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LEADERSHIP IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN TRADITIONAL-AGED FEMALE
UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENTS: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY
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The purpose of this grounded theory study was to understand the process of leadership identity development experienced by traditional-aged female undergraduate college students. The findings led to a model for leadership identity development consisting of four phases. In Phase 1: Awareness and Exploration, students viewed leadership as external to themselves instead of something to which they aspired. In Phase 2: Leader Identified, students equated leadership with a title or position and saw themselves as leaders only when they were elected to a position. In Phase 3: Leadership Differentiated, students understood that leadership could derive from any source regardless of a position, yet they continued to see themselves as leaders because of their positions. In Phase 4: Generativity, students understood their responsibility to develop others as leaders. In this phase some students also realized a need to address change, specifically with regard to societal views of women and people of color. In the early phases of the model, the female students in this study saw gender as irrelevant to them as leaders even though they recognized societal views of female leaders as weaker or less capable. In later phases they understood how being female mattered, and by Phase 4 they recognized a need to take a stand on societal issues related to gender and race. This study

provides valuable insights on the development of female student leadership identity to help leadership educators and student affairs professionals construct intentionally designed programs, yet much remains to be learned.