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The Impact of Gender, Ethnicity, School Setting, and Experience on Student Leadership: Does It Really Matter?

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Abstract

This research examined how gender, ethnicity, school setting, and experience influenced students' leadership practices. Significant differences were found in how student leaders behaved on the basis of these variables. However, further analyses suggested that these differences did not significantly influence the effectiveness of student leaders. That is, the most effective student leaders engaged in the five leadership practices more than the less effective leaders, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or school setting. The impact of these findings for both assessing student leaders as well as for developing their leadership capabilities is discussed, along with ideas for future studies.

Keywords: *leadership, student leadership, student LPI, gender, ethnicity*

1. Introduction

Leadership development is now an integral part of the educational program of most college students, with courses and activities running the gamut from curricular classes offered by a variety of academic disciplines (like business, psychology, political science, history, military science, and education) to co-curricular programs offered by various student affairs offices (from admissions and athletics to student government, Greek affairs, and community service centers). No surprise that this interest has spurred the development of a plethora of leadership books, materials, and experiential activities, along with surveys and instruments to measure and assess skills both prior to and after various leadership initiatives.

Komives and her colleagues argue that leadership, like any other skill, needs to be learned and practiced (Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2006). This premise is underscored by Wren (1995) who argues that leadership is central to the human condition -- timeless and current, not a passing fad -- and that leadership should be understood and practiced by all. In this same vein Kouzes and Posner (2012) posit that "leadership is everyone's business." Astin (1993) contends that it is important to develop young men and women during their college years to become future leaders. This is because leadership development encompasses various activities, perspectives, and experiences which enhances the ability to make a meaningful difference, and hence "education for leadership has been an educational mission of American colleges since the American revolution" (Miller & Jones, 1980:662).

Many of the leadership development programs designed for college students are based upon studies and models that were developed with managers in business and public-sector organizations (Freeman, Knott & Schwartz, 1994). Serious questions have been raised about whether such models are applicable to college students and collegiate environments, which differ considerably from the environments in which managers and corporations operate. One way to address this issue has been the development of a number of textbooks aimed at college students (e.g., Bratton, Grint & Nelson, 2004; Daft, 2010; Komives, et. al., 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Wren, 1995). Still, the typical personal assessment techniques supporting these initiatives continue to be borrowed from non-collegiate environments, supporting Brodsky's observation, more than 25 years ago: "Valid instruments designed specifically for college students to measure their leadership development do not exist" (1988:23). While the 8th Edition of *Leadership Resources: A Guide to Training and Development Tools* (Schwartz & Gimbel, 2000) lists 68 instruments "that are supported by technical data [to measure] a variety of leadership skills and styles" only two had a direct application to student populations. One of these was the student version of the Leadership Practices Inventory

(Kouzes & Posner, 2003). More recently developed instruments aimed at student populations assess various social psychology aspects of leadership, rather than leadership behaviors, like emotional intelligence (Shankman & Allen, 2008), social responsibility (Dugan, Komives & Segar, 2008), and attitudinal thinking (Wielkiewicz, 2000).

Findings from the most recent review of the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (S-LPI) by Posner (2004) were consistent with those found in earlier studies (e.g., Adams & Keim, 2002; Endress, 2000; Mendez-Grant, 2001; Posner & Brodsky, 1993, 1994; Posner & Rosenberger, 1997; and, Williams, 2002). That is, internal reliability coefficients were acceptable and individual respondent characteristics (e.g. GPA, year in school, and academic major) did not account for differences in leadership practices. Scores on the Student LPI were found to differentiate between self-reports of effectiveness by respondents both from a Self and Observer perspective. However, the sample sizes in these previous studies have all been relatively small-to-moderate in numbers and modest in terms of scope and diversity. For instance, the number of women in college now makes them the majority gender; and an increasing number of students-of-color have become part of the collegiate landscape. Some studies have identified differences in leadership based upon gender and ethnicity (e.g., Carli & Eagly, 2012; Ospina & Foldy, 2009), although they have not generally used students as their sample population. In addition, the burgeoning importance of leadership development at the collegiate ranks has permeated down into secondary schools, and it is interesting to examine how school setting (high school versus college) may impact how leaders behave and are evaluated. Finally, previous studies have been inconclusive regarding the impact of experience (either in terms of positions held or classes completed) on how students behave as leaders (Bowers, 2012).

