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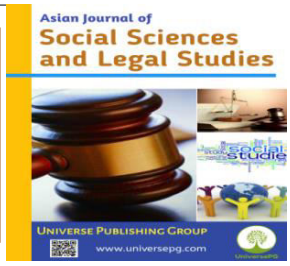

Early Socialization of Adolescent Female Student Leaders: Gender Stereotypes, Leadership Purpose, and Role Models

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ABSTRACT

This study was the last part of a four-part dissertation that investigated the early socialization patterns of eight female student leaders in middle and late adolescence from sectarian and non-sectarian schools in Metro Manila, Philippines. Guided by the Developmental Assets Framework, results show themes related to gender stereotypes, leadership purpose, and role models, in addition to themes related to perceived disadvantages and advantages of female leaders. Younger participants' responses reflect a stronger dependence on others, while older participants exhibit a more stable and deeper appreciation of their leadership role, which could be linked to identity achievement. Although all participants identified female role models, more non-sectarian participants identified male role models (brother, father, and uncle) compared to sectarian participants. Overall, one of the most important findings of this study involves participants' critical appraisal of negative gender stereotypes of female leadership. In addition, leadership experiences and socialization show that Generation Z participants' more sustained exposure to positive and more diverse role models from social media may largely explain their critical appraisal of gender stereotypes.

Keywords: Female student leadership, Adolescent female, Role models, and Positive youth development.

INTRODUCTION:

Because in almost all cultures, males are preferred as leaders over females, looking at how young girls navigated gendered social expectations and even limiting beliefs is necessary for understanding the onset and development of leadership for their age group. Working on the assumption that prior life events and experiences may trigger leadership development (Arvey *et al.,* 2007), it is essential to note which key events and experiences, from the participants' perceptions, are crucial to their involvement and growing interest in leadership. Leadership is a stereotypically male role in almost all societies worldwide and there is a wide gap in the representation of women leaders in many institutions (Haber-Curran & Sulpizio, 2017). This gender gap in leadership among adolescent females could be traced to the gender gap in political ambition, which could be associated with young women's less exposure to political information than young men. Young women receive less encouragement to consider politics as a future career path and consider themselves less qualified to run for office (Islam and Haque, 2022).

Their limited exposure to playing organized sports may also impact how they care about being competitive or winning compared to young men (Lawless & Fox, 2013). Women leaders are almost always a minority, possibly partly due to leadership stereotypes and

biases by gender that hinder women's leadership experiences and advancement (Catalyst, 2007; Haber-Curran & Sulpizio, 2017). Other factors could explain leadership under representation among women: same-gender bias in rating leaders (Martell & DeSmet, 2001), less positive attitude towards female leaders if the perception of the incongruity between female gender role and leadership roles are emphasized (Eagly & Karau, 2002) or stereotype threat (Davis *et al.,* 2005) which may decrease women's leadership self-concept and may even trigger upward threat (Rudman & Phelan, 2010) race (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010) and even awareness of existing affirmative action policy (Islam & Zilenovsky, 2011). Meanwhile, there has been a steady growth of studies focusing on positive youth development, probably due to the growing need to look at adolescents from a more strength-based perspective rather than the usual problem-based perspective. Recent studies show that adolescence is critical for leadership emergence and development (Tackett *et al.,* 2022). Other studies also acknowledge how leadership characteristics of young people differ according to gender, in addition to other factors (Khan, 2022; Dagyar *et al.,* 2022).

Hence, this research investigated essential personal experiences that influenced the leadership path of eight adolescent female leaders. Participants were asked to share specific experiences as student leaders, what they thought about female leader stereotypes and disadvantages, and female leader advantages, if there were any. Participants were also asked about their role models for leadership. Moreover, this study is based on the Developmental Assets framework developed by Peter Benson and his colleagues at the Search Institute to emphasize the necessary concepts related to youth development and their contexts (Benson *et al.,* 2011).

The Search Institute has identified 40 assets that young people need to have better outcomes in life. Strengths or supports that focus on relationships and ties with families, schools, and communities are called external assets. Major categories include support, empowerment, boundaries, expectations, and constructive use of time. Specifically, this study shows which social assets or strengths are helpful for the female adolescent's leadership path. This study could help inform how, despite the increased possibility of constraints and limitations during adolescence, some girls become leaders at a young age.

