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The Experience of Influence Among Youth Leaders

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THE EXPERIENCE OF INFLUENCE AMONG YOUTH LEADERS

by

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THE EXPERIENCE OF INFLUENCE AMONG YOUTH LEADERS

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While the term “leadership” can be difficult to define, one term that is commonly seen in its association is “influence”. While the field of leadership has empirically identified several outcomes associated with adult influence (i.e., greater organizational performance, higher subordinate satisfaction, higher subordinate engagement), little is known about influence in youth leaders. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding of how youth leaders experience influence. Twenty-nine in-depth, semi-structured interviews from fifth- 12th-grade students in a leadership mentoring program called Nebraska Human Resources Institute (NHRI) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln were conducted to ascertain these student leaders’ common experiences with influence. Phenomenological data analysis results indicated that the participants experienced influence by using it to accomplish tasks, and to set an example for others to follow. Furthermore, participants recognized that leaders can influence in both positive and negative ways and expressed that using influence felt good, scary and powerful all at once. Respondents identified having an open mind and being confident as key characteristics for leaders to successfully use their influence and that their families provided the greatest context for learning about influence.

It is naïve to assume that today’s young leaders will lead in the same ways as the generation prior. The results presented in the current study can be used to create more

effective youth leadership programs designed to increase influential capacity and better research unique the variables involved in youth influence.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Statement of Problem

Children face a difficult task in developing their leadership abilities. The term “helicopter parent” is becoming more and more common as youth are being shielded instead of pushed to try new things, especially when there is a danger of failure. Even when it comes to playing, parents are often involved, mitigating situations and circumstances through whatever their children might encounter.

As Barbara Carlson, President and Co-founder of Putting Families First, stated in an article in Psychology Today (2004),

Kids are having a hard time even playing neighborhood pick-up games because they’ve never done it...They’ve been told by their coaches where on the field to stand, told by their parents what color socks to wear, told by the referees who’s won and what’s fair. Kids are losing leadership skills (Marano, 2004, Arrivederci, Playtime section, para 3).

A recent article in Forbes Magazine (Caprino, 2014) also discussed the troubles that youth face in leadership development. Many parents today do not let their children experience enough risk. The safety obsession has grown to a point where it is now crowding out many other important focal aspects of childhood. While parents spend their time protecting their children and bending over backward to make the lives of their children easier, they may actually be harming their child’s ability to develop into a strong leader. “If parents remove risk from children’s lives, we will likely experience high arrogance and low self-esteem in our growing leaders” (Caprino, 2014, We don’t let our children experience risk section, para 1).

Societal trends cause youth leadership development to become increasingly difficult, wherefore it is important the topic be given the merit it deserves. Humanity's future will lay in the hands of these young leaders and the time to start investing in their development is now.

Childhood development starts at very early years in the home. Family relationship context sets the tone for relationships among family members, and when approached in a firm yet warm and responsive way, parents can begin forming a strong bond with their children (Adams & Berzonsky, 2003). This positive relationship can then give way for further learning and development to take place.

Given the overwhelming need for youth to develop leadership skills, time should be spent examining possible avenues of increasing the research of this area. "All effective youth programs have youth development at their core. Effective youth leadership programs build on solid youth development principles with an emphasis on those areas of development and program components that support youth leadership" (Edelman, Gill, Comerford, Larson, & Hare, 2004). While many youth leadership programs currently exist, research needs to be conducted to determine if they are truly being effective at raising strong leaders. Often, time is spent studying the outcomes of such programs in the context of the physical accomplishments such as community service projects. However, little time is focused on the change development and its effects on the youth leaders themselves. By better understanding youth leadership through the eyes of the young leaders participating in such programs, improvements can be made to make these programs even more effective at producing great outcomes and furthering the personal development of youth leaders.

One challenge young leaders face is the lack of opportunities to officially hold a role of authority and lead. Because youth are often seen through a lens of being too young to lead tasks, their opportunities for adult style leadership are limited (Kress, 2006). Instead, they are forced to look for alternative methods to demonstrate their leadership ability. Youth learn to exert their influence among peers in order to accomplish tasks.

Youth influence is not a new phenomenon. However, the term more often elicits a negative connotation such as drugs, alcohol or violence. One such example is the recent focus media has taken on the number of school shootings perpetrated by youth. Everytown Research keeps an updated list of all student shootings in the United States, and their most recent report states that there have been 150 school shootings reported since January of 2013 (150 school shootings in America since 2013, 2015). Though they are young, youth do hold a strong amount of influence that can be used in either good or bad ways, such as the violence that is growing among youth in school. Today's youth need positive influences from adult mentors and from peers. By better understanding how youth leaders use their influence, better programs can be created to foster their development.

Developing programs for youth that focus on fostering relationships and building upon their strengths is an approach that is being increasingly considered (Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, & Hughes, 2010). Nebraska Human Resources Institute (NHRI) offers one such program. NHRI further develops leadership skills among youth who have been identified as possessing high leadership potential. Youth are nominated for NHRI by their teachers

who believe they shown strong leadership abilities. The opportunity to study the influence that youth use is a valuable research area to consider.

NHRI was founded in 1949. The founders, Dr. William Hall and Dr. Donald Clifton, were among the pioneers in the field of positive psychology. Their focus was on the psychology of success and strengths, and through NHRI they focused on students who demonstrated success in relating to others. They soon determined a commonality among these students: each individual had a person in their lives who discovered what their strengths were and then saw that they received opportunities to further nurture those strengths. Dr. Hall and Dr. Clifton believed the best way to further develop strengths is through positive relationships.

With this finding in mind, NHRI was developed to match exceptional college student leaders in a one-on-one mentoring relationship with promising K-12 student leaders. The role of the college student as the counselor is to help the younger youth, the junior counselor, by encouraging and building upon their strengths.

The junior counselors are identified by their teachers as demonstrating promising leadership potential. They are then nominated to participate in NHRI's leadership development program. Currently, this program has 60 participants, both counselors and junior counselors. The junior counselors range from first through 12th grade and include youth from all across the Lincoln school system.

The overall goal of NHRI is to see that positive relationships result in reinvestment in others in both the counselor and junior counselor's lives. Because of this program's focus on developing the leadership potential of youth, the participants for this study were selected from NHRI. Each participant has already been selected for their

leadership potential and spends time actively learning more about leadership. Though the program does not focus specifically on the role of influence in youth leadership, the participants all possess a basic knowledge of what it means to be a leader from their own personal experiences.

Audiences That Will Benefit

Leadership research is continually growing in popularity. As leadership impacts every aspect of society, it is a very important topic and extremely relevant today. Gaining a clearer understanding of what is to be expected from the next generation of leaders is crucial as the transfer of information and position is made. It is naïve to assume that today's young leaders will lead in the same ways as the generation prior. The results presented in the current study can be used to inform leadership practices currently in place in preparation for the approach in a new era of leaders. Furthermore, since relatively little is known about the youth leader, the qualitative data in this study will provide accounts of firsthand experience from current young leaders. The results of the current study may also benefit the youth leaders themselves by helping them reflect more deeply about their own beliefs regarding leadership.

Definition of Terms

Counselor- A college student selected for The Nebraska Human Resources Institute (NHRI). This student is paired with a junior counselor and is responsible for taking on the role of the investor and building an investment relationship with his or her junior counselor. This student works with his or her junior counselor for approximately three years.

Junior Counselor- A K-12 student selected for The Nebraska Human Resources Institute.

This student is paired with one counselor for every three-year period. This student is considered the investee in the relationship. A junior counselor can conceivably have upward of four counselors between kindergarten and their senior year of high school.

Phenomenology- A qualitative research method in which “the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants (Creswell, 2014, p. 14).

Defining leadership.

Defining leadership is a challenge that has been around for many years. As far back as 1990, Rost described the state of leadership as “a word that has come to mean all things to all people,” (as stated in Klau, 2006, p. 59). In his book *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, Rost also critiqued the attempt at defining leadership and highlighted the idea that leadership has come to mean very different things, sometimes very little to do with what actually constitutes leadership. Scholars have long struggled in distinguishing a clear and coherent definition to encompass the complete essence of leadership. One area of confusion is the common held belief that one must wield authority in order to possess leadership (Klau, 2006). In the 1970s and 1980s, various leadership studies aimed at the establishment of power were conducted. These took into consideration such things as aggression and bullying, but failed to give attention to group facilitation, conflict resolution and group contribution. The latter pieces are more commonly referred to as leadership (Edwards, 1994).

With the term “leadership” itself being a difficult one for experts to agree upon, it is expected that defining leadership for adolescents would also not be an easy task. How

does one define youth leadership? White (2004) conducted a literature review aiming to define this term and showed that “there is an understanding of adolescent leadership as training activity or process driven” (p. 66). The answer may be to turn to the youth themselves in assistance for defining this term. By doing this, an increase in youth engagement in leadership may be seen among today’s adolescents (Mortensen, Lichty, Foster-Fishman, Harfst, Hockin, Warsinske & Abdullah, 2014). In 2006, Klau conducted a study of current youth leadership programs and was impressed by the opening statement of one such program. The speaker asked,

‘How many people have been in a position of leadership?’ Many students raised their hands. Then he asked, ‘How many can think of a time when they exercised leadership?’ A few hands tentatively went up. ‘They are two different things,’ he explained (p. 72).

Even youth themselves appear to be a bit confused in their own definitions of leadership. However, a common theme recognized among youth is the emphasis on effecting change as a leader. They described a leader as someone who sees a problem and takes action to create a solution (Mortensen et al., 2014). When one youth was asked how they viewed leadership they replied, “to me, leadership meant taking on greater responsibility, taking action, that my ideas mattered, and that I was given more respect and trust by my peers and adults,” (MacNeil & McClean, 2006, p. 104). Among references to solving problems and implementing change, youth also emphasized helping others as the base upon which to focus their changes. The need to aid in the well-being of others was seen as their motivation in making a difference (Mortensen et al., 2014).

Though youth may have some ideas on defining youth leadership, it appears that many of the youth leadership programs may not have such a concise answer. In Klau’s

2006 study observing youth leadership programs, two out of the three did not have a concept of what they meant by leadership. How are youth expected to understand this concept if the very resources they are turning to in order to build this skill remain unclear? After all, youth rarely have an official position of authority in which to make these decisions, and it appears that they are trying to adapt their definition of leadership toward the reality they experience; one in which they play a more passive role, rather than that of direct leadership (Mortensen et al., 2014). In an attempt to clarify and sum it up in one simple phrase, Phelps and Hubler provided the statement that “a leader is a person who acts as a role model for other youth” (2006, p. 29).

Kress considered Webster’s collegiate dictionary definition of a leader as “one who has commanding authority or influence; one able to direct the operations, activity or performance” (Kress, 2006, p. 45). Northouse discussed the evolution of the definition of leadership as well and in his book came to the conclusion that, “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal,” (Northouse, 2013, p. 5). While the term leadership may be difficult to pinpoint, one term that is commonly seen included in its definition is that of “influence” (Libby, Sedonaen, & Bliss, 2006; McElravy & Hastings, 2014). Even when looking at the components of it, such as characteristics and positions of authority, leadership is still based on influence. Macneil provided a thorough description in her study of applying adult leadership theories to youth leadership development:

Leadership is a relational process combining ability (knowledge, skills and talents) with authority (voice, influence, and decisions-making power) to positively influence and impact diverse individuals, organizations and communities (2006, p. 37).

While there may not be one collectively accepted definition of leadership, it is universally seen as possessing some sort of social influence that helps to achieve a common group goal (Chemers, 2002 as cited in Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Matthews (2004) hypothesized that it may not ever be possible to provide one single definition of youth leadership. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the common components of it include its social nature and application of interpersonal influence.

The definition of youth leadership may look different than the more commonly accepted definitions of adult leadership. The very way in which leadership is currently defined could be excluding youth. With no direct inclusion of youth seen in the terms, youth may not feel there is room for themselves as leaders.

Defining Influence.