With these issues in mind, this study examined the following questions:

1. Do males and females differ in their leadership behaviors?
2. Does ethnic background result in behavioral differences in leadership?
3. Do students in high school behave differently as leaders than students in college?
4. Does experience in leadership effect differences in leadership behavior?

In addition, this study asked whether any of these possible differences differentially impacted the effectiveness of the student leaders. That is, while males and females might differ in regards to their leadership practices, or Asian students might differ from Blacks or Caucasians, did this change the importance of how they behaved effectively as leaders? This issue was explored in a series of null hypotheses that paralleled the questions above.

2. Methods

2.1 Sample

Since 2007 the Student LPI (S-LPI) has been largely administered online (electronically). This has resulted in the accumulation of a substantially large and robust database. This study looked at the S-LPI data collected between 2007 and 2011 from respondents located within the United States. Responses from 47,150 students were included in this sample; including 23,502 who completed the Self version and 23,648 who completed the Observer version. While respondents were required to complete the S-LPI items, their responses to additional questions about demographics or attitudes were completely voluntary, and hence the sample size along these dimensions varies.

The gender distribution was approximately 59 percent female and 41 percent male for both the Self and Observer samples. The majority of respondents were Caucasian (69% of the Self and 74% of the Observers). The 31 percent remaining “people of color” within the Self sample included approximately 28 percent Hispanic/Latinos, 27 percent Asian/Pacific Islanders, 27 percent Black/African Americans, and the remaining 18 percent indicated being of “mixed” (multiple or blended) ethnic backgrounds. Among the 26 percent of the “people of color” within the Observer sample, those indicating Hispanic/Latino was approximately 29 percent, while 27 percent indicated Asian/Pacific Islander, another 27 percent selected Black/African American, and the remaining 17 percent indicated being of “mixed” (multiple or blended) ethnic backgrounds. The predominant year in school was “college” for 80 percent of the Self respondents and 90 percent of the Observer sample; meaning that 20 percent of the Self respondents and 10 percent of the Observers were in high school. In terms of “opportunities to be a leader” approximately 37 percent of the student leaders (Self only) reported that they had “several,” with 31 percent indicating that they had “many” such opportunities, and the remaining respondents (32%) reporting either “some”, “a few”, or “no” such opportunities. As for the number of formal leadership *development* opportunities (that is, courses, workshops, seminars, classes, books, etc.), 42 percent of student leaders reported that they had “many” while 26 percent indicated “several” and 32 percent indicated a “few.”

2.2 Measures

Leader effectiveness was measured by asking student leaders to assess their own leadership skills: “Compared to my peers, I believe that my leadership skills are (1) not well developed, (2) somewhat under-developed, (3) similar with my peer group, (4) somewhat developed, and (5) well developed.” Observers were asked a similar question about the leadership skills of their leaders: “I believe that the leadership skills of the person I just reported about are (1) not well developed; (2) somewhat under-developed; (3) similar with his/her peer group; (4) somewhat developed; and, (5) well developed.” Observers’ or constituent engagement (commitment, pride, motivation, satisfaction and appreciation) was measured using five five-point Likert questions: (1) “Overall, how satisfied are you with the leadership exhibited by the person you just reported about?” with responses ranging from “not very” to “very”; (2) “When working with this leader, I’m highly productive in what I do” with responses ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”; (3) “I’m proud to tell others that I am working with this leader” with responses ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”; (4) “I feel like this leader values my work” with responses ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”; and, (5) “When working with this leader, I feel like I am making a difference around here” with responses ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” These last two questions were added to the survey in 2010 and hence the sample size for the five-item “enhanced” engagement scale was somewhat less than the three-item scale. However, the correlation between the three-item and five-item engagement measure was $.95$ ($p < .001$) and internal reliability (using Cronbach’s alpha) was $.86$ for the latter. The correlation between the enhanced engagement scale and Observers’ overall assessment of their leader’s skills was $.76$ ($p < .001$).

