

TITLE: A Qualitative Analysis of Female Student Body Presidents

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OBJECTIVE: The focus of this study was to examine the conditions that exist at colleges and universities which impede women's desire, ability, and willingness to run for and be elected student body president.

METHODOLOGY: The population consisted of 16 women who served as student body presidents from 1977 to 2004. Thirteen were Caucasian women and three were African-American. They attended universities that ranged from private to public, including a historically Black college and university, and two church affiliated institutions, with enrollments ranging from 5,800 to 50,000 students. Standardized open-ended questions were used to conduct the interviews. Each participant also completed the Leadership Practices Inventory.

KEY FINDINGS: The most frequently used leadership practice was Encouraging the Heart, followed by Enabling, Modeling, Challenging and Inspiring. In the interviews women described their leadership styles using "common leadership phrases including collaborative, empowering, participatory, engaging, consensus building, and compassionate....the women also talked about recognizing the efforts of others, letting people know they were appreciated, taking care of the people that work for you, and leading by example" (p. 118).

"What the women said about their leadership styles was then compared to the two leadership practices each woman scored highest on. Ten of the women accurately described their leadership style in relation to the two practices they scored highest on. Two of the women's descriptions of their leadership style did not match the practice they scored highest on, but did match the practice they scored second highest on. Four of the women's descriptions of their leadership style matched the practice they scores highest on, but did not match the practice they scored second highest on. These results indicate that the women were relatively accurate in knowing their leadership styles, especially when compared to the exemplary practices of leadership" (pp. 120-121).