Many studies have been conducted to examine influence in youth and overwhelmingly report the same results: that parents have great influence on their children. This influence affects their children's values, career plans and aspirations, and children especially look to their mothers for advice on their career development (Otto, 2000). In Otto's 2000 study of youths' perspectives of influence, 81% agreed that their ideas were in line with their parents' ideas. However, while this study suggested that parents are the largest influence in the major areas of a child's life, they failed to ask their participants any questions about their peers and the influence they may have had as well.

Philosophical Foundations

The current study was approached from a constructivist worldview. Constructivism, often associated with qualitative research, is focused primarily on the belief that "individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work"

(Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Individuals give subjective meaning to their experiences. The goal of the constructivist worldview is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation, or phenomenon, being studied (Creswell, 2014). For this reason, it is recommended to use open-ended questions in the interviewing process.

Delimitations

One delimitation of the current study was that the unit of analysis was limited to K-12 students who were involved in a leadership program at a Midwestern, land-grant university. Leadership development programs both within and outside of higher education institutions differ drastically with regard to goals, format, and depth. Furthermore, the participants went through a selection process in order to participate in this leadership program. Considering the selectivity, the participants involved are likely to have higher leadership potential than their peers not selected for the program. Finally, the interviews took into account only the perspectives of the junior counselors, and their responses were indicative of their personal experiences in the NHRI program. Relating the findings of the current study to other K-12 students without similar leadership qualities or experiences may not yield similar results.

Limitations

While delimitations are beneficial to a study, limitations, on the contrary, set some restrictions. Given the very nature of qualitative research, the qualitative data is subject to varying interpretations from one reader to the next. Additionally, qualitative research is both subjective and interpretive by nature. Therefore, the researcher's bias may have influenced the analysis and interpretation of the findings. This issue is addressed in chapter three. Lastly, the population of participants interviewed should also

be considered a limitation. Only students from NHRI will be interviewed in the qualitative research. Their responses will not be compared to responses from other K-12 students outside of NHRI.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how youth leaders experience influence. The phenomenological design behind this study utilized semi-structured interviews with youth leaders and explored youths' definitions of influence, behaviors they consider to be influential, and strategies of using influence in youth leadership roles.

Research Questions

The grand tour question driving this study was: How do young leaders experience influence? Four sub-questions were used:

1. How do youth leaders define influence?
2. What behaviors do youth leaders consider influential?
3. When do young leaders feel they are being influenced?
4. When do young leaders consider themselves the most influential?

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Lack of Research on Youth Leadership Development

When considering the current research available in the area of youth leadership, the results prove quite disappointing. The leadership studies field has grown significantly in recent years, however, a gap still exists in youth leadership research (Macneil, 2006). Adult leaders can be much easier to study, given that they typically hold an official leadership title, pointing researchers directly toward them. It is not surprising that this would prove more challenging with youth, given that their principal role in society is that of a student, making them more difficult to identify (Mortensen et al., 2014). Adult leaders also have clearly definable measurements of their leadership, such as employee engagement, team productivity, profit margins and customer satisfaction levels. While leadership is traditionally thought of as occurring in the workplace, there are young students acting as leaders on a daily basis, just with fewer clearly defined variables to demonstrate this.

While the more narrow focus of study on youth leadership is still emerging, the concept of youth leadership development has been in existence for some time. Though not always directly described as such, youth leadership has been an important aspect of the United States' society throughout history. It may now just be beginning to be recognized as youth leadership development, as for generations Americans have deliberated upon the importance of preparing the next generation of youth for the future (Libby et al., 2006). This is being accomplished through a variety of forms, from learned family values to clubs and organizations. The Girl Scouts program, for example, has been

in place since 1912 and originally began with the aim of developing girls physically, mentally, and spiritually while focusing on diversity and inclusiveness (Girl Scout History, n.d.). Though not specifically designed to foster youth leadership, many of the areas of focus in the program overlap with important aspects of leadership.

Though a positive sign that concern over youth leadership development is not a completely new phenomenon, limited research exists on the effects of the youth organizing programs in place (Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013). Nelson (2010) highlights the lack of research in youth leadership by recognizing that programs focusing on youth leadership development may not be fully effective. While these programs involve community service and character development, which are aspects of leadership, they do not always offer true leadership opportunities. According to Shah (2011), “Much of the existing research on youth organizing programs has focused on the community and political outcomes rather than on the processes of change and effects for the youth participants.” (as cited in Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013, p. 342).

Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen, (2006) also noted the lack of research on the process of youth leadership development that was able to combine both student development and leadership development together. While the existing knowledge on adult leadership provides a good foundation upon which to begin exploration, the depth of knowledge and studies on adult leadership far outshine that of youth leadership. Gould and Voelker (2012) were interested specifically in examining youth leadership in young athletes. “If you ask physical educators, coaches, and parents what psychological benefits are derived from youth sports participation, the development of important life skills are often cited” (Gould & Voelker, 2012 p. 38). The results of their 2012 study

showed that when leadership is intentionally focused upon extracurricular activities, including sports and physical activities, youth do learn to lead. With thousands of youth participating in athletics each year, the opportunities to expand the field of youth leadership knowledge are enormous.

One reason for the lack of literature on youth leadership development is the focus of research on leadership developmental experiences which occur later in life. While leadership experiences may appear more obvious during the adult years of life, it is quite probable that the majority of leaders had developmental leadership experiences earlier in their lives that they later relied upon during their adulthood (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). A leader is not simply grown in one day; each experience shapes an individual's personal leadership as he or she matures through life. However, little is found in the available studies that examine characteristics of youth leaders that inspire their peers to follow (Hollander, 1992; P. Ward & Ellis, 2008). During the adolescent years, relationships among youth change often and friendships shift as individuals mature. It is not uncommon for relational dynamics to ebb and flow among youth, but what is not known is why some youth choose to form leader-follower relationships with some of their peers and not others (Buhrmester, 1990; P. Ward & Ellis, 2008). The current literature fails to explain why some youth emerge as leaders and others do not. White (2004) noted that there was a lack of discussion of followers. It is of the utmost importance to ensure youth are taught the importance of developing strong, healthy relationships as a basis upon which to build their leadership development (White, 2004).

A study by Ward, Lundberg, Ellis, and Berrett (2010) used self-determination theory to explore followership among adolescents. The study aimed to examine leader

characteristics that influenced followership among adolescents. The results indicated that the students were most likely to follow their peers when the peer allowed individuals their freedom by creating a sense of autonomy, fostering a community of relationships among members, and developing feelings of competence (P. Ward, Lundberg, Ellis, & Berrett, 2010). Again, the importance of relationships appears in developing leadership among youth.

This void could be due in part to a shift in focus on leadership that is needed but has not yet occurred. When considering leadership in adulthood, the focus tends to be on issues more fitting for leadership at that level which may be dissimilar to the leadership focus needed at the youth level. Macneil (2006) suggests this by identifying the main concern of adult leadership as authority, while for youth leadership the focus is on ability. While authority consists of the adult leader using their voice, influence and decision-making power, the youth must instead rely on their skills, knowledge, talents, and influence. Although there may be some similarities between leadership at the adult level and leadership at the adolescent level, it is evident that stark contrasts also exist and should be acknowledged through deeper study.

Adult Leadership and Youth Leadership

Adult leadership theory does not always translate to youth populations. In fact, some adult theories may not only be a poor fit for youth leadership, but actually contradict the process of youth leadership (Mortensen et al., 2014). According to Macneil (2006),

The leadership development literature would suggest that a dual focus on ability (learning) and authority (doing) is crucial for successful leadership. By contrast, youth leadership development literature more often focuses

on learning about leadership, but not necessarily on the application of that learning to authentic, meaningful activities (p. 37).

While there is most certainly a difference in the current literature on youth leadership when compared to that of adult leadership, it is not yet known if the actual practices of adult leaders and youth leaders also differ (Macneil, 2006). By recognizing conceptually that youth lead in different ways than adult leaders (Kress, 2006), future research is poised to articulate the difference in actual practice between youth and adult leaders. Further research is needed into the actual practices of youth leaders, and this cannot be done without first changing the way they are viewed by society.

This may begin by first asking youth themselves how they view leadership. Mortensen et al. (2014) suggested that youth do not place as much emphasis on power, authority and specific traits as observed in adult leadership theories do. However, “without a solid understanding of what leadership means to youth, we cannot effectively engage youth in leadership development efforts that are meaningful and useful to them in their current lives” (Mortensen et al., 2014, p. 448). One reason for this lack of knowledge may be that many people view leadership as something that is primarily developed in adults. The “typical” view of a leader is often associated with the business world full of executives between the ages of twenty-five and forty (Nelson, 2010). While it is true that youth may not be able to compare to the corporate world in the years of experience they have, they do still have an advantage; a fresh outlook to offer society (Yip, Liu, & Nadel, 2006).

Because youth tend to lack the experience and authoritative power of adult leaders, they are forced to construct a different definition of leadership for themselves (Mortensen et al., 2014). “In most organizations people are granted authority to directly

influence others; they don't have to rely on the creative solutions they may have turned to as children. This greatly limits the possibilities for finding creative solutions to problems and can hinder an organization's progress" (Yip et al., 2006, p. 13). This is just one of many reasons why youth can bring valuable fresh perspectives to leadership roles. It also provides further support for the idea that the current literature available on adult leadership may not be relevant for those interested in further understanding youth leadership practice (Murphy & Johnson, 2011).

One hindrance that youth may face in their attempt to gain experience in the leadership field is the silo they are often contained to of being "leaders of tomorrow" (Kress, 2006). Although the term sounds promising, it can in fact prevent youth from having a voice in today's issues (MacNeil & McClean, 2006). With the Baby Boomer generation moving closer and closer toward retirement, communities are recognizing the importance of preparing young leaders for the future (McElravy & Hastings, 2014). By tackling the responsibility of growing leadership skills in today's youth, society ensures effective leadership for tomorrow (Seevers, Dormody, & Clason, 1995). But given the culture of the United States, young people have limited power within communities, so a future-orientation persists. Many adults do not know how to involve youth in meaningful leadership opportunities (Mortensen et al., 2014). Although they may offer seemingly positive remarks such as "Someday you'll be a good leader" this continues to imply leading is something that adults do, not youth (Nelson, 2010). Our society further instills this by upholding laws such as prohibiting youth from voting until the age of 18 and requiring school attendance until that age as well (Conner, Zaino, & Scarola, 2012). A change needs to take place in our culture according to Mortensen et al. (2014),

It is critical to involve youth as leaders now rather than waiting until they are adults. Youth have both the awareness and the desire to create change. . . If we can promote civic engagement and leadership in youth while they are youth, we may produce a larger cadre of adults prepared to be the stewards of our society in the future (p. 451).

Murphy and Johnson (2011) noted that there are some adult leadership qualities that youth leaders do not seem to demonstrate, including the ability to set a vision for the future, communicate to followers of rewards based on performance and problem solve through hierarchical organizational structures. Furthermore, the researchers also discuss that youth oftentimes find leadership roles in volunteer efforts while adults find leadership positions at work. Yip et al. (2006) believed that serving the community gives a superb context in which youth can further their leadership development. They learn to lead while overseeing service projects and focusing on the community. Because of this, youth leaders depend on different skills than their adult counterparts. These skills especially include learning influence tactics and gaining lessons from their experience (Yip et al., 2006).

Of course necessary leadership skills change throughout a leader's lifetime. The skills needed to lead an elementary school are vastly different than those needed by a CEO. Some leadership skills developed at a young age will become irrelevant throughout time. "Likewise, the specific leadership identities and self-regulatory capabilities that result in effective leadership are likely to change, depending on one's developmental stage" (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 466). As Macneil (2006) shared, the style of a middle school class president is remarkably different than that of a college student protesting a college's employment practice. However, Macneil also continued on to state that though oftentimes a thirty-nine-year-old individual may be viewed as the wiser

leader, it is not difficult to accept the possibility that a nineteen-year-old may in fact have more significant leadership experience than their elder. Because of this, “leadership scholars and youth leadership educators would not be well served to adopt a linear model of leadership development that is completely age dependent” (Macneil, 2006)

When asking youth directly for their opinions on the matter, 80% believed that there was a difference between adult and youth leadership, with the biggest differentiator being that of experience level (Yip et al., 2006). Yip highlights our society today as a main proponent in encouraging this thought process among youth. With the teaching of “practice makes perfect” and the concept that knowledge is gained through experience, youth learn the mentality that they automatically begin at the novice level and can only improve with time. There is no consideration of the innate leadership abilities that they may be born with, which could in fact set them ahead of many of their other peers and even elders.