METHODOLOGY:

This study, the last part of a four-part dissertation work, investigated the early socialization patterns of eight female student leaders, four in middle adolescence and four in late adolescence, using the multiple case study approach. This multiple case study method utilized qualitative interviews to account for participants' leadership ideas and constructs. Participants' answers to specific questions on socialization and upbringing were analyzed separately.

Participants

Participants were from private, coed junior and senior high schools in Metro Manila, Philippines. Half were from sectarian schools, and half were from non-sectarian schools. All participants were elected leaders of their school organizations for at least one year. Their school council advisers selected them. Their ages ranged from 12-16 (middle adolescents) to 16-18 (late adolescents). Each participant was assigned a code name. At the time of the interviews, two middle adolescent participants were 12 years old, and the other two were 13 years old. Three late adolescent participants were 17 years old, and one was 18 years old. Two participants have five years of leadership experience, one with six years of leadership experience, four with eight years of leadership experience, and one with ten years of leadership experience. Regarding the school setting, four participants were from sectarian schools, and four were from non-sectarian schools. (**Table 1** below for the demographic profile of case study participants in which each column identifies their code name, age, length of leader-ship experience, & school type). There were three school settings for this study. The first school setting was a sectarian school and a private coed institution offering instruction for preschool, kindergarten, elementary, and high school levels. The second school setting was a private, non-sectarian, coed educational institution that provides education at senior high school, college, and post-graduate levels. The third school setting was a private, non-sectarian, coed, non-stock educational institution providing complete education services from preschool to post-graduate. The decision to differentiate between sectarian and non-sectarian schools was partly to in-

vestigate the possible differences in school climate and support systems. The interview guide and objectives of the study were initially presented to school officials, together with the data-gathering procedure and inclusion criteria for participants.

Table 1: Demographic profile of case study participants.

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

The school principals then tapped the school student council advisers to select participants. The student council advisers identified and invited qualified participants to conduct the study upon approval. During the initial meeting, the research objectives, informed consent, and informed assent forms were all presented and explained to participants. They were also briefed about the voluntary nature of their participation and about their right to discontinue should they feel dis-comfort or unease. They were also informed about the confidential nature of the interview. The first interview session with the case study participants was scheduled upon the return of the signed Informed Consent form from their parents. Participants were then asked to sign the Informed Assent form. The first interview lasted for about 40- 60 minutes. The second interview was scheduled based on the availability of the student participants, which lasted approximately 40-60 minutes. One interview session was also conducted with each of the key informants. These interviews lasted for about 20-40 minutes. All the interviews took place inside the school campuses and were all recorded with the participants' permission. The interview guide was constructed based on the research questions, theoretical considerations, literature review, and result of the pilot test. Three adolescent student leaders were selected as participants for the pilot test.

Data Analysis

For data familiarization, each transcribed interview was organized and read several times. Preliminary ideas and concepts were identified and encoded from each transcribed interview, with specific attention to ideas and concepts relevant to the research questions. Member-checking was conducted after each initial interview and data familiarization. Consultations and negotiations of meanings and main ideas were conducted during the second interview session with participants. Once member-checking was complete, two advanced Ph.D. students in Developmental Psychology were enlisted as interraters to help the researcher identify themes or sub-themes. Matrices with participants' responses were given to the interraters with a copy of the Developmental Assets Framework from the Search Institute as a guide. Secondary themes were then identified after the initial classification of responses. Reliability and validity were ensured by moving back and forth reflexively from the themes to the preliminary ideas and concepts and even back to the transcribed interviews whenever necessary. Possible secondary themes were reviewed thoroughly against the data and the research questions to determine whether or not the themes presented a meaningful and cohesive account of the data. Codes from the researcher and interraters were compared for similarities and differences. The researcher and the interraters debated their codes until a certain degree of confidence was reached. Finally, thoughtful interpretation of themes through an integrative discussion was made possible through thick descriptions with an audit trail to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis. The interpretation was also integrated into or against existing literature on female adolescent leadership and the layers of influences in the participants' lives from social to cultural or political institutions.

