

A Case Study of Adolescent Female Leadership: Exploring the "Light" of Change

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ABSTRACT: The topic of this article is the possible changing trends involving adolescent female leadership. This qualitative case study focuses on ideas and practices related to leadership roles assumed by female youth and their male counterparts. The researchers investigate this topic in a secondary school in the United States, explain their methodological approaches, review the literature on gender and leadership, explore various solutions to gender inequity, and consider broader implications. Although the authors expected that male students would have higher leadership involvement, it was found that the sexes were similarly committed. In fact, recent female-dominated patterns of leadership in the realms of governance and sports became evident. Analysis of the feedback suggests that unprecedented change in favor of gender equality might be gradually occurring even while sex-based stereotyping continues. However, contradictions and ambiguities play a significant role in the analysis, suggesting that paradoxes of change continue despite progress. A metaphor of light and dark is used herein to capture this issue of gender equity and inequity, respectively.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article traite des tendances au changement possible chez une adolescente dirigeante. L'étude de ce cas qualitatif porte sur des idées et des pratiques apparentées aux rôles de meneur que les jeunes filles et les jeunes garçons assument. C'est dans une école secondaire aux Etats-Unis que les chercheurs mènent cette enquête. Ils expliquent leurs démarches méthodologiques, font un tour d'horizon dans la littérature sur le genre des dirigeants, analysent différentes explications sur l'inégalité des sexes et envisagent de plus larges horizons. Bien que les auteurs s'attendaient à ce que les étudiants s'impliquent plus largement en tant que dirigeants, il s'est révélé que les deux sexes se sont engagés de la même façon. En fait, le type récent de la femme dominée hiérarchiquement dans les domaines du gouvernement et du sport, est devenu évident. Une analyse rétroactive suggère qu'un

changement sans précédent en faveur de l'égalité des sexes a pu arrivé progressivement alors même que l'image sexuelle stéréotypée de la femme se perpétue. Cependant dans l'étude, des contradictions et des équivoques jouent un rôle significatif. Il y est suggéré que les paradoxes de changement continuent de s'opérer malgré le progrès. Pour une meilleure compréhension de la question sur l'égalité et l'inégalité des sexes, ceux-ci sont comparés ici respectivement au jour et à la nuit.

Backdrop: National Context and Change

The current quality of student leadership that is nurtured by schools matters to the future of North America. This prediction may seem less than hopeful, though, for at least two reasons: adolescent girls within our public schools are not typically encouraged to develop assertive, well-rounded personalities (Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994), and educational systems largely continue to exhibit sexist patterns (Banks, 2000; Pierce, 1998; Spencer & Kochan, 2000). Furthermore, gender inequity is prevalent beyond the educational process within the career life cycle (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Mullen, Whately, & Kealy, 2000).

In this article, gender equity is examined in the context of adolescence, schooling, and leadership development. We respond to Bailey's (1996) call for finding ways to enrich classrooms, widen opportunities, and expand choices for all students.¹ The view presented is not only of the *darkness* but also the *light* where issues involving gender (in)equity and adolescent leadership development meet. Herein the metaphor of light and dark refers specifically to the issue of gender equity and inequity, respectively, and to the socialization patterns that adolescent girls experience, which serve either to help or hinder positive change. Sexist patterns and negative biases in the treatment of girls are associated with the dark; conversely, societal and school interventions that result in opportunities for girls that enhance their performance and growth as leaders, in addition to behavioral change on the part of citizens (i.e., educators and students), are all equated with the light.

The socialization patterns revealed at the secondary public school studied suggest that opportunities for developing females as leaders coexist with the constraints of sex role stereotyping. It is possible that new ideas and improved practices are gradually being produced within the imperfect systems of secondary education, but in what form and to what extent remain to be seen. Consider how, for example, the light and

darkness of change are paradoxically intermingled for adult females. While increasingly assuming leadership positions within school and university systems alike, females nonetheless endure significant discrepancies in salary, promotion, and mentorship (Pierce, 1998; Spencer & Kochan, 2000). Even when women have broken the mold of traditional expectation, as in outdoor career education, antagonism can result when the limits of sex role stereotypes are tested (Melpomene Institute, 1995).

Generally speaking, schools in the United States may be gradually reforming in a way that confronts the well-worn patterns of the past. Federal law was the wheels needed to advance this progress. Landmark legislation in the United States – Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 – banned sex discrimination in schools, whether it be in academics or athletics: “No person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid” (Bailiwick: The University of Iowa, <http://bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu>, 2003). Disparities and gender biases in the opportunities afforded males and females in K-12 schools have since been illegal (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Because of legislative decree, school administrators must ensure that athletic opportunities are equally available for male and female students (Alexander & Alexander, 2001). Title IX surfaces as a critical factor in the slow progress of the school featured herein and of the resocialization involved for its girls and boys, women and men.

The larger systemic picture in education suggests that institutional change has occurred gradually. For example, as more women fill leadership roles in schools and elsewhere, hierarchies become reinvented, assumptions of dominance become challenged, and egalitarian styles of leadership are developed (Grogan, 1996; Kincheloe, 1995; Spencer & Kochan, 2000). A similar set of outcomes has been documented with the rise in female faculty and leaders within universities (e.g., Mullen = Kochan, 2001²). Investigations into gender equality within schools need to be brought up to date, even if only minor modifications can be identified at this time.

Although sexist education and the negative biased treatment of girls in schools have been thoroughly researched (e.g., Bailey, 1996; Sadker & Sadker, 1994), the light, even if it only glimmers, still needs attention (for an example, see American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1996). While this case study is in no way

definitive, it does pursue, through exploration of one school, both sides of the issue. The ways in which learning and leading may be changing for today's youth, with signs of greater participation by females, also need examination. Toward this end, hope can be re-vitalized and the status quo further altered.