When youth define leadership, they fail to mention the dominant themes seen in traditional adult literature of power and authority (Mortensen et al., 2014). Mortensen et al. stated that in order to truly evaluate the fit of adult leadership theories for youth, it must first be determined how youth describe their own leadership. The results showed that the youth focused on “commitment of character, dedication to one’s cause, and a firm belief in what is right are fundamental descriptors of a good leader.” McElravy and Hastings also argued that today’s youth may be distinct from earlier generations in the traits and behaviors utilized for effective leadership, contending, “The field of leadership would be prudent to study the “profile” of the youth leader so as to more accurately predict and plan for the leadership landscape in the coming decades” (2014, p. 135). In

their two studies of middle school student leaders, multiple and stepwise regression results revealed that trait-based emotional intelligence and cognitive and affective empathy emerged as the strongest and most reliable predictors of self-perceived leadership skills. (McElvray & Hastings, 2014).

Perhaps because they are not typically associated with holding official positions of leadership power as adults are, youth leaders have a different focus in their role. Rather than concentrating on the authority of leadership, youth leaders focus on the outcomes of leadership (Mortensen et al., 2014). This is demonstrated through their attention to the change they are able to effect rather than the control they have over others. Additionally, youth chose to emphasize that leadership is an “inclusive opportunity available to anyone who is motivated to make change happen” (Mortensen et al., 2014, p. 457).

The idea that no opportunity is too small to demonstrate leadership was repeatedly mentioned by youth in their descriptions of leadership. While traditional leadership theory focuses on leadership qualities, youth instead emphasized that anyone can make a difference and lead in their own way (Kress, 2006; Mortensen et al., 2014). This appears to broaden the scope of occasions for youth to demonstrate their leadership abilities. At the same time, it also minimizes the fact that some youth have natural talents, skills and personalities to be exceptional leaders (Kress, 2006). Moreover, this complicates the ability to define youth leadership and determine which factors are most important to include in youth leadership development programs. There is a danger, then, that society

can begin to view practically any activity in which youth engage as one qualifying for that of leadership (Klau, 2006).

The current study explores how youth leaders experience influence. It seeks to gain a better understanding of their view of leadership by going directly to the source, the youth leaders themselves. The way youth leaders use influence differs from the way adult leaders use influence. By learning from these leaders their own thoughts and opinions on leadership, youth leadership can be better understood and youth development programs tailored more effectively.

Youth Development

Our modern society continually presents today's youths with new challenges due to the complexity of our fast-track focused and global society (Steinebach, Steinebach, & Brendtro, 2011). During the adolescent years of a youth's life, they experience many transitions and often are faced with uncertainties about their beliefs and directions of their life (P. J. Ward & Ellis, 2008). While it may be a difficult time for youth as they experiment with their identity, it is also an exciting experience as they go through a process of self-discovery on their journey toward independence (Yip et al., 2006).

Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. Erikson (1982) discusses the identity crisis that adolescents face in his stages of psychosocial development, shown below in Figure 1. He defines the psychosocial aspect of adolescence as an identity crisis (Erikson, 1968).

	Infancy I	Early Childhood II	Play Age III	School Age IV	Adolescence V	Young Adulthood VI	Adulthood VII	Old Age VIII
1	Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust HOPE							
2		Autonomy vs. shame, Doubt WILL						
3			Initiative vs. Guilt PURPOSE					
4				Industry vs. Inferiority COMPETENCE				
5					Identity vs. Identity Confusion FIDELITY			
6						Intimacy vs. Isolation LOVE		
7							Generativity vs. Stagnation CARE	
8								Integrity vs. Despair, disgust WISDOM

Figure 1. Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Erikson's stages of psychosocial development argued that each stage is built upon the previous one. That is, each step an individual makes in their development is grounded in their experiences in the previous stages. "Stages of life remain throughout 'linked' to somatic processes, even as they remain dependent on the psychic processes of personality development and on the ethical power of the social process" (Erikson, 1982, p. 59).

"Each item of the vital personality to be discussed is systematically related to all others, and they all depend on the proper development in the proper sequence of each item" (Erikson, 1968, p. 93). Erikson argued that life develops first with a basic sense of trust as seen in the first stage of infancy. This then grows to autonomy, initiative, industry and identity confusion during the adolescent years. However, this is not to say that future components are not present in earlier stages (Erikson, 1968). Even infants can demonstrate a sense of autonomy in some situations. Still, infants primarily reside as dependent creatures needing a nurturer to care for them and provide for their needs. "Each stage becomes a crisis because incipient growth and awareness function together with a shift in instinctual energy and yes also cause a specific vulnerability in that part." (Erikson, 1968, p. 95). Because of this, it can be difficult to determine if a child is to be considered strong or weak during a particular stage. Growth always involves challenges and the individual must learn to draw strength from them and see each potential crisis as furthering their steps (Erikson, 1968).

There exists a large variety of programs aimed at helping youth through these developmental years, and in the 21st century these programs are turning their focus especially toward leadership training (Seever et al., 1995). Kress described this shift further,

While no one has suggested turning over the entire effort of the youth development field to the purpose of developing leaders, the distinction between the two endeavors is often blurred, which, coupled with the values of our culture, can create a pattern of effort that favor young leaders and program that focus on developing youth leaders and not primarily on developing youth (2006, p. 50) .

While program directors and researchers work to determine the differences and connections between “youth development” in a general sense, and a more narrow aspect of “youth leadership development”, other terms such as “citizenship” and “character development” are also shown to be connected to both of these areas (Kress, 2006). Community leaders are encouraging youth program directors to consider what experiences will engage the “whole youth” (Oden, 1995).

It appears that the adolescence development stage is increasingly considered an ideal time for leadership development. It is possible that youth are more able to shape their behavior, personality and skills than adults (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Nelson (2010) shared that his focus of youth leadership was on the age group of eight through twelve as it has been suggested that character is already in place by the age of fourteen. Of course, “What constitutes leadership evolves with age” (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 465) and Murphy and Johnson outlined the four main developmental stages of human leadership development in the table below (2011, p. 466).

Table 1

Leadership Tasks and Skills for Youth

Age range	New leadership tasks and skills
Preschool years (ages 2-5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing others • Getting others to like you • Communicating wishes • Increased need for emotional intelligence in interactions with others (reading the emotions of others, and delaying gratification)
Elementary school (ages 6-11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating others in teams • Early school leadership tasks (e.g., classroom monitor, or teacher's helper) • Fundraising (e.g., selling candy, etc.) • Public speaking to express ideas • Increased need for social intelligence in interactions with others (understanding social situations and acting appropriately)
Middle school-early adolescence (ages 12-14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating teams for fundraising or students projects • Self-management (e.g. goal setting, self-observation & evaluation) • Serving in elected office and other student government activities • Public speaking as a leader to gain support for a cause
High school-late adolescence (ages 15-19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing complex projects • Motivating team members • Organizational skills required by after-school or summer jobs • Working with others to complete a work product in after-school or summer jobs
College-young adulthood (ages 19-22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing grassroots organizations • Complex supervisory skills required during internships • Servings as a leader with multiple constituents

The tasks important at an earlier age are still appropriate at older ages. The tasks listed for older ages are those more unique to that developmental stage.

Note. Adapted from "The benefits of a long-lens approach to leader development: Understand the seeds of leadership," by S.E. Murphy and S.K. Johnson, 2011, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22, p. 466. Copyright 2011 by Elsevier, Inc.

It can be difficult to distinguish between the goals of developing youth and developing youth leaders. There may be many overlapping objectives in the two areas. However, when looking at a more focused level, some clarity is gained between the two. “In the field of youth development, just as with youth leadership, it is generally understood that programs are designed to build a set of core competencies needed to participate successfully in adolescent and adult life” (Kress, 2006, p. 46). Developing youth leadership qualities may evolve out of their experiences as they mature, however, youth development as a whole is not limited to focusing solely on producing tomorrow’s leaders.

The concept that experiences play a large role in youth development is key to realizing that not every aspect of leadership can be taught to youth (Kress, 2006). These experiences can have both positive and negative effects. Research has indicated that children who experience rejection by their peers develop problems not only in school, but in areas that also extend to their everyday life, such as substance abuse, trouble with the law and psychological suffering (Petrides, Sangareau, Furnham, & Frederickson, 2006).

Today’s vocabulary contains a multitude of phrases that seem to indicate youths’ desires to be accepted by their peers, including terms such as “adolescent subculture” and “youth culture” (Smith, 1985). Youth hear these phrases and believe there is a world unique to them as adolescents and they must do whatever it takes to be a part of that world. They grow to depend upon their peers (Steinebach et al., 2011). Positive Peer Culture (PPC) is an approach developed by Vorrath and Brendtro in 1985 to focus on strengths and build an environment of respect among peers, in effect preventing the negative pressures many youth face (Steinebach et al., 2011). Other terms such as “youth

empowerment” have a positive connotation but recommend giving complete power and responsibility to youth who are often not ready to accept the full responsibility (Kress, 2006).

This power of peers among youth has been examined in aiding the recovery of youth battling with substance abuse. Results revealed that support from a peer is distinctly different than that of treatment or therapy (Karakos, 2014). Peer-based recovery programs are created with the thought that youth have the ability to empathize with peers who are experiencing similar challenges and they are able to encourage one another to the extent that improved outcomes are seen (Karakos, 2014). There are similar results supporting a negative side as well, that just as youth can impact one another in recovering from difficult challenges, they can also have effects of supporting each other in dropping out of school and becoming involved in criminal activities (Petrides et al., 2006).

When a peer group forms its own culture, it can take on its own shape and movements, including setting the standard of what the youth consider to be acceptable behavior (Dipietro & McGloin, 2012). Peers hold a great amount of influence over one another as it is during this stage of life that feelings of self-consciousness can dominate as youth experiment with different identities in an attempt to discover who they are (Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013). Youth may experiment with negative behaviors in an effort to conform to their peers and if those behaviors are accepted by the group, the peers experience a sense of social reward (Dipietro & McGloin, 2012).

Youth value respect and being recognized as role models by adults; this may in turn have an effect on the way they view themselves. In fact, adults who yield power or status and support peers may have a strong influence on them (Schwartz & Suyemoto,

2013). But how to leverage this in youth development programs can be a difficult task. Determining a measurement for youth engagement is a challenge. Engagement is felt through thoughts, feelings and behaviors, which are difficult to use as indicators of measurement (Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, & Hughes, 2010b). The Centre for Excellence on Youth Engagement offers the following definition of youth engagement as the,

Meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself. The kind of activity in which the youth is engaged can be almost anything...and it can occur in almost any kind of setting.' Furthermore, it is accepted that engagement will look different for different youth, even with respect to the same activity (Crooks et al., 2010, p. 161).

Moreover, the combination of activities in which youth are involved may affect their development (Agans & Geldhof, 2012). One such example is that of youth sports. Participation in athletics has demonstrated a chance of developmental experiences related to initiative taking and emotional regulation, however, it is also associated with higher stress levels than some other activities (Agans & Geldhof, 2012). When youth are given opportunities to experience situations in which they are in control, in which they have autonomy, it gives them a chance to exercise their influence (Kress, 2006). It is true that leadership skills may develop as a result of this experience, but that is only one result out of many possibilities.

It may not be hard for adults to think of individuals commonly recognized by society as "leaders." Instead, the more difficult task remains in determining the commonalities among good leaders (Kress, 2006). The same can be said of discussing youth development. While it may be a large task to define such a general term, most individuals can offer examples of development programs in which they have been

involved, despite the fact they may not be able to draw connections between the good ones (Kress, 2006).