Ethical Considerations

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

RESULTS:

This section presents the case study findings in connection to the specific research question about the early socialization experiences of participants. Thematic analysis and interrater reliability were employed to identify themes from the result of participant interviews.

Female Leader Stereotypes: Weak and Less Competent

Although Hera shared that she did not personally agree with women leader stereotypes, she learned that other people think of women leaders as weak, moody, and therefore incapable of being good leaders. Lisa shared a similar awareness of gender stereotypes that portray women as weak and incapable of doing things men can do. She was also aware that many people underestimate the capabilities of female leaders. They think men make better leaders because they are more robust and have more leadership experiences. Lisa shared that she feels disappointed over negative female leader stereotypes. She emphasized her firm belief in gender equality and argued that women are just as capable as men. She also asserted that what matters is that women know their capability to lead. Shaina had a similar idea and shared that some people believe women to be incapable of leadership. However, Shaina herself believes that men and women are equal. She also argued that equality must go both ways because "sometimes men are also belittled by women.' Nene thought that many people believed that female leaders were only interested in proving that they were not weak and men's equals. Nene expressed her disagreement with this stereotype. Similarly, Raiza shared that many people think women leaders are just showing off how good they are to avoid gender discrimination. However, Raiza argued that being a leader is not about gender. It is all about one's dedication to the job. She further asserted that female leaders are capable of being motivated to perform or deliver what is expected of them as leaders. Moreover, according to Agape, many people do not think females deserve leadership positions, especially in politics, because the role does not fit women. However, she argued that we are all unique. She asserted that being a leader is not about gender but about personality and the ability to unite people toward one advocacy or purpose. Like the other participants, Dominic was aware that many people believe that female leaders are weak mainly due to patriarchy. Carla expressed a similar point when she said that people talk about how certain types of women are perceived as less competent leaders, "When a woman is sweet and kind, she is more likable yet perceived as less competent."

Female Leader Weaknesses or Disadvantages: Invalidated and Misinterpreted

Aside from gender stereotypes in leadership, many participants expressed their awareness of some female leadership disadvantages. Many were concerned about the emotional side of female leaders and how they get overlooked or invalidated. In Nene's observation, female leaders suffer from getting invalidated by others. Their opinions are usually taken for granted or misinterpreted. Nene attributed this mainly to culture and gender bias, even in cases where females expressed themselves clearly. Hera's observation was similar.

She observed that female leaders are frequently misinterpreted, particularly when displaying their emotions. In contrast, men could quickly get away with showing their emotions. Other people will dismiss men's emotional displays as playfulness or mere jokes. Hera thought that women are treated differently in this context:

> When you are angry or a little mad, they misinterpret that as something else, that that is your intention...it seems that there is bias... They choose not to follow your lead because you are angry or there is something else.

Like Nene's concern, Dominic shared that female leaders are sometimes taken for granted. In her observation, female leaders may not always be perceived as

authoritative by other students because of their perception that boys are more assertive than girls and because of leadership gender stereotypes. On another note, Carla observed how some females like to gossip and dwell on issues more than necessary:

> Some will provoke you and bring out your ugly side. And then, when you become mad at them, they act like they are the victims. Isn't it that some women like to gossip? The issue has been solved, yet they still like to discuss it.

Carla added, "With other girls, sometimes they underestimate the abilities of other girls. It is like they compete with each other." Moreover, Carla shared that female leaders like her receive unconstructive criticisms and online bashing, "Especially girls, they [receive] strong criticism from others like they have so many bashers." Girl culture for Carla can be something like ".[when] there was one thing that did not please them, they will find a way so that you will have to get angry at yourself."

> On another point, Shaina noted that females, in general, get more easily hurt and affected than males. Female leaders, in particular, are more sensitive or easily hurt by other people's judgments. Similar to Shaina's observations, Lisa thought that women and girls could get very sensitive and tend to overthink. Agape noted that female leaders are easily affected by other people's words or judgments. She thought, "Be-cause female leaders are not that strong mentally or physically, that is why they easily get affected when they hear people talk about them in a certain way."