The Student Leadership Practices (S-LPI) was designed to identify specific behaviors and actions that students report using when they are at their personal best as leaders (Posner & Brodsky, 1992; Kouzes & Posner, 2008). These behaviors are categorized into five leadership practices. Representative statements of leadership behaviors for each leadership practice are:

1. Model the way (e.g., I set a personal example of what I expect from others);
2. Inspire a shared vision (e.g., I describe a compelling image of what our future could be like);
3. Challenge the process (e.g., I seek out challenging opportunities that test my skills and abilities);
4. Enable others to act (e.g., I develop cooperative relationships with the people I work with); and,
5. Encourage the heart (e.g., I praise people for a job well done).

Respondents are asked to consider how frequently they engage in each of the behaviors using five-point Likert-scales, with (1) indicating rarely or seldom and (5) indicating very frequently or almost always.

Data on the internal reliability of the S-LPI in this study are shown in Table 1. The overall Cronbach alpha coefficients on the Self and Observer versions run from $.78$ to $.86$. Reliability coefficients are also shown for Self and Observers on the basis of gender, ethnicity and school setting, and follow a similar pattern. All of the internal reliability coefficients on the Student LPI are above $.75$. Additional analyses (not shown) revealed that these coefficients did not increase if an item (statement/behavior) for any of the five leadership practice scales was deleted.

Table 1. Internal Reliability Analysis for The Five Leadership Practices (Cronbach Alpha coefficients)

	Model	Inspire	Challenge	Enable	Encourage
Self	.78	.82	.81	.78	.86
Observers	.78	.82	.81	.79	.86
Female/Self	.79	.83	.82	.78	.87
Male/Self	.77	.82	.80	.77	.86
Female/Observer	.78	.82	.81	.79	.86
Male/Observer	.78	.82	.80	.79	.86
Asian/Self	.79	.83	.80	.80	.85
Asian/Observer	.83	.86	.84	.85	.88
Black/Self	.79	.82	.81	.75	.86
Black/Observer	.76	.82	.79	.75	.86
Hispanic/Self	.79	.84	.83	.79	.87
Hispanic/Observer	.78	.83	.81	.76	.86
Mixed Race/Self	.81	.86	.83	.79	.88
Mixed Race/Observer	.80	.84	.81	.80	.87
White/Self	.78	.82	.80	.77	.86
White/Observer	.77	.82	.81	.79	.86
High School/Self	.81	.86	.83	.78	.85
High School/Observer	.87	.88	.88	.88	.90
College/Self	.75	.80	.78	.77	.84
College/Observer	.77	.81	.80	.79	.85

3. Results

The data in Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviations for each leadership practice from student leaders and their observers, along with the rank order in terms of frequency for each group. Statistical comparisons (*t* tests) between the two groups indicated that scores from observers were significantly higher ($p < .001$) on each of the five leadership practices than the scores provided by the student leaders. However, while the absolute differences between the two groups were statistically significant the pattern of responses (rank order) between the two groups was the same. Enable Others to Act was the leadership practice most frequently engaged in, followed by Encourage the Heart, Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, and Challenge the Process. However, because of the statistically significant differences, subsequent analyses were performed separately for student leaders (Self) and their constituents (Observers).

Table 2. Comparisons on The Five Leadership Practices for Self and Observers

	SELF (N=23,502)			OBSERVERS (N=23,648)			
	Rank	Mean	(SD)	Rank	Mean	(SD)	
Model	(3)	23.6	(3.9)	(3)	23.7	(3.9)	***
Inspire	(4)	23.4	(4.3)	(4)	23.6	(4.3)	***
Challenge	(5)	23.1	(4.3)	(5)	23.3	(4.2)	***
Enable	(1)	24.9	(3.6)	(1)	25.0	(3.7)	***
Encourage	(2)	23.6	(4.6)	(2)	23.8	(4.6)	***

*** $p < .001$ (*t*-test)

Comparisons between female and male student leaders are shown in Table 3. Statistical analyses revealed significant differences ($p < .001$) between females and males for both leaders and their observers. However, for both females and males, as well as for both leaders and observers, the rank order of the leadership practices was identical. Enable Others to Act was the most frequently engaged in leadership behavior, followed by Encourage the Heart, Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, and Challenge the Process.