Youth Leadership Development Programs

When narrowing the focus of youth development to specifically youth leadership, the area is still quite general (Klau, 2006b). One approach to consider when examining this field is to ask youth directly how they would describe the term “leadership.” This could greatly aid in furthering the development of future leaders by directly aligning the youth leadership development programs with the very definitions of leadership that youth consider to be most prevalent (Mortensen et al., 2014). Moreover, “a framework of leader development that delineates what is learned before one reaches adulthood can improve our understanding of leadership and leader development” (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 467). Past research in this field has attempted to define youth leadership as the actions demonstrated by the youth or the personal characteristics they possess (Libby & Sedonaen, 1989). However, the educational opportunities for youth to learn about developing their leadership often comes from extracurricular activities and programs.

There are many programs in existence aimed at developing leadership skills among today’s youth. Many of these programs do succeed in involving youth in their communities and these programs gather helpful information, but it is still unknown exactly what to do with the information they now have.

The Uniting Our Nations Peer Mentoring program focuses on developing positive relationships between younger students and peer mentors from higher grades (Crooks et al., 2010a). The pairs meet once a week during their school lunch break and participate in a variety of activities together. According to Crooks et al., (2010) the mentors are

selected based on their academic excellence demonstrating their positive ability to be a positive role model.

Another similar program is the Rotary Youth Leadership Program, which has determined the areas of leadership they consider most crucial and have focused on educating youth in these areas. These include “the capacity to analyze personal strengths and weaknesses, align others toward a common vision, and maintain commitment to a course of action” (Yip, Liu, & Nadel, 2006, p. 12). Facilitating Leadership in Youth (FLY) provides yet another opportunity for youth to develop their leadership skills. FLY is aimed at serving one of Washington D.C.’s poor regions by supporting the youth in that area to fulfill their educational goals, maximize their strengths and grow in their role as a leader (Larson Detzler, Van Liew, Dorward, Jenkins, & Teslicko, 2007).

Nebraska Human Resources Institute (NHRI) is another program specializing in youth leadership development. By matching young potential leaders, identified by their teachers as having the capacity of high potential, with college student leaders, a mentoring relationship takes place. The college student is a counselor to the junior counselor who may fall anywhere in age from six years old to 18 years of age. NHRI supports a strengths-based approach helping a child grow by focusing on their strengths. With an emphasis on the importance of building positive relationships, the NHRI counselor spends one-on-one time mentoring their junior counselor over the course of their partnership (NHRI: Investing in Leadership Potential, n.d.)

FLY operates year round supporting youth between the ages of nine and 18. The program can accept up to 45 individuals at once and all participants come from families whose income levels are a minimum of 200% below the poverty line. 98% of the youth

do not have their father present at home (Larson Detzler et al., 2007, p. 110). FLY offers its youth the opportunity to play an active role in the decision-making process for the different activities within the program. In this way, it helps to build their leadership skills. When the youth grow older, they are also involved in public speaking, leading meetings attending conferences and training other local teens (Larson Detzler et al., 2007, p. 111). FLY ensures that its participants are not only gaining valuable leadership skills, but also giving back to their communities by designing plans for future development. This includes completing community vision exercises to brainstorm improvements that could be made in their local community to raise safety levels and allows citizens to feel respected and protected.

This approach to encouraging youth to make a difference in their own community appears as a common theme among many youth leadership programs. The city of Philadelphia turned to their youth in the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU) for opinions on educational policy (Conner et al., 2012). Other more prominent programs include Boy Scouts, 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA) which hold a long tradition of including leadership training in their curriculum (Carter & Spotanski, 1989). In fact, one of the goals of FFA since its beginning in 1928 has been to develop agricultural leadership skills (Wingenbach & Kahler, 1997). Because of the renowned reputations of these programs, many researchers have studied the development of youth leadership within the setting of 4-H and FFA (Hastings, Human, & Bell, 2011).

However, the data from these studies still does not fill the void of information needed on youth leadership development. Some studies have been dedicated to determining predictors of youth leadership skills development among FFA members

(Dormody & Seevers, 1993), while others aim to develop a reliable scale to measure whether such programs are truly developing the youth leaders (Seevers et al., 1995). Data has produced positive results that the 4-H program, for instance, is successful at building leadership skills in youth (Flynn, Igo, & Frich, 2009). However, these studies have failed to consider the role that influence plays among young leaders.

Youth Leadership Development

Many students are not introduced to any sort of leadership course prior to entering college (Carter & Spotanski, 1989). In fact, upon entering college, most students view leadership in a traditional hierarchy, similar to trait, behavior and situational theories of leadership (Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Owen, & Osteen, 2006). College students are not recognizing the difference between the words “leader” and “leadership” but instead consider them as one (Komives et al., 2006). In fact, it is possible to develop the opinion that instead of learning leadership, students are only being taught about leadership. While they are growing in their knowledge of leadership, they are limited without the opportunity for leadership practice (Macneil, 2006).

Understanding the meaning of youth leadership and what it means for youth development can be a complicated task (Libby & Sedonaen, 1989). In order to truly develop leadership skills, youth must engage in opportunities in which they are offered the chance to apply what they have learned from textbooks (Komives et al., 2006). It is entirely possible, even at the graduate level, for a student to receive their degree, accompanied with excellent evaluations, yet still not have the faintest idea of how to lead people (Carter & Spotanski, 1989).

There is a significant difference between learning about leadership and learning leadership. Learning leadership happens experientially, through involvement in

opportunities to practice the skills, experiment with approaches, and try on the roles. . . It means we must create opportunities for young people to do more than hear stories of great leadership or participate in skills building activities (MacNeil & McClean, 2006, p. 99).

One reason that the field of youth leadership development has been growing is that it is seen as a tool to prevent youth from engaging in negative behaviors and activities (Macneil, 2006). But there is an entire other side of youth leadership development to be considered as well. Community organizations are becoming more and more open to the idea that youth can add a great deal of benefit in leadership efforts for their projects. This recognition has been instrumental in changing the public view of youth as problems to be contained to transforming it into viewing them instead as assets (Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013). The principle of positive youth development (PYD) has also helped society to realize the positive attributes that youth have to offer as leaders (Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013). This has aided youth in the defeat of the barrier of “adulthood,” that is the view that youth are too young, inexperienced and incapable to lead (Conner et al., 2012). Youth are becoming actively involved in more and more programs each day that benefit their local communities, and the public opinion is continuing to sway in the direction that recognizes the enormous value youth have to add (Macneil, 2006).

Does this mean that our society is drastically changing policies in the way youth are allowed to be involved? Not necessarily. Instead, opportunities that have traditionally been viewed as times of building the community or developing a young person’s character are now more fully being recognized for what they truly are: examples of youth effectively leading (Libby et al., 2006).

Another angle to further examine youth leadership development is to study the youth currently serving as leaders. As Macneil asked, “What are the outcomes of those contexts and processes in which you not only are learning about leadership and developing leadership skills and knowledge, but also are truly practicing leadership by influencing and affecting individuals, organizations and communities?” (2006, p. 40). In general, the research supports a connection between youth leadership activities and the development of leadership skills (Dormody & Seevers, 1993). Due to the vast amount of leadership studies that have been conducted with agricultural programs such as 4-H and FFA, research shows that students at the secondary level can in fact increase their leadership skills by participating in different leadership organizations and activities, both in school and the community. In particular, the skills that have shown growth as a result of these programs include communication, decision making, teamwork, interpersonal relations, learning, self-management and self-understanding (Wingenbach & Kahler, 1997).

4-H and FFA are not the only extra-curricular programs in which youth leadership development has been studied. In their 2012 study on youth leadership development in athletics, Gould and Voelker drew three main conclusions: “(1) youth leadership, like that in adults, is dynamic in nature, such that it involves a complex and flexible interaction between the person, the situation and his or her followers; (2) youth leadership is learned in phases and stages; and (3) youths can and do learn to lead if leadership is intentionally developed through extracurricular activities, including sport and physical activities” (p. 39). Other approaches, like the youth-in-governance approach, chooses to focus not only on programs that help develop leadership skills, but also examine opportunities in which

youth can practice their leadership (MacNeil & McClean, 2006). Regrettably, communities do not always fully take advantage of the potential youth offer (Mortensen et al., 2014).

There is further value then in maintaining an active pipeline of youth leaders who care about their communities (Conner et al., 2012). Youth do not simply get up one morning and decide that they are now a leader. Instead, the developmental process is ever growing as they learn about their leadership abilities and also shape their own identity in their process of maturing to adulthood (Yip et al., 2006). This process is self-reinforcing and as the youth grows in their confidence to lead their likelihood to then engage in leadership experiences also increases (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). “Learning to lead is multifaceted. Youths learn through observational and experiential learning, mentorship, trial and error, and formal education” (Gould & Voelker, 2012, p. 40). For example, youth involved in civic actions had an effect not only on the views of others in regard to the young individual, but also in the way that youth viewed their own abilities (Schwartz & Suyemoto, 2013). Murphy and Johnson explained that leadership opportunities given early in life build a foundation upon which future leadership development continues to grow (2011). Their reasoning for this phenomenon is twofold, including the larger ability that exists at a younger age for this development to occur and the self-reinforcing nature of leader development (2011, p. 459).

Results also showed that youth generally enjoy the leadership opportunities they are given when they are properly supported through them (Crooks et al., 2010b). This is a positive sign to see, as oftentimes the connection made between youth leadership education and the actual needs of society’s youth is not completely accurate (Kress,

2006). Too often, youth find themselves learning something in the classroom that does not practically translate into the needs of leading in authentic situations. As Kress described the situation, “Too frequently, didactic methods are employed to teach an assortment of skills related to leadership in isolation from an experience of real influence” (Kress, 2006, p. 52). Clearly, the construct of youth leadership involves many aspects beyond education, including experiences, backgrounds, and attitudes (Wingenbach & Kahler, 1997).

Hastings, Barrett, Barbuto, and Bell conducted a study in 2011 considering how youth leaders develop through community engagement. This research differed in the fact it combined a conceptual framework of both social capital and sense of community with a study of youth development. Results revealed that the “young leaders in the study developed in the context of community and had success exerting influence upon their community as a result of their experience” (Hastings et al., 2011). While the reality is that most young leaders experience much of their development through the school context, the real-world context proves to be valuable. Additionally, when the community takes the time to develop young leaders, they could be creating an influential subgroup, as the youth leaders in the study demonstrated significant influential power (Hastings et al., 2011). .

While leadership opportunities are good, more is needed than to simply put the young person in that position. After all, choosing to participate in sports does not immediately produce leadership in youth (Gould & Voelker, 2012). There is a step that needs to be taken prior to this, and that is to properly identify leadership potential among young people (Kress, 2006). In fact, this can be started at a very young age in a child’s

life. In a 2010 study of young leaders, results revealed that if a child shows leadership aptitude by the age of ten, he or she is “sufficiently developed cognitively to learn many of the sophisticated social skills required in leadership, such as team building, problem solving, and conflict resolution” (Nelson, 2010b). The results from Nelson’s research revealed that the children who demonstrated this leadership aptitude enjoyed learning about leadership more than those who did not. This factor of enjoying the learning process was significant because not many young leaders find extrinsic benefits from leadership roles (Nelson, 2010b). Because of this, it is important they instead experience intrinsic satisfaction from their involvement if we hope to see them continue in their leadership endeavors.

Leadership is a life skill that may now be more important than ever for today’s youth to develop (Gould & Voelker, 2012). Youth only remain young for a limited duration of time. The very nature of youth leadership development is encompassed by the fact that there is a constant turnover of youth (Conner et al., 2012). It is important to keep up with the changing times by ensuring that we truly understand how young people view youth leadership, that young leadership potential is identified, and that youth are given the opportunity to express this potential through real leadership positions. Only then will we continue to have capable leaders for our future.