Meanwhile, Raiza thought that one of the weaknesses of female leaders is that they are emotionally sensitive and that such behavior could sometimes get in the way of effective leadership. However, she also thought being emotional has its advantages, "…female leaders are more independent in their emotions. Like they always have empathy… that is why it is easier for them to understand the feelings of others."

Female Leader Strengths or Advantages: Interpersonal Skills and Sense of Responsibility

Carla argued that women are good listeners, as well as good at encouraging and convincing people. Thus, women make excellent and loyal leaders:

> We cannot please everyone; therefore, we need to respect their opinions because it is their opinion. Moreover, we women should prove them wrong …So by doing our best, we can prove to them that [we are] just equal. Women can do what men can do as leaders. It is not about gender. It is how well they fulfill their responsibilities as leaders. Men and women have their strengths and weaknesses.

Carla also thought that women leaders have good communication and social skills and different ways of leading and relating with others. In Shaina's opinion, female leaders have unique strengths, "we are patient when it comes to waiting for things, and also we are more encouraging of others." Moreover, Hera emphasized that females, in general, are more sociable. When asked to compare women leaders with male leaders, Hera emphasized a female leader's ability to fight for their opinions without hurting others. In comparison, men often speak without considering how their words might affect others. Hera added that women leaders know how to relate well with others and are also cheerful. More so, she argued that there are different ways of leading and that females approach leadership differently from men. Instead of stereotyping female leaders, Hera argued that people should believe that females can also make good leaders just like males. Furthermore, Dominic emphasized female leaders' interpersonal skills as their strength, "...they know how to listen. When it comes to ...advocacies, they are unbiased. Because they understand the need to fight for things." Similarly, Nene believed that female leaders are more considerate than their male counterparts. She asserted that females lead with a heart. They carefully consider people who will get affected by their leadership decisions. These qualities are essential because they negate people's perception that female leaders are weak. From Nene's observations, female leaders are just as capable of leadership and fighting for their principles. For Agape, being sensitive as a leader is an advantage since it enables them to anticipate other people's needs. She believes gender stereotypes should be rejected and the person's leadership personality matters. Another advantage of female leaders, according to Lisa, is that they have a strong sense of responsibility, something that they have developed while managing their households. Meanwhile, Raiza thought

that women and girl leaders are more aggressive in decision-making because they always come prepared with plans, "We think 60 million times before we finalize things." Furthermore, because women are emotional, they know how to consider others' feelings more thoughtfully, "Like they always have empathy ...they can more easily understand what others feel."

Development of Leadership Purpose

Among younger participants, their development of leadership purpose revolved around how they connected with others, persevered and improved their leadership skills. For instance, part of Carla's experience as a student leader involves being consistent and treating others fairly. She draws inspiration and motivation from her upbringing, where she learned to be disciplined. In some of her negative experiences, she also gained insight into the importance of consideration and fairness. She learned to listen better to different sides because she knows the feeling of being ignored, as though one is voiceless or without rights.

> Regarding leadership principles, Shaina shared that she persevered, finished tasks on time, and surpassed expectations.

Meanwhile, Hera's somewhat tentative sense of purpose could be gleaned from her thinking that she is more of a guide than a leader "...because as a leader it is important that you should be the one guiding them and when they do not show up, you are still their leader, and so you must act." In Lisa's experience, she initially doubted her leadership abilities: "It hurts because, of course, when we are working on a task, I sometimes wonder if I am enough or if I can finish the work on time. That is why it seems that I get distracted." However, she tried to make the most out of it by forgiving, forgetting, and using the negative experiences to change her perspective. As for Hera, she realized that she wanted to fight for others' rights. She likes expressing her opinions when she knows that she is right, "I would like to defend the rights of others. I do not like others' rights getting violated, and I want to defend my opinions, the ones I know are right... that is what I like about being a leader." She plans to inspire young women to become leaders by advocating for equality between males and females, "Being female is not a disadvantage in being a leader because we are all equal and we are also human." She said that women need to express their opinions, mainly because, at times, this is what makes things right or good. She added that women should not be afraid to express their opinions since we are all equal and have different opinions. Among older participants, leadership purpose emerged from their reflections regarding criticisms from others, good examples from role models, personal advocacies, and the desire to help others. For instance, Nene shared that initially, negative experiences like receiving criticism from classmates affected her self-confidence as a leader. Eventually, she learned to focus only on their positive feedback and reminded herself that her leadership has a purpose. She kept in mind that the students who voted for her trusted her and that this trust should not go to waste. Like her female role models, Nene shared that she strives to be decisive and principled, "But I have to keep in mind what is right, and if I know that I am on the right side, I should not be afraid, and instead, I should be confident of the choices that I will make."