Situating the Theory: Gender, Leadership, and Change

Researchers report that little has changed for women in the United States regarding an equitable education and career. Females, both those who are becoming leaders and those already acting as leaders, are still not on an equal footing with males (Bailey, 1996; Orenstein, 1994; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1992). As equitable opportunities for and rewards of leadership continue to evolve for females, the deeper problem of systemic barriers needs further examination.

The way girls are typically socialized has fostered personal insecurities and sex-stereotypical attitudes and skills, leading to a conflicted future for many (Orenstein, 1994). Dramatic metaphors of plunging downward to the point of death have been used to narrate what often happens to adolescent females, as in the "developmental Bermuda Triangle" where resiliency, optimism, curiosity, and risk-taking all seem to take a nosedive without warning (Pipher, 2002). Those teenagers who live such disablement have been viewed as passive, self-conscious, low in self-esteem, preoccupied with looking attractive and appearing unintelligent, and non-goal oriented (Orenstein, 1994; Sills, 1994).

The shortchanging of girls in secondary schools has been extensively documented not only by researchers (e.g., Bailey, 1996) but also by associations (e.g., Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1992). The consistent finding has been that, despite federal law, discrimination on the basis of sex persists in schools today. However, insufficient literature is available on the leadership development of teenage girls in relation to this issue. Other researchers have only contributed to the larger picture with critiques of hegemonic systems of schooling that perpetuate a sexist ideology (McLaren, 1993; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). We focus on the leadership development of high school girls in an effort to supply a missing piece of the picture involving female adolescent development.

Many researchers that have probed the development of adolescent girls without attention to leadership issues have offered rich insight. For

example, in her book on girls' self-esteem, Orenstein (1994) calls for "gender-fair curricula" by dissolving gender and racial hierarchies in schools. Such hierarchies, as applied to the domain of leadership, also presumably implicitly teach that boys are the natural leaders and girls, the natural followers. The leadership capacity of females is also probably affected by the empirically documented rate of sexual harassment by school employees and male peers (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1993; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). To combat this, school practitioners need to create support systems, gender-sensitive curricula, and new habits of mind that encourage the non-sexist development of young females and males (Pierce, 1998).

Research Scope and Context

This case study asks: what patterns are evident in public schools with regard to leadership and performance opportunities for adolescent girls? We decided to explore the socialization process of both genders at a single school in order that comparisons could be made relative to leadership-based activity patterns. As will be revealed, we learned that new leadership opportunities had become available for the female students; this was an unexpected result.

A typical public high school in Florida was selected for this exploration of the gender-based leadership roles of students. By typical, we refer to the socioeconomic profile of a student/family population that is primarily middle- and working-class; we speculated that an average school has greater potential for exhibiting predominant socialization patterns than an upper-class school. Student leadership development and activity were used as the constructs for gauging the awareness levels of teachers and students at the site. We were curious to learn what leadership roles the girls and boys valued and performed, and whether certain opportunities were stigmatized or prized based on gender. For the adult educators, we focused on their views of and support for student leadership and the awareness level in regard to socializing the sexes equitably.

Local School Context

The high school we feature houses an increasingly diverse student population, not unlike other rural/suburban schools in Florida and the United States. This comparably small school's total student population for the 2000-2001 school year was approximately 2,110, with a fairly

equal distribution of males and females. Racial demographics were 56% White, 13% Black, 29% Hispanic, and 2% multiracial; 75% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Nearly half of the students' parents, while not high school graduates, were believed by the teachers to value their children's education.

Case Study Design and Methods

Two interconnected populations – students and their teachers – were studied in order to gain better insight into the leadership development of the adolescents at this school. Feedback from both groups was provided through assessments, definitions, and instances of student leadership. Multiple data sources were used, including application surveys (National Honor Society student applicants), leadership information surveys (with different questions for the students and teachers), and formal interviews (teachers only). A select group of teachers and administrators was first surveyed and then interviewed on site. Adult participants were encouraged to reflect on the environment in which they worked and the ways in which students may be prepared as leaders for life, within and beyond the school.

In all, three forms were designed and used for collecting data. Teacher participants completed a survey entitled "General Information Form" in which they provided career information (years spent in education, subject areas taught, certification achieved, and school functions). A second form (intentionally untitled) probed each teacher's philosophies of gender, leadership, and student development. The subgroup of teacher/administrator respondents completed the survey before being interviewed as preparation for exploring topics in depth. The study's premise regarding student-based leadership was revealed to them, but gender per se was not flagged. We wanted to avoid any premeditated responses about differences between the sexes or persuasive talk about ways that female students may have been encouraged to participate as leaders. This step proved crucial for eliciting spontaneous and probably honest responses.

A third tool, the interview protocol called "Socialization and Secondary School," was designed to elicit thoughtful material about issues of leadership involving male and female students. During the face-to-face taped interviews with the adult practitioners, they were invited to describe their ideas of student leadership. They also discussed ways in which they have helped to foster the leadership of students

within their own teaching domains (e.g., classrooms and sports fields). The interviews lasted from 20 to 90 minutes, and the data were individually analyzed for any thematic patterns and compared for consistency.³

Procedures

Student respondents. Data were specifically collected from a sample group of 9th and 11th/12th grade students. This wide representation in age was necessary for comparing early and advanced experiences of leadership development in adolescence. Three 9th grade classes (77 students) completed the original survey as well as one 11th/12th grade class (38 students). The 9th graders filled out surveys in the teacher researcher's English classes. This group was selected not because the students were viewed as actively developing leaders but because they typified entry-level freshmen. To vary the results as much as possible, the females were taken from a different class than the boys.

A pilot involving upper-level National Honor Society applicants was also launched, which spawned this broader study of various student groups. The teacher researcher, who had been coordinating the National Honor Society at her school for several years, thought that the leadership development of older female applicants had seemed obvious enough during her year (2000-2001) of sponsorship. However, this scenario shifted drastically when it came to the performance of her grade-9 English classes. Comparatively low dedication was apparent on the part of females regarding extracurricular and potential leadership activity. They indicated that their spare time was spent "hanging out" with friends – talking on the telephone and shopping.