Qualities of Leadership

Although many traditional adult leadership theories attempt to determine the qualities needed to create an effective leader among adults, this knowledge is limited in youth leadership studies. With the multitude of youth leadership development programs in existence, it would be most beneficial to the program staff to know in which direction

they should focus their time and energy. This could be done through the ability to identify youth with qualities likely to foster followership among their peers (Ward & Ellis, 2008).

In their study to determine youth leadership characteristics, results revealed that adolescents choose to follow leaders who demonstrate an idealized influence. Idealized influence is not a method of persuasion, rather leaders use it to entreaty themselves to their followers' personal values and identities (Ward & Ellis, 2008).

In addition to idealized influence, results also showed high emotional intelligence as a trait among young leaders. In a 2006 study conducted by Petrides, Sangareau, Furnham, and Frederickson, students were asked to nominate their classmates who fit the seven behaviors on the trait emotional intelligence questionnaire. Students were given the questionnaire to complete and teachers were asked to nominate students as well. Results revealed that students with a high level of emotional intelligence on the questionnaire also received more nominations for their "cooperation" and "leadership" than their classmates who scored lower. Not only were the students with high emotional intelligence shown to have higher levels of cooperation and leadership, they were also recognized for being less disruptive, aggressive and dependent. McElravy and Hastings's 2014 study revealed that youth leaders with higher emotional intelligence tended to perceive themselves as having higher leadership skills.

Another important quality to youth as they select their leaders is that of competency, including task organization, goal setting, solicitation of opinions and generation of new ideas (Edwards, 1994; Kress, 2006). In addition, popularity and attractiveness also appeared as factors of leadership selection, while thoughtfulness and sensitivity did not. Social status and social support proved a dominant factor in predicting

followership among peers (P. Ward & Ellis, 2008). So while young leaders may not possess official titles of authority, they have other ways to measure the standing of their peers. Youth indicated that a leader's character was of utmost importance (Kress, 2006), that they must be willing to do the right thing at all times, regardless of the situation (Mortensen et al., 2014). To build upon the importance of the leader's character, results revealed that youth also expected their leaders to be seen as role models, willing to help those in need (Mortensen et al., 2014).

Extraversion also proved to have significant correlation with self-perceived leadership skills (McElravy & Hastings, 2014). However, the results of McElravy and Hastings (2014) study revealed that personality was neither a significant nor reliable predictor of youth leadership life skills. Soto, John, Gosling, and Potter, (2011), examined the relationship between age trends and personality traits. Trends indicated that an adolescent scored negatively on agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion and openness. However, individuals between the ages of 20 and 65 demonstrated a definite upward trend in these personality factors. Results indicated that personality factors were not accurate predictors of self-perceived leadership skills (Soto, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2011). During adolescence, youth do not have a stable personality and there are too many changes encountered during the period to accurately predict a connection with leadership skills (Soto, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2011).

Youth indicated the importance of listening to and helping others in need. Again, it is evident that youth do not choose to focus as much on specific character traits in leaders as much as they do on the need to support one another and achieve the purpose of their leadership role (Mortensen et al., 2014). While many contend that all youth are

prospective leaders, this conclusion is often determined based on one simply possessing influence (Kress, 2006). As Edwards determined in his 1994 study,

Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982) found that controversial children, as well as popular children, received nominations as leaders, with the dimension of cooperation a defining factor in distinguishing popular children. Because the relationship between sociometric status and leadership is likely to vary as a function of the task environment and the source of information (peer nominations, teacher ratings, etc.), additional research is required to clarify the qualities, if any, that children consistently attribute to the leadership role (p. 921).

Influence

Peer influence can be a difficult term to define. Dipietro and McGloin, described it as "normative influence and situation inducements provide by informal socializing with peers- two of the well-substantiated processes of peer influence" (2012, p. 713). Another aspect to consider is that of followership, which can be defined as "a voluntary desire to affiliate with and be influenced by another individual in highly significant ways that are not necessarily the follower's preference" (Ward & Ellis, 2008, p. 79). Followers are described as those who allow themselves to be influenced in some form by another. However, the question still remains of what this influence looks like among youth leaders.

Peer influence is a generic term that can mean many things to many individuals (Smith, 1985). One aspect that is often confused for influence is that of peer pressure. It is a common assumption that all youth will experience peer pressure at some point in their lives. It is reasonable to adopt the perspective that youth with leadership abilities will have a larger amount of peer pressure to exert (Phelps & Hubler, 2006). Peer pressure is one reason why youth choose to follow some individuals and not others. Other motives may also include seeking popularity and validation from peers (Ward & Ellis,

2008). During adolescent years when youth are experiencing many shifts in their thinking and beliefs, the support they receive from their peers grows in its importance. When they hear their peers encouraging them by saying “‘you can make it’ . . . ‘cause I’m going through the exact same thing.’” it is encouraging and reassures them that they are not alone (Karakos, 2014).

Phels and Hubler (2006) argued that whoever stands to benefit most from a situation often becomes the dominator of the group’s behavior. Furthermore, Phelps and Hubler emphasized when the dominant individual also holds a leadership position, the impact on the group is even greater. This is not to say that an official leadership title is needed in order to possess power or influence. As Alinsky (1987, 1946, p. 126) highlighted in Conner et al., (2012) “‘The first rule of power tactics’ is that ‘power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have.’” (p. 568). For instance, elementary school children do not often hold positions of power. However, Murphy and Johnson (2011) drew attention to Bass and Bass’s 2008 study of primary school-aged children. Bass and Bass determined that the children, young though they were, developed into leaders because of their desire to influence others. Shin et al., further explained that youth develop social power in order to influence not only their peers, but their teachers as well (as cited in Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Murphy and Johnson (2011) also noted that the leader’s behaviors change as the youth experiment with different leader identities when influencing their peers. For many, the adolescent years are a time when youth look for new peer leaders to follow and allow these young leaders to have a significant amount of influence over their attitudes and actions (P. Ward & Ellis, 2008). The “popular” youth are often the individuals who are especially influential among their peers (Karakos,

2014). Young leaders also have the ability to use their influence in both positive and negative ways among their peers, affecting others' attitudes, values and behaviors (P. Ward & Ellis, 2008).

In Warr's 2002 study, he noted that this influence among peers peaks particularly high during adolescent years (as cited in Smith, 1985). This is chiefly because it is during this time that youth are attempting to create their own unique identity and assert their independence from their parents (Smith, 1985).

Karakos conducted a study in 2014 examining how peers influence each other in drug recovery high schools, considering both positive and negative aspects of peer influence. It was determined that peer influence often plays a key role, both in beginning substance abuse and then recovering from the addiction. While it may be peers that influenced these youth to begin using drugs in the first place, the research also indicated that youth can have a positive influence throughout the stages of drug addiction. It becomes even more critical to gain a deeper understanding of peer influence in knowing that it can be used in such powerful ways, both good and bad.

Whether society chooses to recognize it or not, it remains a fact that youth demonstrate leadership behaviors through their influence, with or without an official leadership title. Moreover, youth are becoming dependent upon this influence ability since they oftentimes do not have any sanctioned power (Yip et al., 2006). In their 2011 study of youth leadership development and community engagement, Hastings, Barrett, Barbuto and Bell offered the view that youth leaders may be our community's most influential group. As stated by Hastings et al., "The young leaders in the study developed in the context of the community and had success exerting influence upon their

community as a result of their experience” (2011, p 25). Nelson (2010) acknowledged the importance of this topic by stressing that teachers need to learn how to identify “young influencers” and create an environment in their classrooms that welcome leader emergence.

Although influence may be a powerful aspect of youth leadership, the challenge remains in finding a way to quantify it. Conner et al., (2012) suggested a method to measure influence through looking at ways students lead at schools. Student Councils often create campaigns to accomplish changes, such as receiving additional books, and the success of the campaign can indicate the level of influence possessed by the students. As one administrator described it, “the organization is widely viewed as having an ‘important’ and ‘strong voice,’ which influence educational policy in the city” (Conner et al., 2012, p. 570). Both schools and communities are beginning to recognize influential youth as leaders.

Service also provides an excellent context for youth leadership development in which the young people are given the opportunity to directly impact the community in which they live. This helps not only in giving them exposure to an aspect of leading through service, but also provides the means by which they can identify with a local need and lead in a practical way (Yip, 2006).

Oftentimes, youth are viewed as individuals who need a leader, and it is assumed that that leader must be an adult. However, what has failed to be taken into account are the benefits that today’s youth can provide back to society right here and now, not only once they reached adult age. Youth can be just as influential as adults. As Macneil (2006)

stated in an article examining adult leadership theories and looking at their application to youth leadership development,

...These approaches don't fully capitalize on the power and potential of youth leadership to benefit not only the youth participants but also the organization and communities in which young people practice leadership. Some youth development and leadership researchers suggest a different framework, one that focuses on the role of you as problem solvers, not problems to be solved. Youth as assets to communities, not liabilities (Macneil, 2006, p. 31).

Summary

Although the literature on youth leadership development is beginning to grow, there is still much left to be discovered. Very little literature exists on the way young leaders describe influence. Oftentimes, leaders in their early years are not given the official title of a leadership position, and so must depend instead on their influence to accomplish leading. This study examines influence among youth leaders by gaining descriptions from the young leaders themselves.

Society today is full of youth influencing and leading each other on a daily basis. It is of utmost importance to take the time to invest in them at an early age so they can begin to apply their talents in a positive way and realize that regardless of their position, they each have the opportunity to lead. By learning directly from these youth leaders how they use influence, a better understanding of the similarities and difference between how adult leaders use influence and youth leaders use influence can be attained. This knowledge will provide helpful insight into the minds of youth leaders and what they value. Applying this understanding will in turn improve youth leadership development programs and ensure these leaders are being invested in through the most effective methods possible and through ways that resonate directly with them.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how youth leaders experienced influence. Chapter 3 outlines the approach and design rationale, describes the participants as well as the intervention and explicitly details the methods used in each phase to address the aforementioned study purpose. The phenomenological design behind this study used semi-structured interviews with youth leaders to explore youths' definitions of influence, behaviors they consider to be influential, and strategies of using influence in youth leadership roles.

Approach and Rationale

The current study utilized a qualitative approach, which is a procedure for better understanding a human or social problem to answer particular research questions (Creswell, 2014). The rationale for using qualitative data was to provide a more complete portrait of the role influence plays among youth leaders. By collecting the perspectives of youth, the participant voice was used to provide an accurate representation of their experience with influence.

The qualitative researcher intended to gain an understanding of the situation from the viewpoint of the participants (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). While quantitative research turns much of its focus toward statistical analysis, qualitative research involves interviews or observations of humans in social settings (Lichman, 2010). According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), "Qualitative researchers are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings of the participants

themselves attribute to these interactions. . . Thus, qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (p. 2).

When researching individual lived experiences, a research strategy to employ is that of interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). To address the research questions best, the researcher aimed to gather a full description of the participants’ leadership experiences and personal use of influence. Participants must be given the freedom to fully express their life stories with the ability to provide any supporting information that is needed for better understanding. Qualitative research allows a flexible approach with a semi-structured interview. In order to allow the participants to share their opinions in their own words, open-ended questions will be used in the interviews (Roulston, 2010), allowing the participants to answer questions in their own words and provide additional information as appropriate. For the current study, semi-structured interviews were used, which offered a standard set of questions for consistency among participants, but allowed the researcher to follow up with probe questions as appropriate.

In the data collection process, qualitative phenomenological methods were used through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with each participant. Each of these interviews was audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The next step of the research process was coding the transcripts and developing themes from the coding. This research process is outlined in figures 2 and 3 below.

