Psychosocial and Leadership Identities Among Leaders of Identity-Based Campus Organizations / DOI: 10.1037/a0018564

Scholars have clearly established that involvement in campus activities leads to student learning in a number of domains (see Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005), including leadership development (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005). A growing body of literature has supported the claim that involvement in campus activities related to a specific element of psychosocial identity—such as race, sexual orientation, or gender—contributes to development of that identity (Arminio et al., 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Inkelas, 2004; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Renn, 2007). College student leaders may also begin to develop what has been called a “leadership identity,” or sense of self as able to lead and make changes in the world (Komives, Casper, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Limited evidence has suggested that leaders of identity-based student groups such as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) student organization (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a, 2005b) or an African American student organization (Harper & Quaye, 2007) experience leadership development and identity development in the relevant domain.

Given the potential “double impact” of identity-based student leadership on student development, and given the need to respond to calls to prepare college graduates to take up leadership in a diverse democracy (see, e.g., Butler, 2000; Hurtado, 2003; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005), the purpose of this study was to explore how student leaders of identity-based groups describe their experiences and how this knowledge might inform higher education programs and policies. **Specifically, we designed the study to address the question:** How do student leaders of identity-based groups experience leadership identity and the psychosocial identity or identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation) on which the group is based?

**College Student Leadership**
An abundant literature on student leadership (e.g., HERI, 1996; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006) has supported the student affairs functional area of leadership education (see ACPA Commission for Student Involvement, n.d.; National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs, n.d.). …

The notion of leadership identity development (Komives et al., 2005) is also compelling because it addresses identity, and we include it as well.

**Student Leadership in Identity-Based Contexts**
Scholars have undertaken a handful of studies of leadership in identity-based settings. For example, Sutton and Terrell (1997) and Harper and Quaye (2007) studied African American men, Arminio et al. (2000) examined leadership experiences of students of color.

Understanding the identities of LGBT, African American, or women leaders will require learning how students understand themselves as leaders as well as LGBT people, African Americans, or women. We turn now to the emerging area of leadership identity development.

**Developing a Leadership Identity**
Leadership development models of the 1990s, for example the social change model of leadership development (HERI, 1996) and relational leadership model (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006), provided important theoretical foundations for leadership education in postsecondary education yet they focused on the…

...the LID model raises interesting questions about how leaders of identity-based groups understand leadership identity and themselves within the leadership context. It also provides a robust theoretical foundation for addressing our research question.