Dominic's sense of purpose as a student leader is rooted in her advocacy regarding the importance of education:

> The government is in such a big mess these days, and I want to educate people, students, and children to be aware of what is going on and that they should be able to express what they want to say...I want them to be aware of what is happening in the country. I want them to be informed about the laws.

However, Dominic also admitted that there were times when she grew tired of her duties as president of their organization. In such moments, she would usually remind herself that that is what she wanted - to serve others and get recognized for it. Dominic also shared that she is happy that younger schoolmates recognize her and her organization's contributions to the school. She perseveres in her work because she is genuinely happy with her role. She derives satisfaction from working hard for her school and from having a sense that others see her as their leader. Agape also shared her realizations about her leadership purpose and style. She said she is almost always aware of her current abilities and limitations. She also thought that she needed to learn about what leaders do to endure dealing with pressure, making personal sacrifices, and

learning how to manage time efficiently. Agape believed that she had yet to reach this level of leadership maturity. She thought she needed to give up her fear of being perceived as an outcast. She also needs to learn better communication skills, "I need to learn how to be approachable to others, and also public speaking because I am not that expressive... that is how I got started as a leader in school activities." Finally, she shared that her leadership goal is to help others:

> I also want to know what I can do and how I can help others. If I can uplift myself and take myself out of my comfort zone, I would also like to uplift others and show them things they can still accomplish.

Leadership Role Models

Females in Elected Government Positions

Carla shared that as a student leader for some time, she looks up to role models for additional guidance. One of her role models is a female politician whom she described as hardworking, imaginative, responsible, and always thinking about ways to improve the city.

> Shaina described her role model, a female politician, as kind and genuinely concerned for her fellow "kapwa." Shaina admitted, "Sometimes I try to copy her qualities, kindness, and love for her fellow. I tell myself I should be like that and not become worse."

Lisa considered another female politician as her role model mainly because of her exceptional qualities as a public speaker and her many achievements. Lisa learned a lot about the late senator through social media. Lisa said she tries to do well in public speaking, just like her role model. At the time of the interviews, she shared that she was active as a debater in her school. Nene also looked up to another female senator for similar reasons - being assertive and a fighter. She shared,

> "With the way she speaks, when she wants something, she really wants it and will do it, fight for it regardless of what happens or other people's criticisms." Based on what she saw in her role model, Nene argued that women leaders could keep up with their male counterparts because they were just as capable. Raiza also shared her admiration for the same female senator. Raiza noted that her role model was remarkable and admirable for fighting for what she believed in and that "She was firm. In every decision that she makes, she is straight to the point. She was brilliant and informative...and was not afraid to tell the truth about what was happening to the government. She was also very transparent to everyone." Like her role model, Raiza said that she strives to be assertive, "I like her characteristics of being vocal like I am also vocal to my community."

Females in Appointed Government Positions

Agape identified a female environment secretary as her leadership role model. Agape thought this leader's life was admirable because she left her comfortable life to be a yoga missionary in India, where she experienced hardships while helping children. She was a role model for her strength and robust qualities. Agape also emphasized the significance of the environment secretary's anti-mining advocacy. Nene shared the same admiration for the female environment secretary. Nene considered her a female leader role model because she was upfront, decisive, assertive, and committed to protecting the environment, "it seems inspiring to have leaders who still care about the environment." Like her role model, Nene shared that she has been trying to be a good person. She is learning to fight for her principles and find ways to fulfill her duties as a student leader.