Phase 1	Phase 2
Qualitative Data Collection	Qualitative Data Analysis
Procedure: Semi-structured, 1x1 interviews with NHRI junior counselors	Procedure: Coding and theme development
Product: Transcripts	Product: Themes to explain the role of influence among youth leaders

Figure 1. Research Process

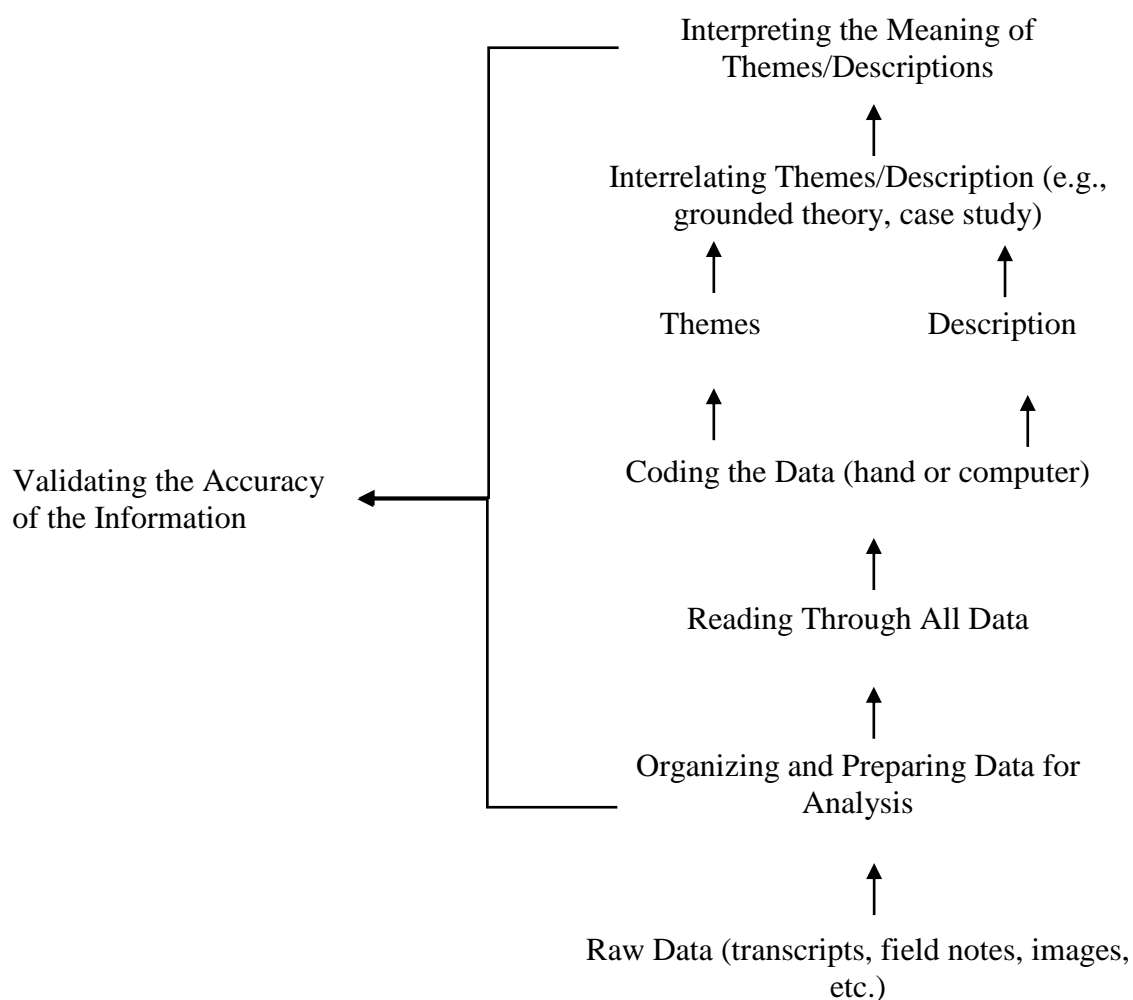


Figure 2. Data Analysis for Qualitative Research (Creswell, 2014, p. 197).

Research Questions

“Qualitative research questions tend to focus on the explorations of behavior or social organization, of the many factors that might contribute to these, and of their meaning to the study population” (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012, p. 79). There are two main purposes that the research questions serve in a study: to help focus the study on the actual goals and to offer guidance for conducting the research (Maxwell, 2009).

The grand tour question driving this study was: How do young leaders experience influence? Four sub-questions were used:

1. How do youth leaders define influence?
2. What behaviors do youth leaders consider influential?
3. When do young leaders feel they are being influenced?
4. When do young leaders consider themselves the most influential?

Participants

According to Maxwell (2009), “In a qualitative study, you are interested not only in the physical events and behavior taking place, but also in how the participants in your study make sense of these and how their understandings influence their behavior (p. 221).” All participants for the current study were the Junior Counselors of the Nebraska Human Resources Institute in 2015. Participants for this study were purposely selected based on their involvement in the program called Nebraska Human Resources Institute (NHRI), a leadership development program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). In NHRI, college students attending UNL are selected for participation on the basis of demonstrating possession of significant “human relations capital.” These students were selected due to their demonstrated ability to influence the thoughts,

feelings and behaviors of others in a positive manner. Once chosen, these UNL students are then assigned an identified young leader (K-12) in the Lincoln Public Schools system who also shows significant “human relations capital” and is selected to participate as a junior counselor. The two individuals form a partnership for the college student to mentor the junior counselor. Typically, there are approximately 130 college student leaders involved in NHRI who are paired with 130 young leaders (K-12) in Lincoln Public Schools. The current study focused on the young leaders involved in NHRI, called junior counselors.

Sampling procedure. This study was open to NHRI junior counselors, in grades five through 12, who were interested in participating. Students selected to be junior counselors at NHRI are young leaders (K-12) enrolled in the Lincoln Public Schools system. They are nominated by their teachers for their outstanding leadership abilities. The researcher presented the current study opportunity at group meetings for the NHRI counselors. Counselors who thought their junior counselor may be interested in participating were provided further information and contacted by the researcher in follow up to the meeting. Once the counselor indicated that their junior counselor was open to participating and that the parents of the junior counselor had approved the interview, the researcher provided a parental consent form to be signed. At the same time, a meeting time for the interview was also arranged with the NHRI counselor and junior counselor.

Informed consent and assent were obtained from all participants and their parents. Participants were informed that the data collected from them was held confidentially and reported anonymously. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before conducting the study (see Appendix B).

Intervention

As discussed previously, intervention participants were selected based on their participation in a program called the Nebraska Human Resources Institute (NHRI), a leadership development program at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln (UNL). NHRI was founded in 1949. The founders, Dr. William Hall and Dr. Donald Clifton, were among the pioneers in the field of positive psychology. The program has been in place for over 60 years partnering college students with young leaders (K-12) in mentoring relationships. Below are stated the NHRI's mission and basic assumptions:

Mission:

- To **Discover** individuals with exceptional capacity to positively influence the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of others
- To **Explore** the dimensions of human leaders and ways this potential can be maximized
- To **Develop** leadership potential through one-to-one investment relationships
- To **Direct** developed leadership toward reinvestment in others
- To **Document** positive leadership development
- And to **Communicate** this information

Basic Assumptions:

- The greatest resource is the human resource
- Establishing positive human relationships is the best way to develop this resource
- Positive human relationships are maximized when one individual with considerable human relations capital invests in another
- Investment in human relationships nourishes positive leadership development

College students selected for this program (called “counselors”) are matched with selected K-12 students (called “junior counselors”) based on common interests. The pair meet weekly for three years. The goal for the counselor is to identify leadership talents within their junior counselor and to develop those leadership capacities by creating situations in which to capitalize on those capacities. For example, if a counselor observes the junior counselor has a strong ability to “think outside the box” they may challenge the

junior counselor by presenting them with tough problems that require resourceful thinking. The overall objective of the partnership is for the junior counselor to effectively grow in their abilities to make a difference in others' lives. By the counselor investing in their junior counselor, the plan is for the junior counselor to then invest in others and create a continuous cycle.

Based on the age or school of the junior counselors, "projects" are formed by grouping the students together. Each project conducts a monthly retreat with their junior counselors to examine positive psychology concepts. Typically, the project volunteers in a community reinvestment project or participate in a program prepared by the counselors.

The overall goal of NHRI is to see the positive relationships result in re-investment in others in both the counselor and counselee's lives. Because of this program's focus on developing the leadership potential of youth, the participants for this study were selected from NHRI. Each participant has already been selected for their leadership potential and spends time actively learning more about leadership. Though the program does not focus specifically on the role of influence in youth leadership, the participants all possess a basic knowledge of what it means to be a leader from their own personal experiences.

Qualitative Research Strategy

Phenomenology. Within the field of qualitative research, a variety of approaches to study have emerged: case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative and phenomenology (Creswell, 2014). A phenomenological design was used for collecting and analyzing data in this qualitative study. Phenomenology was first introduced by Edmund Husserl and was received with much popularity in Europe. It was in later years

that it spread to the rest of the world as well (Lichman, 2010; King & Horrocks, 2010).

A phenomenological approach is taken to better understand and describe the personal experiences of individuals who have been involved in a specific phenomenon (Lichman, 2010). The goal is to comprehend what a certain experience means for the participants involved (Moustakas, 1994).

The phenomenological method is in line with not only the qualitative approach but also the constructivist worldview. Creswell explained the goal of the constructivist worldview “to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (2014, p. 8). He added that the questions should be as open ended as possible and researchers need to acknowledge that their own personal experiences will shape their interpretations of the data. With this approach, the researcher aims to understand the world in which they exist and gain meanings from individuals and their experiences. Therefore, the constructivist worldview is quite evident in phenomenology.

Phenomenology encompasses many philosophical assumptions. One of these principles is that of intentional consciousness, which describes one intentionally focusing their consciousness on an object (Moustakas, 1994). In a phenomenological approach, this means that the reality involving the object relates directly to the individual’s conscious experience of it. In other words, phenomenology captures the perceptions or research participants and collects their individual meanings and experiences in reference to a particular phenomenon. In order for the researcher to gather data of straight interpretations from the participants, the transcendental phenomenology emphasizes removing all prior biases and preconceived judgments held by the researcher, including the researcher’s personal experiences with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This

allows for the untainted views of the participants to be studied and is referred to as “phenomenological reduction” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). When considering the views of the participants, it is the responsibility of the researcher to describe the qualities mentioned.

Data Collection Procedure

The method of data collection that was used in this study was one-on-one interviews following the semi-structured design. First-person accounts of personal experiences centered on a particular phenomenon are the primary source of evidence within the phenomenological research method (Moustakas, 1994). For that reason, first-person interviews were used for this study. The questions that were asked were both structural and descriptive, providing guidelines for the participants’ account. Additionally, each interviewee was informed of the “no right or wrong answer” rule.

The semi-structured format is described by Whitley and Kite (2013) as one in which the researcher asks each participant the same core questions, but may slightly alter their follow-up questions according to what the participant says. The researcher also reserves the right to ask probing follow-up questions according to the responses of the participant. This allows the interview to feel like a natural conversation, which is especially important when discussing the questions with children. The more casual feel of the interview will allow the researcher to better connect with the youth and build trust with them.

The NHRI counselors approached their junior counselors to gauge interest in participation in the study. A pre-meeting with the participants not only offered the opportunity to observe their fit for the study, but also provides the chance for the

potential participants to learn more about the research topic and ask any questions about the process logistics (Moustakas, 1994).

Interviewing stands out as the most popular form of data collection in qualitative research (King & Horrocks, 2010). While the research questions identify the objectives set forth to understand, the interview questions generate the data with which to understand the answer to these objectives (Maxwell, 2009). When using phenomenological interviewing, the purpose is “to generate detailed and in-depth descriptions of human experiences” (Roulston, 2010, p. 16). The qualitative research interview focuses on personal experience and emphasizes open-ended, non-leading questions (King & Horrocks, 2010). These questions can be presented in both specific as well as general terms (Maxwell, 2009). It is not necessary to always begin in general terms if the study is aiming to answer questions about a more specific topic (Roulston, 2010). Roulston also stated that the interviewer should begin the interview by asking the participant to provide a definition of the phenomenon, which is the focus of the investigation in this study. “Generating good questions requires that you pay attention not just to the questions themselves but to their connections with all the other design components” (Maxwell, 2009, p. 232).

Roulston suggested formulating phenomenological interview questions in the following way:

“Think of a time when you experienced ____ and describe that in as much detail as possible.”

“You mentioned____, tell me what that was like for you.”