Table 3. Comparisons on The Five Leadership Practices by Gender

SELF						
Females (N = 13,860)			Males (N=9,444)			
	Rank	Mean	(SD)	Rank	Mean	(SD)
Model	(3)	23.8	(3.9)	(3)	23.2	(3.9) ***
Inspire	(4)	23.5	(3.9)	(4)	23.1	(4.5) ***
Challenge	(5)	23.3	(4.3)	(5)	23.0	(4.2) ***
Enable	(1)	25.1	(3.5)	(1)	24.3	(3.7) ***
Encourage	(2)	23.9	(4.6)	(2)	22.9	(4.5) ***
OBSERVER						
Females (N = 13,748)			Males (N= 9,751)			
	Rank	Mean	(SD)	Rank	Mean	(SD)
Model	(3)	24.0	(3.8)	(3)	23.4	(4.0) ***
Inspire	(4)	23.8	(4.2)	(4)	23.2	(4.3) ***
Challenge	(5)	23.6	(4.2)	(5)	23.0	(4.2) ***
Enable	(1)	25.3	(3.6)	(1)	24.7	(3.7) ***
Encourage	(2)	24.1	(4.5)	(2)	23.3	(4.6) ***

*** $p < .001$ (t -test)

Comparisons between student leaders, and their observers, on the basis of ethnic background are shown in Table 4. The first level of analysis (t -tests) was between White/Caucasian student respondents and Students of Color. For leaders, the differences were not statistically significant for any of the five leadership practices. More detailed analyses (ANOVA), breaking the People of Color category into its four component parts (Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Mixed) revealed several statistical significant differences. For the leadership practices of Model the Way and Inspire a Shared Vision the differences were mostly between Asian and Mixed ethnic student leaders using these practices less frequently than Blacks, Hispanics and Whites. For Challenge the Process and Enable Others to Act the differences were mostly between Blacks and Hispanics using these leadership practices more frequently than Asians, Mixed and Whites. For Encourage the Heart the differences were primarily between those student leaders of Mixed race using this leadership practice less frequently than Asians, Blacks, Hispanics and Whites.

For observers, there were statistically significant differences ($p < .001$) between White/Caucasian students and Students of Color on three leadership practices. The former reported their leaders as engaging in Modeling, Inspiring, and Challenging more frequently than the latter. No statistically significant differences between the two groups were found on the leadership practices of Enabling and Encouraging. More detailed analyses (ANOVA) showed that the differences by ethnicity were mostly about Asians and Mixed Race observers reporting their leaders engaging less frequently on Model, Inspire, Challenge and Enable than Blacks, Hispanics and Whites. On Encourage the Heart most of the differences were accounted for by the lower frequency reported by Asians about their leaders in comparisons with Whites, with Blacks, Hispanics and Mixed race observers not significantly different in their responses.

Table 4. Comparisons on The Five Leadership Practices on the Basis of Ethnic Background

	SELF***					
	N	Model	Inspire	Challenge	Enable	Encourage
White/Caucasian	16,198	23.6	23.4	23.1	24.9	23.6
People of Color	7,240	23.5	23.4	23.2	25.0	23.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	1,955	23.2	23.1	23.0	24.9	23.7
Black/African American	1,940	23.8	24.0	23.5	25.2	23.8
Hispanic/Latino	2,004	23.8	23.6	23.4	25.1	23.9
Mixed/Other	1,341	23.1	22.8	22.9	24.7	23.2

	OBSERVER***					
	N	Model	Inspire	Challenge	Enable	Encourage
White/Caucasian	17,302	23.8	23.6	23.4	25.1	23.9
People of Color	6,104	23.5	23.4	23.1	25.0	23.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	1,626	23.1	22.9	22.8	24.7	23.6
Black/African American	1,627	23.6	23.6	23.2	25.1	23.7
Hispanic/Latino	1,781	23.4	23.7	23.4	25.2	23.9
Mixed/Other	1,070	23.5	23.4	23.0	24.9	23.6