Survey questions addressed leadership and gender roles performed by the adolescents both inside and outside of class. We probed such areas as the level of enthusiasm for group work and particular roles assumed (e.g., organizer of materials or on-task leader). No title was provided on the survey instrument or any explanatory information beyond the line items themselves. Our goal was to elicit accurate reporting of extracurricular and leadership-related activity; the teacher clarified questions raised in regard to the wording of actual statements. Students were given 15 minutes to complete the survey (7 questions on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree ("tons!") to strongly disagree ("never!") and one short-answer question seeking further information. Responses on the instrument were tallied and sorted according to gender. Likert

scale ratings were then produced for the male and female participants; these two summary sheets indicated the number of responses for each gender relative to the seven survey questions.

Unlike the teacher group that was both surveyed and interviewed, the students were only surveyed. Strong evidence exists suggesting that adolescent girls typically downplay their academic prowess or "play dumb" in order to gain acceptance. By conforming to social pressure, many are then able to enhance their attractiveness to the opposite sex (Mitchell & Weber, 1999; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). For this reason, questions about leadership activity and goals might especially threaten any such cover-up.

Following the pilot study, additional student data were obtained during the spring, summer, and fall semesters of 2001. Once variances in gender and leadership were tentatively identified for a sample student population, the groundwork was established for investigating possible leadership trends for boys and girls, and from the perspectives of different stakeholder groups. We strove to construct a picture of gendered leadership development at this school through as many lenses as possible.

To avoid skewing our data, we included the teachers in our sample as a filter for monitoring possible inaccuracies in the students' self-reports. We realized that the adults could also misrepresent the students' development or even their own role in this enterprise, so we monitored this possibility by including student feedback at most grade levels. A benefit of using multiple data sets is that information gained from one group can be compared with another, thus triangulating results while gaining a more balanced and complete picture; this form of analysis is in keeping with expectations for case research in education (Merriam, 1998). In this way, we were able to compare data from the students and teachers as well as within and across the student groups themselves. Finally, we assessed our own results by comparing the findings of other studies in the areas of gender, education, and where available, leadership.

Practitioner respondents. Four female teachers and two males, all White Americans ranging from 24 to 65 years of age, participated. Classroom teaching experience also covered a wide range of years (from 3 to 37). The administrator had been in his current role for four years and had taught for seven years. The teachers' instructional areas were English literature and composition.

The selection of appropriate faculty participants was based on three criteria. First, we wanted a mix of experienced and new educators. The veterans group could be expected to provide description of the changing culture of the school and patterns of student leadership over time whereas recent entrants could offer a fresh view of their workplace.

The second criterion for this selection process revolved around each participant's reputation among students. Noddings (1991) believes that pedagogies of care are needed for students to flourish within schools. We included only those educators whose beliefs and actions were perceived by school stakeholders to be aligned with this view. As may be expected, these were somewhat elusive attitudes to discern. The educators/administrators/coaches identified were reputed to be actively involved with supporting students beyond the call of duty. The excellence of educators travels readily by word of mouth at this site; hence, student opinion was a factor in the selection of appropriate adult participants. In addition, time sheets showing teacher activity were consulted to determine patterns of participation beyond regular school hours.

Third, awards for teaching excellence were included for choosing faculty. Four of the seven participants had been named "teacher of the year." The community as a whole held these adults in high esteem. Everyone invited to participate did so.

Although our focus is on student leadership, sex role stereotyping is an unavoidable topic that surfaces. Consider the sex-based roles of these adult participants: One male was an English teacher who coached sports and the other, an administrator with a social studies background. The female teachers, all English instructors, did not coach any sports. One might automatically expect the conventional roles assumed by these adults to be manifested in their attitudes toward what is permissible for male and female students; however, the situation proved more complex and possibly hopeful than this.

Adult survey and interview. In creating the adult survey on student leadership, we strove to develop a picture of student development at the beginning and end of the high school years. It included any gender differences in the leadership awareness of and roles played by the different groups (grades 9 and 11/12). These questions were formulated into five salient areas:

1. Gender differences (general or "typical" personality and appearance) in early adolescence (9th grade, upon entry into the high school).
2. Gender differences (general or "typical" personality and appearance) in late adolescence (11th/12th grade, upon graduation from high school).
3. Participation in leadership and extracurricular activities by males and females.
4. Possible differences in the participation of males and females.
5. Effects of gender on the leadership roles students are willing/unwilling to assume.

The teacher interviews produced content in three areas: personal definitions of leadership, impressions of the students as developing leaders, and ideas about appropriate pedagogical strategies for fostering student leadership.

Pilot Study: Mapping Student Leadership

The pilot study conducted in 2001 provided insight into the leadership orientations of students at the school. Controlling for the best possible scenario of adolescent leadership within this average school, we turned to the top academic group – the National Honor Society (NHS). The applicants' ages ranged from 16 to 18, and their grade levels encompassed 9, 10, 11, and 12. The teacher researcher's responsibility in her role as educator was to make determinations regarding the acceptability of these student candidates. The school's criteria for acceptance were grade point average (minimum 3.5), active participation in school activities, and overall demonstrated leadership commitment. Sixty-seven applications – 47 submitted by females – for membership into this elite academic club were analyzed. The assessment revealed a range of leadership activity of both genders in student council, basketball, service clubs (e.g., Students Against Drunk Driving), and more. Approximately 75% of the NHS applicants, mostly female, had cited membership in at least one service club.

Further analysis of the NHS data indicates that the male applicants had overwhelmingly participated in more sports than the females. The males fulfilled various types of leadership and managerial roles in a range of sports, whereas the females participated almost exclusively in one sport. The boys' statements reflected an eagerness to develop as leaders in this domain, aspiring to become a star quarterback or a lead player. The females focused on other kinds of leadership roles that better

fit their academic priorities. The National Honor Society data strongly suggest sex role stereotyping. While both sexes listed leadership in student government as one of three top choices of student leadership, the girls exclusively named cheerleading as a preferred athletic activity, and the boys, football and baseball. Hegemonic barriers to equitable physical education opportunities for females may be implicitly at work in this school culture. Despite the changes brought about by Title IX legislation, such barriers continue to be reported by studies of sex-integrated public school cultures in the U.S. (e.g., Schell & Rodriguez, 2000).