Female Fiction Characters

Other female leader role models were derived from movies. For instance, Carla looked up to Amber from Detective Files and described her as "… fierce, she may look strong outside and tough, but if you know her, she just has a good [idea] to improve her group..." In addition, Carla also identified Wonderwoman from Warner Brothers' Hollywood blockbuster movie as another female role model. Carla believed that "She is always there to help others and she could show that even though she is female, she can fight like a male like an equal...that there are things that men can do and that she can do as well." Nene identified another fictional role model- the character of Black Widow from the movie Avengers of Marvel Studios. According to Nene, Black Widow is unique because she brings her team back together again. She was the kind who did not easily give up on others. Nene learned from Black

Widow that nothing is impossible and that there is always a way to fulfill one's goals.

Female Relatives

Three case study participants look up to their grandmothers and mothers as female leader role models for leadership. Carla looks up to her businesswoman mother as a leader and role model. She described her mother as someone who does not give up easily. She is open-minded and is always looking for things to improve. Similarly, Hera's role models for leaders are her mother and grandmother. She explicitly views her mother as a leader role model because of the guidance she provides to her children. Hera also considers her grandmother a leadership role model because she has guided Hera to prepare more responsibly for the future. Raiza also identified her grandmother as her leader and role model in her family. Raiza observed that her grandmother's good examples were adopted by her parents.

Her grandmother knows how to assign responsibilities, which, Raiza believed, instilled discipline, "… she was a good example as a leader because my parents also took after her, which is if they take care of you, you also adopt those qualities." Raiza was also particular about her grandmother's leadership style, "Assigning their responsibilities because when she speaks about tasks, it is a must."

Female Pop Stars

Lisa said she looks up to K-pop stars as role models mainly for their work ethic. Female leaders of K-pop groups act like mothers to their teams and are known to be very responsible and supportive.

Female Schoolmate

Nene recalled an older female schoolmate as one of her very first female role models. Nene was particularly impressed by her schoolmate's public speaking skills. This female student leader eventually noticed her and invited her to join their school's political party. Nene thought that that person's influence left a lasting mark on her and had been a source of inspiration for her.

Confident Females

Hera was not specific about her female role models. Instead, she was more particular about confidence as an admirable female role model quality. She was interested in women who are confident and capable of influencing people to do what is right. Hera added that whenever possible, she tries to learn from their example. Moreover, she admires female leaders who have courage, expresses their opinions, and stand up to men. However, she was also careful in understanding how to make their qualities fit her circumstances.

Male Leader

Shaina's first role model for leadership was a former male senator of the country. She emphasized that she found him worth emulating for his advocacy on moral governance. Moreover, Shaina also considers her father a role model for good leadership, "Maybe because he is a teacher of politics, that is why he knows how to do it, how he teaches others to be loyal and not lack loyalty about different matters." In addition to female politicians and female fictional characters, Nene also shared that she is mainly inspired by the example of her uncle, who, at the time of the interview, was currently a local politician in the city of Makati:

> He does not give up easily. Because he knows that he is capable of leading, he knows how to get the support and trust of people...I know him as a responsible person, who is why he has that position today, and then I see that he deserves it and is good at leadership.

Similarly, Agape said she also looks up to her father as a leader and role model. She described her father as someone capable of multiple roles as father, engineer, and pastor all at the same time. Furthermore, Dominic shared that her initial interest in student leadership was inspired by her older brother, who had been a very active student leader.

Her brother was her first leader-ship role model. She admitted that she idolized her older brother and observed his leadership example closely. However, she insisted that although her brother was an inspiration, eventually becoming a student leader herself was initiated and has grown into a personal passion.