“You mentioned____, describe that in more detail for me” (2010, p. 16-17).

Two types of probing questions were also asked as the researcher saw fit. These questions were for clarification purposes to better understand a participant's response or a completion probe, which asked the participant to elaborate further (King & Horrocks, 2010). When asking probing questions, it is important to point out that these questions are often built off of the participant's own words. This ensures that the researcher is not offering additional wording that the participant may not have used themselves and protects the quality of the data (Roulston, 2010). If this precaution is not taken and the researcher rephrases an individual's response into their own words for the probe, oftentimes the participant may inadvertently use the researcher's wording later in the interview even if they would not normally use the terms themselves. This can compromise the data collection.

Moustakas (1994) offers a general guide to use when interviewing, in order to gather the most value response data from the participants. This guide of recommended questions is listed below:

1. What dimensions, incidents, and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?
2. How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?
3. How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
4. What feelings were generated by the experience?
5. What thoughts stood out for you?
6. What bodily changes or states were you aware of at that time?
7. Have you shared all that is significant with references to the experience (p. 116)

An interview protocol was used to collect research for this study. The protocol was designed by the researcher and reviewed by professors at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Though the questions on this protocol do not exactly mirror the ones provided by Moustakas (1994), they were designed by following Moustakas' guidelines. This protocol can be found in Appendix A.

Data analysis. For the current study, each interview was audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were saved in a Microsoft Word document and analyzed in Microsoft Word. The qualitative analysis progression followed Moustakas' recommended process (1994). This process is outlined in Figure three on page 56.

Data analysis for this phase followed traditional phenomenological analysis procedures (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). To start, each transcript was examined for significant statements and statements of meaning as they related to the phenomenon. This involved "horizontalizing" the data, which Moustakas described as giving each statement equal consideration for meaning (1994). From these identified "horizons," statements of consequence were identified. These statements were organized through categories, referred to as themes, and converted to textural descriptions (the experience of the participant) and structural descriptions (contextual influences on the experience of the participant). Ultimately, both the textural and structural statements were combined to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

Step 0: Epoche	The researcher should fully disclose and describe his or her experience with the phenomenon.
Step 1: Horizontalization	Identify and list every expression in the transcripts relevant to the phenomenon.
Step 2: Determine Invariant Constituents	Test each expression identified in #1 for two requirements (and remove all statements that fail the test): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the expression a necessary constituent in order to understand the phenomenon? 2. Can the expression be abstracted and labeled?
Step 3: Cluster and Theme	Cluster related invariant constituents and develop themes for those clusters.
Step 4: Validate Themes	Validate each theme by revisiting the invariant constituents as they appeared in the original transcripts and examine if those statements are compatible with the theme.
Step 5: Textural Description	Construct a textural description to describe <i>what</i> the participants experienced using the validated themes and invariant constituents.
Step 6: Structural Description	Construct a structural description to describe <i>how</i> the participants experienced the phenomenon using the textural description and imaginative variation.
Step 7: Composite Description	Develop a composite description of the meanings and essences of the group's experience with the phenomenon.

Figure 3. Data analysis steps for phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).

Validation strategies. Data was verified utilizing a number of validation strategies, including member checking, rich and thick descriptions, peer review, and negative or discrepant information (Creswell, 2014).

Member checking. This strategy involved sharing portions of the research with the research participants. Each interviewee was given the opportunity to review his or her transcript. The researcher did not receive any feedback on changes to be made. The interview validation form can be found in Appendix E.

Rich and thick descriptions. This qualitative research seeks to richly describe the experience of NHRI junior counselors with influence in the youth leadership context. The methods section and the findings section richly describe the research participants and their leadership experience so as to allow the readers to gain a fuller understanding of the context and trustworthiness of the results.

Peer review. In an attempt to avoid significant bias, a peer review was solicited. Peer reviews are a validation strategy designed to increase the rigor and accuracy of a study's findings. A fellow graduate student in Leadership Studies served as the peer reviewer for the study. The reviewer was given a participant's transcript data that relates to the phenomenon at study. The reviewer was asked to initially code the transcript as if she were the researcher. Next, significant statements that were mined from the transcript data by the researcher were highlighted. The reviewer was asked to verify and/or challenge the essence of these statements that accurately reflected the transcription. Finally, the reviewer was presented with a list of the significant statements and his or her corresponding themes. The reviewer was again asked to verify and/or challenge the validity of the meaning units and corresponding themes. The peer review letter can be found in Appendix F.

Negative or discrepant information. In an attempt to paint a clearer picture that is as realistic as possible for the reader, contradictory statements were shared that do not lie in agreement with the themes. While most evidence from the transcripts will support a theme, outliers will exist. Reality consists of differing perspectives and the researcher will share some of the differing perspectives in order to further validate the findings.

Ethical considerations. Several ethical considerations were made prior to, during, and after this study. As previously mentioned, each junior counselor (potential study participant) was first approached by their NHRI counselor in order to minimize coercion. Once the junior counselor indicated interest in participation, the researcher met with them and explained the general purpose of the research, giving the potential research subject the option to participate or opt out. The interview locations used were locations in which the participants were both familiar and comfortable. Prior to the interviews, each participant was again offered an explanation of the research purpose and given the opportunity to sign an informed consent form. This form indicated the use of audio recording equipment. During the interview, each participant was informed and reassured of the “no right or wrong answer” rule. After the interview, each participant was assigned a pseudonym in order to safeguard their privacy and anonymity.

Pilot interviews. These interviews were used to gather reactions from the participants and also request feedback from the interviewers themselves. The pilot interviews provided helpful recommendations regarding the interview questions. As per the recommendations, some of the questions were reformulated so as to garner richer stories.

Summary

This study took a qualitative approach to examining youth leaders’ descriptions of influence. While the area of study of youth leadership is growing and indicates that influence plays an important role in youth leadership, there still exists a very limited amount of research on this topic. Even less information is available on the way the young leaders themselves describe influence. This study aimed at collecting feedback directly

from the young leaders themselves by seeking to learn their personal stories. With this additional information from youth, a greater insight can be made into leadership influence perceptions that they currently hold.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of the role of influence among youth leaders. Chapter four is organized explicitly to report the results from the qualitative interviews. The data analysis was used to answer the research question, How do young leaders describe influence? This research study focused on the experiences of 29 junior counselors in Nebraska Human Resources Institute (NHRI) who had all been previously identified as having high leadership potential. The author chose to stop interviewing after 29 because data saturation had been reached.

Participants ranged from fifth grade through 12th grade. 20 participants were female and nine were male. These participants not only varied in age and gender but also in schools location and socioeconomic background. Some had already been in NHRI for many years, and some were new to it. All in all, these participants represented a comprehensive cross-section of student participants in the NHRI program. Table 2 below represents all participants in the current study.

Table 2

Study Participants

Name	Grade	Gender		Name	Grade	Gender
Abigail	6	Female		James	12	Male
Amanda	7	Female		Jason	5	Male
Andrea	7	Female		Jennifer	8	Female
Arah	10	Female		John	5	Male
Barbara	10	Female		Kathryn	7	Female
Brenda	9	Female		Kendra	8	Female
Chris	6	Male		Macy	11	Female
Christine	9	Female		Matthew	7	Male
Colin	8	Male		Megan	6	Female
Emma	11	Female		Nathan	5	Male
Erin	9	Female		Rachel	10	Female
Ethan	12	Male		Samantha	8	Female
Grace	8	Female		Sarah	7	Female
Hailey	9	Female		Tamara	6	Female
Hannah	11	Female				

Several themes emerged from the data that described what the participants defined as influence to them and how they experienced it as a youth. Themes presented in the following sections are divided into textural themes (what the participants experienced in regard to influence in the context of youth leadership) and structural themes (how the participants experienced influence in the context of youth leadership). Although much leadership research describes influence from an adult perspective, this research offered a unique opportunity to learn how youth engage in influence. These sections will conclude with a summary textural description, summary structural description, as well as a description of the “essence” of these students’ experiences with influence in the context of youth leadership.

Epoche

In an effort to prevent bias from encroaching into the study, the phenomenological researcher is advised to take part in an epoche process whereby the researcher reflects upon and articulates his or her own experience with the phenomenon in the current study. By cataloguing these experiences, the researcher is better oriented for success in distinguishing influence of these personal experiences when collecting, reviewing and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). The passage below is taken directly from the researcher's journal:

My first experience with influence in the context of youth leadership was during my high school years when I began leading at youth events at our church. I volunteered as a staff member in a Christian Youth Scouting club and organized programs at our church for children. I began to realize my passion for working with youth and helping them to develop their own leadership skills. This interest continued as I worked at a youth summer camp the summer after my freshmen year in college. It was not difficult to observe the new group of kids arriving at the start of each week and see how they all used their influences in their own ways to fit in and determine who they were going to be friends with for the week. Upon graduation of college I moved to Honduras for four months where I lived at an orphanage for children and volunteered teaching English and caring for the children in a street outreach program that provided them with food, clothing and opportunities for bathing. These children used influence in a manner far more mature than the summer campers I had worked with in the past. Due to their life experiences of living on the street, they were more focused on doing what they could to find their next meal rather than making sure to sit next to the cute boy during breakfast time.

Currently, my direct work is focused primarily in the adult business world with the exception to the minor role I play at work as the Director of the Young Leaders Academy. This academy is geared at teaching kids about leadership from a strengths-based philosophy, very similar to NHRI. I lead this three-day intensive program each summer with a team of my colleagues at Talent Plus. The program focuses on helping kids discover their talents, how to apply those when being a leader, and the importance of building good relationships.

These personal and professional experiences may have impacted the overall interpretation of the qualitative data. To avoid bias, the researcher did not have any prior experience working with NHRI and did not know any of the counselors or junior

counselors prior to the research study. This was a benefit to ensure that the research was unbiased in interpretation as the researcher needed to ask probing questions to clarify terms that were used by the junior counselors and dig deeper into understanding their experiences. If the researcher had previously been involved with the program, they may have already been familiar with the activities and experiences the participants were referring to and not felt the need to probe for additional information around such instances.

The researcher was familiar with working with children with leadership potential in general, and this may have biased some of the interpretation of the language used by some of the participants. For example, many participants shared examples of using their influence as a leader in different sports teams to which they belonged. The researcher did not always probe further on the explanation of different positions on the team or the duties of the “team captain” as the researcher was already familiar with leadership positions in youth sports. This perhaps biased some of the interpretation because the researcher may have drawn conclusions based on her own recollections, rather than what was specifically shared by the participants during the interviews.

Textural Themes

As previously stated, several themes emerged from the data that described *what* the participants experienced in regard to influence among youth leaders and *how* they experienced it in the context of being a youth. Textural themes presented in this section capture *what* the participants experience with regard to influence among youth leaders and are presented in an overview in Figure 5.

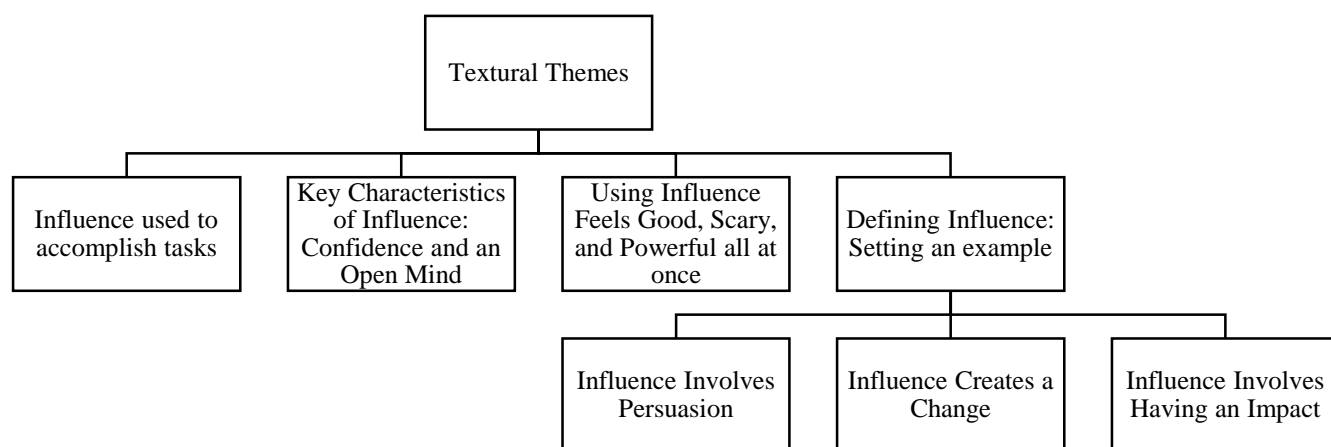


Figure 4. An overview of the textural themes presented in the current study.