The females' overall participation in extracurricular activities actually increased 23% over a two year period. It is notable that these applicants sought more leadership responsibility associated with traditionally male-dominated positions of power. Importantly, from 1999 to 2001, females filled the majority of student government positions, including the office of president. Over 70% of the rosters for both the institution's student council and steering committees have been female dominated. These adolescents established themselves as leaders vis-à-vis the school's administration and operations and in other ways as well – as assistants in the principal's office, duty monitors in the school, and more. The teacher group reported that the female students have increasingly and undeniably become recognized as leaders. These changing patterns fit with a larger societal trend that Smith and Smits (1994) refer to as the "feminization of leadership" resulting from the increase of women in all professions.

The NHS male applicants also participated in service clubs, but to a far lesser extent. What is puzzling is the decreased interest the males showed from previous years for leadership opportunities within student government. This significant power base for students is probably second only to the sports arena. The male participation rate in student government and community service declined 15% during the 2000-2001 school year compared with the previous year, whereas two years earlier this figure rose over 40% compared with the preceding year. Perhaps the boys were more focused than previously on gaining leadership opportunities within the athletic realm. However, fluctuation was evident even in some sports. For example, in 1999, too few males turned out to form a bowling team. Yet this same sport became quite popular the following year. While the boys' bowling league has developed in fits and starts, the girls have consistently and actively developed their own league, winning championship games statewide.

Thematic Analysis and Results

Grade 9 Survey Results: Exploring the Tension

The grade 9 boys' data analysis revealed three primary dimensions of leadership: enjoy participating in classroom discussion, like to be the leader when working in groups, and strive to play an important role in activities both in and out of school. Secondary dimensions of interest/commitment were also identified: enjoy working in cooperative learning groups; participate in extracurricular activities at school and in the community; and feel comfortable being an officer of a club or sport. The category receiving the least enthusiastic response was "when working in groups, I like to be the *organizer*."

Interestingly, these results for the boys mirrored those for the female group in all respects except for cooperative group learning. This represents a primary (as opposed to secondary) dimension of leadership for the girls and constitutes the only significant difference between the sexes in this sample. The teacher participants offered corroborating comments: "I've found that the females tend to like working in cooperative groups more than males. They find it nonthreatening and easier to lead." This developing leadership orientation of the girls appears consistent with empirical findings on adolescent female development and women leaders' styles in education. The importance placed upon the roles of connection, attachment, and relationship for adult female professionals, educators, and leaders (Belenky et al., 1986) probably has its beginning in early female adolescence (Gilligan, 1982). From this perspective, then, the dimensions of adolescent female leadership derived from our research seem aligned with capacities considered to be generally associated with adult female leadership.

Short-answer responses on the survey regarding school and community activities for the boys were weighted toward sports. The activity pattern varied in other areas: arts, academic-political-social clubs, recreation, marketing, socializing, technology, and religion. In contrast with the girls, only one boy expressed commitment to academic clubs with sociopolitical agendas; also, no males indicated interest in mentoring/tutoring activities, unlike most of the females. Males typically responded: "I like boxing, kick boxing, karate, fight clubs, and wrestling on the TV." A few mentioned agricultural activity indigenous to the region (e.g., vegetable judging).

The girls gave weight to their involvement in academic-political-social clubs. To a lesser extent, they highlighted athletic participation in

sports.⁴ Variance for the girls was indicated in a number of areas that matched the boys' pattern of responses: arts, socializing, and religion. However, in the area of recreation, unlike the boys the girls did not identify fishing as a sport they enjoyed; instead, a few identified eating and sleeping as desirable pastimes. They did not mention computer-based learning, unlike some of the boys.

The role of leader as tutor, teacher, and mentor, evident in most of the females' comments, did not carry over for the males. Female respondents commented: "I like to stay after school and help the migrant students, and help my friends with math" as well as "I tutor people in Algebra" and "I teach lessons about Jesus to the little kids in Sunday school." The career goals of these girls resemble those of adolescent females who desire to become teachers one day – with fantasies of playing teacher kept alive while performing in school (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). Consistent with our results, a national study conducted by the American Association of University Women Teachers (1994) found that "teachers are important role models for girls ... more than half of high school girls want to be teachers. Far fewer adolescent boys ... want to be teachers" (p. 10). Girls who strive to be teachers instead of surgeons and scientists, for example, fall into the classic, sex-based pattern of socialization.

Similarly, the data indicate that girls did not play football and boys did not play volleyball at this school. This separation probably reflects yet another classic pattern, this one in male-dominated sports. However, the newer pattern in the school administration's effort to eliminate the gender gap was also demonstrated. Recent developments at this site suggest that females as participants and even leaders have infiltrated football, probably the ultimate domain of adolescent male power. For over five years, females have been selected as the team manager in this school, helping to organize practices and assist with paperwork.

According to the sports coach and administrator in our sample, female students sought out this managerial sports role, competed for it, and typically filled it. Males also applied for this position – signaling that the managerial role carries status. Coaches claimed that they judged the applicant pool using, as criteria, previous leadership roles assumed, community service hours accumulated, and grade point average. Because of the desirability of this position and the nature of the screening process involved, the female managers who served in this capacity were, importantly, not to be viewed as secretaries. According to the assistant football coach, it has become known that females did a

better job in this role than the males – they were thought to be far more organized and dedicated. This comment suggested that, if anything, a favorable bias toward females in leadership may have been at work in the selection of football managers. A caveat worthy noting is that the females were fulfilling the task of organizer in this leadership role – the very job that their male counterparts had more generally shunned.