DISCUSSION:

According to the Developmental Assets Framework, positive youth development is more likely when individual strengths or assets are aligned with a community's "external" or ecological assets, which can be

manifested in terms of (1) support; (2) empowerment; (3) boundaries and expectations; and (4) constructive use of time (Benson *et al.,* 2011; Lerner *et al.,* 2012, pp. 368-369). Themes from participants' responses, specifically those related to female leader stereotypes, weaknesses and disadvantages, and strengths and advantages, could be associated with external support assets. Participants' critical appraisal of gender leadership stereotypes and their understanding of female leader strengths and weaknesses were made possible by the support they received from positive family communication, other adult relationships, and caring school climates. All participants were able to recognize and criticize limited female stereotypes that are related to leadership. Case study participants were aware that many perceived female leaders as weak, less competent, and hypersensitive or expressive. However, although stereotype threat may deter some women from leadership roles (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016), all case study participants could critically examine such gender stereotypes. Instead of getting affected by stereotypical societal thinking, participants were able to reframe the harmful gender stereotypes related to female leadership by discussing their representations of female leaders. Many had the insight to consider that women leaders are thoughtful, responsible, strategic, and possess strong interpersonal skills. Somehow this demonstrates that although exposure to stereotype threat could influence some women to favor non-threatening subordinate roles over leadership roles, it is essential to know how to create identity-safe environ-ments that could lessen vulnerability to stereotype threat (Davies *et al.,* 2005). It also matters to emphasize how participants were supported in various ways so that they were able to generate the cognitive resources that helped them reframe negative female leader stereotypes. For instance, one may take note of how agents of gender socialization like family, friends, peers, school, church, and even social media provided participants support in understanding and examining gender stereotypes. Moreover, participants' critical appraisal of gender stereotypes and overall display of cultural competence could be interpreted as partly a reflection of moral development. With the positive and liberating influence of role models, participants' interrogation of discriminatory gender stereotypes may be, in effect, an interrogation of conventional rules of morality. Gilligan, (1982) once posited that the onset of adolescence is associated with the loss of "voice" in girls attempting to conform to cultural stereotypes of feminine behavior. Such contention is not reflected in this study. None of the participants expressed attempts to conform to negative gender leadership stereotypes that they identified in their responses. Instead, they rejected such negative gender stereotypes and resisted the pressure to conform. Along with rejecting or questioning female leader stereotypes, all participants could discuss their understanding of what appear to be female leader strengths or advantages. Their under-standing is essential because it connects with their relative self-efficacy or subjective well-being (Weiss *et al.,* 2012). Stereotype threats did not psychologically harm the case study participants, unlike many female adult leaders who find stereotype threats as severe challenges to self-efficacy (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Participants identified their positive representations of women leaders that reflect important external social assets or strengths in the form of role models and other socialization patterns. All participants shared how their role models helped shape their perceptions and attitudes toward their leadership duties. This experience points to early socialization and learning the values, attitudes, and expectations of appropriate behaveors and social roles as vital for effective social functioning. Arguably, this process is eventually responsible for the accessibility of role models and other interactional experiences that become part of a developing person's behavior (Assibey-Mensah, 1997). Participants' identification of role models also reflects the presence of specific boundaries and expectations, another external asset in the Developmental Assets Framework. In discussing their role models for leadership, participants identified the qualities they admire most from their role models, as well as what they perceived to be their role models' weaknesses. They also explained how they apply these observational learnings in their contexts and circumstances. Many participants shared that they try to learn from the good examples set by their role models and consider similar experiences or similar challenges. Some studies claim that exposure to nontraditional female roles may decrease women's leadership self-concept and trigger upward threats (Rudman & Phelan, 2010). However, the results of this current study show the positive influ-

