to achieve their individual goals, while women viewed time management as the ability to balance time spent in all aspects of their lives – personal, school, and social. Similarly, Caucasian men identified their goals within the context of the groups to which they were often a part, measuring their success using a personal yardstick. Caucasian women, however, identified success more often as something that would be shared with others.

### **Implications**

These findings hold significant implications for leadership educators in student affairs. The goals with which students approach an educational experience may strongly influence the degree to which they learn (Kaufman, et al., 2008). Past research has shown how students augment their learning when program developers attend to their preferences for development (Allen & Hartman, 2009). Our findings suggest moderate differences by gender in how students approach their own leadership development. Several avenues exist to attend to these differences. Leadership development programs could develop gender-based curricula. There is some evidence to support gender-focused curriculum for female students (Townsend & Thorp; 1997; Thorp, Cummins, & Townsend, 1998). Moreover, gendered curriculum has already been suggested in elementary education (Gurian & Ballew, 2003). A more balanced approach may be to implicitly attend to these differences by focusing on both skills and traits, and by providing a wealth of examples of how their development may be applied both individually and within groups. Our findings suggest that such an approach may result in increased participation by males in leadership programs. Recent research shows that women are beginning to participate more frequently than men in many university-level leadership development programs (Dugan & Komives, 2010), a significant change from only a decade ago (Cress, et al., 2001). While it would be premature to attribute the shift in participation levels to the long-standing effort to focus more on traits and values of effective leadership in university programs (Astin & Astin, 2000), further examination of this trend may be warranted. The degree to which we explicitly attend to the diverse goals possessed by students entering co-curricular leadership programs may serve to increase diverse participation among student identity groups.

## Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations exist within this study that could be addressed in future research efforts. Our research took place on a single campus. Including students from a broader diversity of campuses may more comprehensively inform educators on goal differences in students' leadership development. Moreover, we qualitatively examined gender differences in goal statements from the Caucasian subsample, the only racial grouping that showed significant differences by goal attribute. Further study should examine differences across other racial categorizations as well. Even though these groups did not show differences in trait, skill, and behavior frequencies in their goal statements, more complex differences might emerge through more comprehensive analysis. Lastly, our findings were based on content analysis of pre-existing statements created for enrollment within a leadership development program. Individual or focus-group interviews conducted on this topic might yield a different perspective or more comprehensively inform goal-oriented differences by race or gender.

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