With Title IX, the participation of females in sports increased significantly throughout the United States. However, as Sadker and Sadker (1994) have reported, high school boys' participation in athletics is still almost double that of girls. High schools continue to be plagued with "missing female leadership" in this male domain wherein the greatest prestige is made available (p. 126). The American Association of University Women Teachers' (1994) report indicates that adolescent boys have far greater confidence in their own talents than girls, which translates into action. Yet females have made inroads in the athletic arena at this school, albeit in support-related capacities within male-dominated sports as well as in all-female sports.

Based on our overall analysis of the 9th graders' self-reports, while there appears to be progress in the leadership roles assumed by girls and boys, there is also evidence of sex role stereotyping. In part, the girls are helpers, teachers, and sex objects, and the boys are fighters, action figures, and problem solvers – these represent some of the key dimensions of gendered identity that will probably have a role to play in the leadership development of these students and others like them. Although both sexes appeared athletic in behavior, the boys tended to be more "testosterone-driven" toward the "hard" sports, whereas the girls were more committed to track and other "soft," and hence subordinate, activities.

The adult participants we interviewed confirmed that a classic dichotomy exists in the physical activities chosen by the sexes.⁵ One teacher shared this about the gender-based roles assumed at the site: "Football, baseball, and basketball are the most popular with the gentlemen. Cheerleading, volleyball, basketball, and track are the most popular with the women. Although some interests overlap, there are differences in the sports males and females gravitate towards."

On the positive side of leadership development for these student populations, activity was fairly evenly distributed between the sexes, with some preferences made apparent. This trend toward increased gender equality could become stronger, as one teacher forecasted. She believed that the cooperative learning groups in her class allowed

students to test the reins of leadership within a protected environment before transferring these newly acquired skills to leading the entire student body. The adult participants believe that female students are predisposed to be leaders and that any pedagogical interventions only serve to support their development. The consensus was that these females enter the 9th grade more conceptually and developmentally mature and better behaved than males: "The females are bright and gung-ho while the males are still trying to inadequately assume the narrow masculine, macho role." This adolescent female edge could contribute significantly to the potential for girls' leadership in school and beyond.

Student Leadership Profile

Typical female student leader. The teacher participants concurred that the school's typical female student leader was an older well-balanced individual. Her academic performance was judged to be high and inclusive of athletics, social interaction, and activities. The administrator best summed up these points: "The female leader, who is usually on the honors list, excels academically. But she is also 'well-rounded,' involved in athletics and other extracurricular activities. [She gets] along and interact[s] with all groups within the school."

Teachers noted that the "cool kids" at the school "are usually the leaders." Female leaders who were fortunate enough to be categorized as "cool" clearly had a power base from which to operate: "These girls tend to lead from both an academic and social standpoint." The female leader was also seen as reserved and sometimes withdrawn, but not usually passive or shy. One faculty participant characterized her as "often being the center of attention although she doesn't seem to seek it out." The male teacher pointed out how the females tend to be "more withdrawn and quiet when out of the classroom. They also, however, believe it is okay to be smart and good at activities in school. Academics are important to them." Interestingly, these academically oriented females, some or all of whom were believed to have strong leadership potential, were described as "withdrawn" by him.

The adults also reported that the high achieving female could frequently be found in honors classes wherein she is quietly assertive. Strong leadership is not usually associated with behavior described as quiet, withdrawn, and academic, but rather aggressive, center-stage, and action oriented. Murphy (2000) contrasted "quiet lambs" with "roaring

lions," two different leadership styles that could be construed as genderized female and masculine behaviors, respectively. The lamb he describes (and implies is feminine) *appears* unheroic: acting cooperatively, depending on others, attending to details, and foregoing the need for control and attention – unlike the lion that is aggressive, controlling, and visionary to the point of overlooking critical day-to-day realities. Perhaps it is worth knowing that student leaders may generally need guidance from within this nonconforming pool of characteristics.

The quality of social relationships was also believed to be important to the school's population of female student leaders. Their ability to "cultivate friendships with peers and adults" was largely attributed by the adults to the capacity to get along well with others. In support of this effort, the female leader was perceived as someone who "smiles," is "clean as well as appropriately dressed," and "listens well." As indicated earlier, these results are consistent with the literature on women's development. The importance of connection, attachment, and relationship has been identified as a core value for young females that is often reproduced throughout their career and life cycles (Gilligan, 1982; Greene, 1988).

The teacher and administrators concurred that the younger females were generally more cognitively, emotionally, and physically mature than their male counterparts. They expressed such shared views as: "Girls are more mature in that most act like adults – they don't hit one another and play those kind of games. Boys are still in the silliness stage, except for most of the 'cool guys.'" While the adults agreed that the maturity of the male and female students drastically differed in grade 9, there was no consensus on how long this trend persists. As the male teacher explained, "Females and males are very different throughout high school. The maturity level of the women is far above that of the males. They describe the males as acting 'goofy.'"

Importantly, the maturity of the female student may be a predictor of her leadership potential: "Usually the female students who were leaders as freshmen in my classes tend to be the ones who later assume positions of leadership in various associations and societies." As seniors, the female students demonstrating leadership potential apparently strive to become class presidents and officers in service clubs.

Offering an enriching perspective, several teachers shared that some grade 9 females who show signs of becoming leaders do not necessarily grow in this direction. Instead, it is "usually the quiet girls [or lambs]

that eventually become the leaders." This complex, if not elusive, phase in the transition of developing girls was described in this way: "You can *almost* point to a time between 9th and 10th grades where assertive, attractive girls stop speaking out and no longer assume leadership roles. They are replaced by girls who seem to come into their own between 10th and 11th grade." One teacher relayed a critical story relevant to this point:

In my 9th grade critical thinking skills course I once had a female student who was so bright she would amaze me. I would constantly ask, "How did you know that?" She would say, "I read it in National Geographic or somewhere else. In Grade 10 that same girl became a boy-crazy fluff-ball. Why did that happen to her? But then again I've also had female students who are quiet and seem confident. They won't speak out or take a leadership role though. But, if you assign a leadership role to them they will do a good job. In 11th grade, it is these students whose leadership potential blossoms.