ence of role models in the leadership path of case study participants. Furthermore, similar to some studies where a role model is someone with whom girls have a deep personal connection (Buck *et al.,* 2007), some case study participants identified their parents, grandparents, older siblings, or other relatives as their role models. However, more role models were identified from other segments of society. Note that such role models were made visible to the participants through social media since all of them are part of Generation Z (born between the mid-to-late 1990s up to early 2010s), a demographic cohort thought to have used social media and smartphones at a very young age. Compared to older generations who grew up watching limited representations of women on mainstream TV or movies, Gen Z's intense exposure to social media paved the way for more diverse role models. It also shows more advocates of female leadership and positive representations of women and girls in general. On the one hand, social media is commonly seen as responsible for popularizing unrealistic body image and beauty standards for young women. On the other hand, most of the female role models identified by case study participants were politicians, appointed leaders, or celebrities made famous by Facebook and Hollywood blockbuster movies. In addition, "female empowerment" campaigns were launched on various social media platforms recently, and they were made very visible by well-known figures like Malala Yousafzai and Beyonce Knowles. Previous studies show how underrepresented women leaders are in many institutions (Lennon, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2015; Haber-Curran & Sulpizio, 2017). Such under-representation in the political arena, corporate board-rooms, or higher education institutions could be due to leadership stereotypes and gender biases that discourage women from assuming leadership positions (Catalyst, 2007; Haber-Curran & Sulpizio, 2017). Mean-while, participants' development of leadership purpose themes reflects two external assets: empowerment and constructive use of time. All of the participants could make sense of how some personal experiences were turning points in their growth as student leaders and how these experiences fostered and deepened their sense of purpose as student leaders. Many developed a sense of purpose that focused on goals beyond personal needs, consistent with studies in youth engagement. This finding shows that engaging youth through meaningful activities and connections can foster motivation (Dawes & Larson, 2011). Moreover, their sense of purpose themes reflects responses related to truth, fairness, discipline, respect, and service, among many others. These responses, in turn, could be connected to other positive youth outcomes like the development of civic engagement (Wang & Peck, 2013) prosocial values (Van Rijsewijk *et al.,* 2016), and social responsibility values (Wray-Lake *et al.,* 2016). Comparing the ages of participants, older participants shared more similar socialization experiences related to a sense of purpose. Younger case study participants recalled challenges related to gaining support or cooperation from their groups and remembered how teachers and classmates played essential roles in their decisions to accept leadership posts. Older participants shared early experiences related to experiences of motivation, resolve, and discovery of leadership purpose.

These differences between younger and older participants may underscore differences in cognitive and moral development, as well as differences in identity development. Younger participants' responses reflect a stronger dependence on others, while older participants exhibit a more stable and mature under-standing of their leadership roles. Younger participants' dependence on others for support or validation could be linked to conventional morality, "A person acts in ways that please or help others and are approved by them" (Thomas, M., 2005, p. 432). In comparison, older participants' deeper appreciation of leadership roles could be linked to some degree of identity achievement, a stage that is reached after devoting considerable thought and after experiencing more life challenges (Papalia *et al.,* 2001). Older participants have had the time to reflect upon their leader-ship roles and expressed more substantial commitment to the task. Also, although all participants identified female role models, more non-sectarian participants identified male role models (brother, father, and uncle) compared to sectarian participants. In sum, these results demonstrate the more expansive, nontraditional, and progressive socialization of non-sectarian participants. Whereas sectarian schools are commonly associated with 'caring communities,' it is possible that non-sectarian

schools are into other priorities like socialization opportunities (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

CONCLUSION:

Finally, note that behavioral expectations, restrictions, and limitations directly or indirectly imposed by family and society shape adolescent girls' behaviors and socio-emotional development differently, thereby limiting their physical and psychological development (Cavanagh *et al.,* 2007). More often than not, early socialization and education of girls focus more on preparing them for caring or supportive roles. These roles, in turn, eventually lead to the communal, care-taking style of women in leadership but may not include "the stereotypical directive and assertive qualities of good leaders" (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Policy or leadership programs for young females may consider looking into strengths or assets. Perfectly timed interventions may be helpful specifically for their age group. Research may also examine how role models work for specific age groups or contexts. For instance, in some cases, the increasing presence of women as political candidates may inadvertently lead to more vigorous resistance to change (Brown & Diekman, 2013). Research may look into how females effectively identify with role models and what kind of early socialization at home or in safe environments could more easily facilitate such identification (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006). In other cases, girls need deep personal connections before they can relate or identify with specific role models (Buck *et al.,* 2007). Borrowing from Bronfenbrenner's, (1979) emphasis on the universe of ecologies, the Developmental Assets framework emphasizes collective social responsibility in fostering positive development, coming from different systems like families, schools, neighborhoods, student organizations, and churches as socializing agents and support networks (Benson *et al.,* 2004). Hence, leadership development among adolescent females should be supported by multiple networks and socialization settings. Schools and communities should have more systematic mentoring programs that target specific developmental assets or improve youth's social and emotional competence (Dewit *et al.,* 2016).

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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