*** $p < .001$ (ANOVA) for all five leadership practices

Comparisons between those students in high school with those in college are shown in Table 5. While the responses of college student leaders were uniformly higher on all five leadership practices than those from high school students, only one (Enable Others to Act) was statistically significant ($p < .01$). However, from the perspective of observers, the frequency to which college leaders engaged in these five leadership practices was significantly higher ($p < .01$) than reported by high school observers. The rank order of the five leadership practices, however, was identical for high school and college leaders and identical again with that reported by observers in high school and college. The most frequently engaged in leadership practice by high school and college students (and as reported by observers) was Enable Others to Act, followed by Encourage the Heart, Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision and Challenge the Process.

Table 5. Comparisons on The Five Leadership Practices by School Setting

	SELF					
	High School (N = 847)			College (N = 7,136)		
	Rank	Mean	(SD)	Rank	Mean	(SD)
Model	(3)	23.0	(4.4)	(3)	23.4	(3.2)
Inspire	(4)	22.8	(4.9)	(4)	23.3	(3.8)
Challenge	(5)	22.6	(4.7)	(5)	22.8	(3.6)
Enable	(1)	24.4	(3.9)	(1)	24.8	(3.0) **
Encourage	(2)	23.4	(4.7)	(2)	23.6	(4.0)

	OBSERVER					
	High School (N = 989)			College (N = 7,136)		
	Rank	Mean	(SD)	Rank	Mean	(SD)
Model	(3)	23.1	(4.5)	(3)	23.7	(3.8) ***
Inspire	(4)	23.1	(5.2)	(4)	23.6	(4.2) ***
Challenge	(5)	22.8	(5.2)	(5)	23.2	(4.2) **
Enable	(1)	24.2	(4.9)	(1)	25.0	(3.6) ***
Encourage	(2)	23.5	(5.4)	(2)	23.9	(4.4) **

** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (t-test)

The impact of leadership *experience* for student leaders was investigated in several ways. First comparisons were made (ANOVA) on the basis of how many opportunities they had experienced *to be* in the role of a leader. Examining the frequency with which student leaders engaged in the five leadership practices revealed a statistically significant pattern ($p < .001$). As shown in Table 6a, the more opportunities student leaders actually experienced *to be* leaders, the more frequently they reported engaging in each of these leadership practices. Student leaders were also asked about how many opportunities they had to *develop* their leadership skills and a similar pattern of results were found (Table 6b). The more opportunities that student leaders had to develop their leadership skills the more they reported engaging in each of the five leadership practices ($p < .001$). When these two variables --- opportunities to be a leader and opportunities to develop leadership skills --- were combined, the findings (not shown) were consistent with the results from the separate analyses.

Table 6.

a) Comparisons on The Five Leadership Practices by “Opportunities to Be a Leader”

	Few (N=1,373)	Moderate (N=1,605)	Many (N=1,345)	
Model	21.2	22.5	23.2	***
Inspire	20.4	22.2	23.3	***
Challenge	20.4	21.8	22.9	***
Enable	23.8	24.0	24.3	***
Encourage	21.7	22.9	23.5	***

b) Comparisons on The Five Leadership Practices by “Opportunities to Develop Leadership Skills”

	Few (N=1,386)	Moderate (N=1,110)	Many (N=1,828)	
Model	21.5	22.2	22.9	***
Inspire	20.9	21.8	23.0	***
Challenge	20.8	21.4	22.5	***
Enable	23.9	23.8	24.2	***
Encourage	21.9	22.7	23.3	***

*** $p < .001$ (ANOVA)

The results in Table 7 confirm that the level of engagement on the part of observers is systematically enhanced as a result of the frequency to which they report their leaders using each of the five leadership practices. For example, the more that observers report their leader Modeling the Way the more engaged they report being ($p < .001$). The same consistent pattern was found for each of the other four leadership practices.