Typical male student leader. The teachers reported that academics were less important to the male youth than athletics. The typical male student leader was described as "physically attractive, active, involved" and "committed to a number of school activities." This potential leader is perceived as someone who often takes regular academic courses and is assertive, if not loud, conspicuously "enjoying the spotlight." A national study confirms that boys report a greater willingness to speak out in class and to be heard (American Association of University Women, 1994).

Seemingly comfortable with himself and with females, this self-confident male was characterized by faculty as having intelligence rooted in common sense. He also actively assumes leadership roles that emphasize "athletics for the most part over academics." These boys were reported to be visible "all over the athletic fields from soccer to baseball" and were described as both clean and "sometimes inappropriate in dress, language, or behavior." Boys may be responding, as one person summed up, to the expectation of "male as 'rebel' image." Additionally, these male students were said to "deal with controversy using humor."

It was believed that the males, unlike the females, "never hesitate to speak their opinions" throughout their high school years. Despite being assertive, the male's leadership capacity was viewed as being developmentally slower. The teachers reported that the males were not as ready to be interested in the opposite sex as the females at this age,

and the literature confirms this observation (e.g., Orenstein, 1994). It may be, though, that the boys who become leaders act somewhat differently than the "lionized" population of males. The adults in our study strongly hinted at this possibility, indicating that the boys who blossomed as leaders tended to "get along well with female students, [were] not sexually aggressive, and [were] liked by male students."

The typical male leader's academic performance was depicted as ranging anywhere from "average academic ability" to "often performs poorly academically." According to one teacher, the developing male leader exhibited a change in image and social posture as early as the transition from 9th to 10th grade: "It's curious because I see guys changing, where they are fulfilling the masculine role in grade 9, to becoming leaders in 10th grade less macho – and in some cases more conciliatory. Some just remain jerks, but I don't think they become leaders."

Male leaders were described as ready for life upon graduation, even "raring to go, to get into college or work, and to progress towards their life goals." Part way through their high school years, it was believed that a downward curve occurred in their development as leaders. This was attributed to the pressure they felt to work part-time because "dating becomes important, and that is expensive for them." Interestingly, this social context may in part account for the growth in female leadership, which assumes an upward curve: "As males get busy making money, most females become increasingly active in school activities and sports – they are usually under less pressure to earn money." These males were thought to pay a serious price for their new commitments: "Boys who work 30 hours a week barely scrape by academically."

Another factor for the promising male is the shift away from fixating on social image and acceptance. As one teacher offered, "As he gets older, this male assumes more diverse roles in leadership, having become less obsessed with being cool or not as plagued with shyness." Males who remain overly focused on their popularity apparently get "weeded out and sent to alternative schools or dropout prevention." They are also considered troublemakers. Like the females, it was believed that "the shy group of boys [lambs] has found its voice." These boys had apparently slowly become interested in activities that would help them develop as leaders and citizens.

Student Leadership in the Classroom

Student leadership development had not been addressed in the school's mission statement or professional development plan, or as a state benchmark or public goal. Public speaking techniques and organizational ability only were vaguely represented at the school level and in the Florida Sunshine State standards (Florida Department of Education, 2003). Although the school data indicate that issues of leadership relative to the delegation of power within peer groups were evident in some teacher-led contexts, no structured school curriculum to this effect appears to have been in operation.

Pedagogical methods exist in the classrooms for dealing with the idea and practice of constructing a leader, but without a school-wide plan. For example, the administrator shared that he would appeal to the students' sense of duty as activists and decision makers in communicating their responsibilities: "I explain they're the leaders of their class and other students look up to them, which requires action. I also say that if they don't like something or want something changed, they need to get involved." This example of the "light" that administration can bring is noteworthy but many more critical pieces are needed for sponsoring female leadership.

All of the adults felt they had encouraged students to assume leadership roles in the classroom and to develop as potential leaders. The practitioners claimed to be using various approaches for accomplishing this goal – efforts that were individually undertaken, which is ironic given the values espoused. Significantly, the teachers all used cooperative group learning as a key strategy for fostering student leadership and citizenry. It has been documented as the preferred learning style for females in general (e.g., Sills, 1994). The interviewees all recognized the value of teamwork as a critical element in the maturation and leadership development of students. Boys appear to be increasingly socialized at this school to experience learning and leading as a relational, cooperative enterprise. This is a far cry from traditional values that place the onus on the individual (not the group) and on competition (not cooperation).

Social development for boys and girls must include both the relational and the competitive skills needed for full participation in westernized societies. Each sex will be shortchanged if girls are socialized to be cooperative only, and boys, solely competitive (Bailey, 1996; Sills, 1994). The idea of a leader as somehow separate from or

above the group that follows his or her charge has become outdated (Banks, 2000). Leaders cannot survive and build alone, and yet, paradoxically, such "an individual [can be] named as the prime mover of major changes" (Goodson & Anstead, 1998, p. 68). Students may need to understand how leadership paradoxes (e.g., cooperation-competition and individual-group) function, and in what contexts.

It is essential that top educational leaders possess group and systems learning skills. Marsh (2000) focuses on the development of adult leadership in schools today. His work identifies collaboration (development of high-performing work teams and learning communities) and systems building (creation of an infrastructure that supports learning, performance, and partnership) as core skills areas. Obviously, many girls and boys will not become educational leaders in schools; regardless, it is vital that adolescents develop these capacities.

Popular Extracurricular Activities

Favored extracurricular activities of the students were found to contribute both to an increase in gender equality and to sex role stereotyping. However, even the sex roles that the students assume show signs of breaking down and changing. Clearly, this school is in a period of major transition, probably not unlike other schools receiving federal assistance. Research indicates that while sex stereotypes remain strong, attitudes about expected behaviors for females and males are slowly changing (e.g., Banks, 2000).

Notably, more girls than boys were represented in the school's student governance committee. Participation in sports was gradually becoming equal, with the caveat that the power base – football – was male dominated and female supported. Female recognition has been on the rise: Far more males play on the golf team, but the women's competitive golf team, like its bowling team, was reputed to be the best in Florida.