Table 7. Comparisons on The Five Leadership Practices by OBSERVERS’ *Enhanced Engagement*

	Low (N=1,405)	Moderate (N=770)	High (N=1,176)	
Model	21.6	24.3	26.7	***
Inspire	21.3	24.0	26.6	***
Challenge	21.2	23.8	26.4	***
Enable	23.3	25.6	27.3	***
Encourage	21.4	24.3	26.9	***

*** $p < .001$ (ANOVA)

Subsequent analyses were conducted from the perspective of observers for each of the previously reported demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and school setting). They reveal a strikingly consistent, and statistically significant ($p < .001$), pattern of responses. The level of engagement by observers was directly related to the frequency that they reported their leaders engaging in each of the five leadership practices. This was true for females

and males (Table 8), Caucasian and students of color (Table 9) -- and results, not shown, indicate the same pattern for Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and Mixed race respondents -- and, high school and college students (Table 10).

Table 8. Comparisons on The Five Leadership Practices by OBSERVERS' *Enhanced* Engagement and Gender

FEMALES				
	Low	Moderate	High	
Model	21.7	24.5	26.8	***
Inspire	21.6	24.2	26.6	***
Challenge	21.3	24.0	26.5	***
Enable	23.3	25.6	27.3	***
Encourage	21.6	24.5	27.0	***
MALES				
	Low	Moderate	High	
Model	21.6	24.1	26.5	***
Inspire	21.0	23.9	26.6	***
Challenge	21.0	23.4	26.2	***
Enable	23.2	25.6	27.4	***
Encourage	21.0	24.2	26.6	***

*** $p < .001$ (ANOVA)

Table 9. Comparisons on The Five Leadership Practices by OBSERVERS' *Enhanced* Engagement and Ethnicity

WHITES/CAUCASIANS				
	Low	Moderate	High	
Model	21.8	24.4	26.7	***
Inspire	21.4	24.1	26.6	***
Challenge	21.2	23.8	26.4	***
Enable	23.3	25.6	27.2	***
Encourage	21.3	24.3	26.8	***
PEOPLE OF COLOR				
	Low	Moderate	High	
Model	21.6	24.2	26.7	***
Inspire	21.3	23.9	26.7	***
Challenge	21.1	23.7	26.5	***
Enable	23.3	25.7	27.5	***
Encourage	21.6	24.3	27.0	***

*** $p < .001$ (ANOVA)

Table 10. Comparisons on The Five Leadership Practices by OBSERVERS' *Enhanced* Engagement and School Setting

	HIGH SCHOOL			
	Low	Moderate	High	
Model	22.2	24.2	26.6	***
Inspire	21.8	24.2	26.6	***
Challenge	21.9	24.2	27.0	***
Enable	23.5	26.1	27.5	***
Encourage	21.7	25.1	27.6	***
	COLLEGE			
	Low	Moderate	High	
Model	21.8	24.6	26.6	***
Inspire	21.8	24.6	26.6	***
Challenge	21.4	24.0	26.2	***
Enable	23.1	25.7	27.4	***
Encourage	21.8	24.7	26.9	***

*** $p < .001$ (ANOVA)

4. Discussion

This study explored how the leadership behaviors of students might vary as a result of certain demographic factors, but also asked whether this finding (similarities or differences) would matter in terms of the effectiveness of student leaders. To the first issue, the analyses show that there are differences in how student leaders behave. To the second issue, the results revealed that the most effective student leaders engaged in the five leadership practices more than their less effective counterparts, regardless of gender, ethnic background, or school setting.

Female leaders reported engaging in the five leadership practices more than their male counterparts and this was also true from the perspective of observers. On the basis of ethnic background, student leaders of color and Caucasian student leaders did not report any significant differences in how they behaved as leaders, although from the perspective of their observers, the latter were seen as engaging more frequently in the leadership behaviors of Model, Inspire and Challenge more than student leaders of color, with no differences for Enable and Encourage. More specific comparisons by ethnic background revealed some differences between the leadership behaviors of Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, Whites, and Mixed race respondents. College student leaders and high school leaders reported no difference in how frequently they used the leadership practices of Model, Inspire, Challenge and Encourage, but the former did report significantly greater frequency than the latter in terms of Enable. The leadership behavior of college student leaders, on the other hand, were consistently seen by their observers as more frequently engaged in than reported by the observers of high school student leaders. Finally, the leadership experience level of students accounted for variances in how often the five leadership practices were used. The more that students reported having opportunities to “be a leader” or opportunities to “develop their leadership skills” the more frequently they reported using each of the five leadership practices.

While differences, and some similarities, were found on the basis of the demographic variables, the second set of questions explored whether these variables were a significant factor in the reported effectiveness of student leaders. Effectiveness was measured by the extent to which constituents (observers) reported being engaged (i.e., committed, proud, motivation, appreciated, and satisfied). This analysis generated a consistent pattern of results indicating that levels of engagement rose in direct relationship to the frequency to which observers reported their leaders using the leadership practices. This was true across all five leadership practices. In addition, this pattern was uniformly consistent across gender, ethnicity, and school setting. The most effective student leaders, regardless of gender, ethnicity or school setting were those who used the five leadership practices significantly more than their less effective peers.

Finally, a careful review of the data also shows that the rank order use of the five leadership practices did not vary across leaders or observers, males or females, ethnic groups, school setting, or experience as a leader. This evidence substantiates the claim made by Kouzes and Posner (2008, 2012) that “leadership is everyone’s business.” While

people, settings, and circumstances certainly vary, the behaviors used by effective leaders do not. Alternatively, one can be an effective leader by using these five leadership practices regardless of one's gender, ethnicity, or year in school.

5. Conclusion

Several practical observations can be drawn from this research. First, leadership matters. Those student leaders who use the five leadership practices are more effective than those who don't use them. This conclusion is reinforced by *post hoc* analysis showing that the student leaders who viewed themselves as having developed their leadership skills more than their peers concomitantly reported using the five leadership practices more than their counterparts who didn't perceive their leadership skills to be as well developed. This same result held true from the perspective of their constituents. Observers who felt that the leadership skills of their leader were well developed in comparison with their peers also systematically reported that these leaders used the five leadership practices more than that reported by observers of student leaders whose skill levels were lower. Second, the findings from this study confirm previous investigations about the robustness of the Student LPI across various sample populations. The S-LPI is relatively unaffected by various demographic qualities. Likewise, the internal reliability of the S-LPI was found to be relatively stable across these different dimensions.

Future studies of more increasingly diverse college student populations will continue to further an understanding of both leadership and student development. It would be useful, for example, to look at more diverse populations, such as student body officers, officers in professional clubs, sports teams, peer educators, and even graduate students. Equally revealing would be studies investigating various socio-cultural differences, such as socioeconomic status, sexual identity, disability, and the like. Expanding the investigation of leadership education outside the United States would also be informative. In addition, studies investigating the relationship between leadership and such factors as cognitive complexity, personality typology, thinking and learning styles would be instructive. For example, one recent study (Posner, 2009a) found that the more students were engaged in learning the more use they made of the five leadership practices.

Studies examining the impact of various leadership development programs and classes, especially over time, would assist greatly in understanding just how leadership is developed. For example, in one study the use of a conceptual leadership framework and feedback were shown to enhance the effectiveness of the pledge education program and to significantly increase leadership practice scores in a pre- and post-test condition (Matsos, 1997). Leadership development, as a visible component of new member development, was postulated to serve as a path for better aligning the fraternity experience with the aspirations of the academic community. Studies investigating just how leadership development occurs would be invaluable not just for those involved and responsible for student leadership development but for people who provide leadership education for corporate, civic and community organizations.

Finally, leadership educators (and student personnel administrators broadly) can take comfort and even pride in knowing that leadership education programs and leadership classes are influencing the actual leadership behaviors of students (Posner, 2009b). More frequent leadership behavior seems to be related to the opportunity that students have to reflect on their leadership experience, and themselves, as leaders. These can be further facilitated through case studies, shadowing opportunities, journaling, guest speakers (role models), advanced and follow-up experiences.

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