Female involvement and leadership at this high school has changed to the point that equality may be on the horizon. As the administrator explained (with resounding support from the teachers): "Used to be you'd have all the same kids playing all of the sports. But over the past few years, this pattern has changed. More women are participating." Major reasons given for this change in the sports scene include legal imperatives and the influence of the sports coaches. A developing

consciousness about exclusion on the basis of sex was also cited as a force.

Practitioner Definitions of Leadership

The faculty believed that being good leaders meant modeling effective leadership attributes. Examples included a view of leadership as "the ability to organize and facilitate people to become the best possible versions of themselves." A conception of teacher as guide was also expressed: "Leadership is the ability to guide a group in a direction you feel is most beneficial."

The practitioners also discussed those qualities that need to be fostered in developing student leaders. These included the responsibility of chosen leaders to actually lead. The administrator added, "[Potential leaders] don't get anything done by staying in the background." The teachers agreed, elaborating: "Leaders willingly take on extra responsibilities, drive action forward, and do the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people." Other qualities of leadership mentioned were "being able to inspire loyalty and respect," "knowing what healthy leadership looks like," and "leading by both what they say and what they do."

Although the adults did not identify popularity as a distinctive quality or condition of student leadership, they attributed it to the student body as a defining value: "Leadership is a popularity contest here." Another added, "The student leaders are usually the most popular on campus. They drive the action of the school. They are not necessarily the most intelligent either – just whoever is willing to go out on a limb and show bravery gains attention." To this another added, "The unpopular students are the 'followers.'" The inextricable relationship between leadership and popularity was expressed this way: "Leadership and popularity are two lines that get crossed when you're talking about student leadership within a school" (administrator).

One teacher provided the caveat that popularity as a prerequisite to leadership decreases in importance as students mature. She stated that whereas the younger students' view of leadership is a matter of popularity, "the older ones have a different outlook. Those who are leaders were perceived as capable of making something of themselves, in preparation for living as a mature person." The adults all believed that students experience increased self-esteem and feelings of popularity in their leadership roles. However, some students "only want to be

leaders for popularity unlike those who want to make a difference, busting their hump in order to do so."

This leads one to speculate whether the general student population is able to discriminate between false and genuine forms of leadership. Student leaders believed to be authentic were thought to be motivated for reasons beyond their own popularity. These individuals apparently assumed responsibility in order to accomplish the work at hand, and they connected in order to "get along with everyone, including those outside their clique." One teacher's insight was that student leadership should be earned and that the adults appreciate only those who are authentic.

Assumed Gender Differences in Leadership

The situation involving leadership opportunities for female students may have improved within this school, but it is nonetheless interesting to note gender differences that may be persisting in leadership positions. Unlike the boys who apparently "use the force of their personality to gain acceptance in leadership roles, the girls tend to show by action and accomplishments their right to leadership within differing organizations" (teacher participant). This primary difference in male and female styles of student leadership – described metaphorically herein as the lion and the lamb – formed a consensus among the adults.

The sexes may also be striving for excellence in different but related directions. Generally speaking, female students who seek leadership roles within communities take it upon themselves to organize the societies and manage their activities. In contrast, boys ostensibly use their positions of power to gain desirable leadership roles on the athletic field and secondary ones as treasurers and secretaries of clubs. The male administrator voiced strong support of the female approach to leadership: "You get more done when females are in leadership roles instead of males, and this sometimes goes for adult positions of leadership too."

Taking Ownership: Becoming a Student Leader

As indicated earlier, a dramatic increase in student leadership activity was reported for the upper levels. At an earlier time in the school's history, leadership may have been more pervasive among the freshmen. A veteran teacher told how a negative trend has since developed. During her 30 years spent at the school, she has observed fewer grade 9

students exhibiting growth as potential leaders. Corroboration was forthcoming from one source, the administrator's big picture view of the school's recent decade: "Few freshmen show interest in leadership, as is evident by how we have over 900 students in grade 9 but only two wanted to run for student council office this year. But this changes as they get older and become more involved."

Implications: Leveling the Playing Field?

The female adolescents we studied have apparently honed a leadership style that reflects their societal conditioning. Ambitious and gifted girls must learn how to navigate between fulfilling their potential, and thus standing out, and complying and standing back if they are to succeed (Orenstein, 1994). A veteran teacher observed how "males more aptly force their will concerning the activities they are involved in, whereas if a female acted this way she would be disapproved of – girls have to walk a very fine line." Females occupying the top leadership positions, including school president, have presumably made headway in these rough waters.

At the school we featured, girls have been recently dominating a number of respected areas. Of note is that of school governance and a few select sports, particularly golf and bowling. Female governance and managerial activity have produced a new trend in student leadership – constituting a key insight gained: "Right now we are in a female-dominated leadership pattern. Females hold most of the important posts in student government and class councils lately. But, over the years, this hasn't particularly been true" (school administrator). Multiple factors contribute to this changing pattern of leadership for female adolescents: Title IX and other legislation, role modeling of adults including coaches, new pedagogical strategies, career goals and expanded options, changing attitudes by both sexes, and societal and global trends. Growing appreciation for the style of leadership associated with "the lamb" offers yet another influence (Murphy, 2000).

While the female students have access to opportunities beyond the traditional roles of vice president and secretary, ideas about the proper place for women persist. Just as adult women must learn to cleverly adapt to the feminine model of leader, girls must discern how to appear nonthreatening while assuming leadership (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). The inescapable picture that arises from our data and the literature is that while female and male adolescents may be similarly experiencing a new liberty in leadership, sexism continues.

We offer the following nine guidelines for promoting the leadership development of all students, female and male alike, in an effort to translate our results into useful knowledge and new policy.

1. Make provisions for student leadership development in the school's mission statement, professional development plan, and classroom lessons and materials. Influence state-led curricula to reflect the priorities and educational directions of schools along these lines.
2. Educate students concerning leadership opportunities both inside and outside the institutional setting. Encourage students to join groups early in high school, with continued reinforcement at all grade levels. Allow and encourage students to diversify in their leadership interests as they proceed from one year to the next.
3. Educate adults about issues of leadership and gender bias within the school setting. Discuss relevant issues and possible courses of action with all educators, administrators, coaches, and students.
4. Interrogate sex-based stereotypes and actions within the school that socialize students to play gendered roles and thereby associate a particular sex with particular functions (e.g., male as leader, female as manager).
5. Incorporate leadership-building activities in the curriculum for promoting consciousness-raising and informed action, including those for "the shy ones." Tasks should help students analyze gender roles and bias, societal and interpersonal conditioning, and leadership trends and prospects.
6. Males and females should be placed in situations throughout the school whereby they need to interact as developing and cooperative leaders and team players, joining mixed-gendered groups, sport teams, associations, and councils.
7. Teachers and administrators should freely share their experiences as leaders and their personal definitions of leadership. Adults need to mindfully embody and enact positive role models whose action and words reinforce one another.
8. Adult professionals who would respond positively if directly asked but who do not otherwise volunteer should be invited to actively mentor girls, especially those who show leadership potential.
9. Educators should encourage students to formulate their own definitions of leadership from which to map their goals as related to moral character, extracurricular activity, postsecondary education, and career.

Conclusion: Slowly Treading Forward?

What changes have occurred for American adolescents, especially girls, from 1972 to 2004? And what is happening out there more broadly in schools, school systems, and countries? Might it be that some educational systems are evolving in favor of female leadership – or are such local occurrences a sporadic happening at best? Much more research is obviously needed for making an accurate determination of the contemporary status of female adolescent leadership. Before a genuine face can be put on any change relative to gender-based leadership at this time, a portrait of the typical adolescent and school is needed. We strove to create just such a picture through a study of female students' leadership patterns as compared with males'. While progress seems evident for at least one school, culture-based gender stereotyping persists. Also, examples of "stewardship" – ranging from cheerleading to volunteering in service organizations – probably mix sex stereotyping with the phenomenon of growing female leadership. Contradictions and ambiguities abound in this portrait where the dark (the status quo) and the light (positive change) coexist, no matter how awkwardly.

While there appears to be forward momentum for positive change in the area of female adolescent leadership in pockets throughout society, much has yet to be accomplished. Studies of changes in leadership for girls have yet to be comprehensively formulated with sensitivity to trends, context, and complex, murky realities. The "light" and the "dark" intermingle particularly where paradoxes seem evident. Notably, on the one hand, Title IX, which was legislated over 30 years ago as a gender equity intervention strategy in education, "has been able to influence systems and affect behaviors somewhat." This is the good news. On the other hand, "[However], the question of changing people's attitudes and of meeting the spirit of the law has been a more difficult issue" (Flansburg & Hanson, 1993; cited in Pemberton, 1997, p. 13). Gender equity in athletics, the focus of this law, is more complex than some may think. This issue involves activism through confronting and changing fundamental belief structures and cultural norms that perpetuate sexism against girls (Pemberton, 1997). Obviously herein lies the challenge. As evidenced by the research cited, gender bias and discrimination in athletics persist, despite the progress made; in other words, compliance with Title IX has yet to be accomplished (Pemberton, 1997). While the involvement of girls in sports and women in the Olympics has changed and at a level not previously witnessed, barriers persist. Girls tend to internalize messages not only from their peers, the

media, and their families that say sports are more important for boys than girls, but also from within the educational system (e.g., Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Sills, 1994).

Not only have opportunities in sports expanded for girls and women, career options have also increased for them (Melpomene Institute, 1995). However, while leadership roles have accompanied these changes for females within school and societal systems, the self-esteem of high school girls continues to be reported as significantly lower than for males (Melpomene Institute, 1995; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Indeed, the Melpomene Institute's almost exclusive emphasis on self-help, body image, and psychological wellness for girls underscores self esteem issues, hence reinforcing this message.

Finally, research shows that peer, family, and school all have a significant influence on the development of adolescents. However, better understanding is needed not of *which* societal forces shape the cultural identities of females so much as *how* they interrelate and in what ways. As another salient point, educational researchers have only begun to focus on the leadership development and performance of females in adolescence. Attention has clearly been on other issues, many of which highlight the deficiencies of female development. Consequently, our own sensitivity to "light" is warranted if we are to explore in earnest this unknown but promising territory.

NOTES

1. The League of Women Voters (<http://www.lwv.org>, 2003) and the Melpomene Institute (<http://www.melpomene.org>, 2003) appear to actively support the socialization of girls, with some focus on their developing leadership. However, assessments beyond basic descriptions of these programs were not available at the Web sites.

2. An equal sign (=) appears between the names of C. A. Mullen and F. K. Kochan as an alternative to the standard ampersand (&) in order to underscore that responsibilities pertaining to the project was equally shared. For the originating source of the equal sign and a description of its relevance that suggests a new inquiry relationship symbolizing genuine partnership as coauthors, see Mullen = Kochan (2001).

3. The design of the study and its protocols were jointly conceived and crafted. Elizabeth Tuten, the coauthor (teacher researcher) obtained permission for the study, collected the data, and helped analyze it; she also confirmed that the school portrait presented was reliable and trustworthy. The first author, Carol Mullen, an Associate Professor in K-12 educational leadership, guided all aspects of this case study research; she also analyzed

the data, prepared the literature review, and wrote this article, both in its draft and final form.

4. A few girls also talked about playing football in their neighborhoods, an event not sponsored by the school, but one that possibly foreshadows another new direction for female involvement.

5. On a cautionary note, our study draws upon practitioners' self-reports for describing relevant phenomena. We realize that while valuable insights were disclosed, gender bias unconsciously translates into sexist instruction and the favorable treatment of males (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). We fully acknowledge the seriousness of this convoluted issue, which was beyond the scope of this article.

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