Influence to accomplish tasks. When participants were asked when they felt they were influential, many examples related to school. This is to be expected given that these youth ranged in age from sixth-12th graders, all who would be considered full-time students. While almost all of the participants discussed experiencing influence in a school setting, 13 of them shared specific instances in which they had initiated it. The instances were most recalled when a group of students had a task to accomplish and the individuals were all very distracted. During these times, someone was required to step forward and use their influence to focus the group on the charge at hand. Participants in this study often found themselves filling this role. For some participants, this took place in a formal setting in which the participant held a leadership role. When Barbara, a 10th grade leader, was asked about some times when she had recently used her influence she recounted her experience on student council: “I’m on the prom committee so we’re talking about prom themes and ways to decorate for prom. Just using my influence I’ve designated tasks for us to do each day and we’ve gotten things done because I feel like I’ve helped influence

them to be on task and get things done...Knowing that we have a certain task and that we need to get it done by a certain time. My influence has helped move the process along.”

As these participants were chosen for the study specifically because they had been identified as having high leadership potential, it was not surprising that more than one participant was a member of the student council at their school. Hailey, a leader in ninth grade, also shared a story similar to Barbara, “In student council I would help with people just try to get them back in. If they’re off a little bit try to encourage them to get back to where they are.”

Participants also spoke of other after-school activities such as athletics. Matthew, a seventh grade leader, talked about his baseball team and helping them focus before a big game: “If they show up to a game not ready or goofing around, get them straightened out I guess or fired up. Just talking to them and not goofing around while talking to them, like act serious.” Rachel, a 10th grade leader, also spoke about soccer tryouts and feeling the effect of others not taking things seriously: “When I’m doing something as simple as trying out for a soccer team and trying to impress a coach during conditioning, other people are either goofing off and not taking it seriously or are taking it seriously and working hard. I know people that I want to respect me, I have seen that they’ve influenced me. Like them either goofing off or working hard has been contagious to my work ethic.” Grace, a leader in the eighth grade, talked about participating in her drama group rather than sports: “In drama sometimes we’re not always on task because of backstage. Although, I mean obviously I’m 14, I like to have fun. But I know when to get working because our play is in going to be in like two weeks.” Jason, a fifth grade leader, also admired stage helpers who focused on their job at hand, “When I was in stage I

always saw people working and they never messed around. I had a high respect for them.” Tamara, a sixth grade leader, also spoke about one of her extra-curricular activities stating: “We were trying to get like this movie night thing and everyone was kind of screwing off and not exactly doing their tasks. I had to put my foot down and be like ‘this needs to happen.’”

Participants also described using influence in the general classroom setting, especially when working on group projects or given in-class time to study for tests. When asked to recall an example of when she has used her influence, Arah, a 10th grade leader, articulated, “When we have time in class to study for the tests that we have the next day and you have the choice to talk with your friends and hang out with them or take the time and actually study for the test.” Rachel, a leader in the 10th grade, had a similar story to share in which she not only chose to focus on her studies, but realized the effect this would have on others as well: “A good example would be just on school assignments that we have class time to complete. I use that class time not only ‘cause I’m busy with soccer and things at night but just because I think it shows the teacher a lot of respect and you get the assignment done quicker. I’ve used just my hard work to get things done so when I’m not talking to other people they’ll do the same cause they have no one to talk to.” Samantha, an eighth grade leader, echoed this as well, saying, “If a bunch of kids in class are talking, it influences you and then you’re all talking.”

When considering the participants being influenced themselves, Andrea, a seventh grade leader, described her recognition of following the crowd, “When I went to the library last week, I was playing on my phone and my friends were doing their

homework. So I decided to do my homework too.” Influence, even among youth leaders themselves, works in both directions.

Participants noticed that when they used their influence to help others complete the tasks given, they were also able to encourage participation of other students who may have grown quiet among the commotion. Christine, a ninth grade leader, made this a point in using her influence:

There was a school project in civics class and we were like in islands and we had to make up a government. And I kind of like, people were shouting and stuff and I just calmed it down and stuff and let everyone talk. There were some people in the back not participating and I made sure, asked them if they had any ideas and one girl shared an idea we ended up using. I just told them to calm down and realized that there were some people not participating and I just kind of singled them out and asked them if they had any ideas.

Colin, a leader in the eighth grade, also recognized the value of gathering more participation and shared a similar situation in which he used his influence:

Sometimes people have really good ideas but they’re really shy. So you want to be able to include them a lot instead of just saying ‘oh, they’re just not talking because they’re not thinking about it, they’re probably somewhere else.’ Knowing maybe they just don’t want to speak out, but may have a really strong idea. So knowing where everyone is coming from. Or like in an opposite sense, if someone is always shooting out ideas, knowing that a lot of them are really good but they also might, they’re going to be the person that you know if you need something done quickly. And you’ll know that they’ll have lots of ideas and at least one of them works.

Kendra, another eighth grade leader, also gave her account of using influence as a tactic for motivating her class to complete a project given to them by their teacher:

We had this huge project and had to write down ten things that we thought affected the globe the most. They were kinda saying stupid stuff, like not stupid but not intelligent I guess. They’d be like ‘well some people like don’t tie their shoelaces.’ Stuff like that. And I’d be like ‘Ok, there’s obviously more things like human trafficking, like there’s other stuff that’s going on that we don’t need to focus on this stuff.’ And so then I looked at them and there was this one kid, let’s

say his name was Zeke, and he was like ‘I kinda agree with Kendra you guys, maybe we should actually start talking about more important stuff in the world so that we actually get a good grade on this.’ And the other two were like ‘Yeah, no I’m not doing this, this looks dumb.’ And so then I looked at Zeke and said ‘Come on Zeke, let’s just do it.’ And so then we started working and we were having fun while doing it. Like we weren’t all depressed while writing and so then one of the other group members kinda looks and goes ‘uh, do you guys have this on there yet?’ And he kinda joined in and realized that doing school work and actually focusing on the negatives can make you realize and be grateful for the positives that you do have.

Table three highlights this theme along with some of the significant statements and corresponding meaning units to that theme.

Table 3

Influence to Accomplish Tasks Theme

Significance statement	Meaning Unit
Knowing that we have a certain task and need to get it done by a certain time	Recognizing need for focus
Realized that there were some people not participating and I just kind of singled them out and asked if they had any ideas	Engage others to participate
They never messed around. I had a high respect for them	Desire to avoid distraction
I would say that influence is when someone can open the eyes of someone else and make them realize that who they are and what they can do is acceptable in society	Include others and encourage participation
Act serious	Set the example for others to follow
If someone’s mean to someone it could make them be mean to another person.	Recognizing the effect of influence.

Key characteristics of influence: an open mind and confidence. When describing what they had experienced among influential youth leaders, the youth emphasized the importance of avoiding abuse of a leadership position by keeping an open mind. This followed along the lines of encouraging participation from all members of the group by specifically outlining a tactic to do this: recognizing others' opinions. When asked what he thought was one of the most important things to know about being a leader, Ethan, a 12th grade leader, said, "You're not always right. You have to be willing to listen to the people you're leading. Be able and willing to change what you're going to do." Arah, a leader in the 10th grade, echoed the same sentiments by also focusing on the importance of considering others' opinions:

People are going to have different point of view and opinions. And that you have to, you can't always see what you think, you have to look at other peoples' point of view and try to understand and accept them. You're going to work with a lot of people in your life and everyone sees things differently. Have to overcome that part where you think that everyone else is kinda gonna see your way.

It was evident that even at a young age, these youth leaders were able to recognize the need to be open to others and consider their opinions. Brenda even noticed that this can have a bigger influence in the end than someone leading in front of a group. When asked about her overall experience as a leader she replied: "Leadership doesn't always mean you have to step out in front and tell people what to do. Sometimes you need to listen to peoples' opinions and you really need to know what they think and you need to incorporate that. You're not always going to be right and I think that's pretty important."

Hannah, an 11th grade leader, summed it up well by highlighting the need to listen to others as the number one most important thing a young person should keep in mind about being a leader:

I would say probably, the top thing that comes to mind is always being open minded. Because when you're a leader, I think you always listen to everyone and you always want to hear everyone's ideas. And you have to kind of make sure everyone feels that they're all being participated. Or I guess that doesn't make sense. But yeah, just always having an open mind or always being willing to try everything.

Ethan continued by saying, "Also having confidence in what you're telling people. You can't be indecisive or have doubt in what you're telling people or what you're showing people. And having that trust with the people you're with too."

Confidence was also mentioned by eleven other participants throughout the interviews as something that was vital to have when being an influential leader.

Discussed closely with having an open mind was the need for confidence when being a young leader. For many of the participants, growth in this area was one of their biggest accomplishments. Displaying confidence was frequently mentioned as something that was a challenge for participants, especially when they were among their peers.

Brenda was proud of the fact that she was overcoming this: "In my group of friends I'm usually just there for the ride and I do whatever they do. But more I've been like driving them around and telling them what I want to do. I still let them choose and stuff, but more active." Other participants, like John, a fifth grade leader, did not think confidence could be separated from leadership: "Confidence is a big part of leadership. If you have a lot of confidence you'll be a pretty good leader." Hailey, a ninth grade leader, agreed with this and believed an individual needed to possess confidence before attempting any sort of leadership roles: "The most important thing would probably be confident in yourself first. You have to be sure about your decisions and just taking that role as being that leader." When asked if she thought there was anything else that could also help with becoming a

leader, she struggled to come up with another answer: “Besides confidence and first discovering yourself before you help other people, I would, that pretty much describes it. Like if you’re wishing to influence others you have to first find yourself and then you can work from there.”

Rachel, a leader in the 10th grade, used her confidence when leading during difficult times: “You need to have a good amount of confidence in the fact that in the end of the day it’s not who thinks you’re cool, it’s not a matter of who’s judging you, but that you know you’re doing the right thing. You have to have confidence in that.” Ethan recognized that confidently doing the right thing helped foster trust among followers as well which he shared at the beginning of his interview, “Getting it out there and being confident in what you’re saying. Giving them someone to trust coming in and giving them someone to look to when they come in. Because I was really open with them with how I felt about it and let them know it’s going to suck but it’s going to be worth it.” To conclude his interview, he was asked a final question to determine if there was anything else important he wished to add to this study. He came back to the importance of confidence once again:

Just confidence and trust are two of the biggest things that you have to have. Because if the people around you don’t trust and you don’t trust the people you’re leading then you’re never going to actually accomplish anything because there’s always going to be some sort of doubt in what you’re going to do. And trust and confidence go hand in hand. If you have a ton of confidence in what you’re telling people, people can totally read whether you believe what you’re saying or not.

Some participants emphasized the need for confidence to an even greater extent by describing the necessity for leaders to be brave and fearless in their actions. As John said, “I’d say the field of whatever you’re doing and getting to know the people, whoever

you're working with, I'd say not getting nervous and just being brave." One participant in particular stood out with a truly thorough description of what it took to be a brave leader.

Kendra, a leader in the eighth grade, described conquering fears in the following way:

I guess I'd say like if other people want to be leaders or want to be leading something, I'd say be fearless... My definition of fearless is different. Most people see fearless as the absence of fear, there is no fear in that soul. But with me, I see fearless as there is fear, everywhere you turn there is fear and you can't push it aside. But you're not afraid. You feel the fear and you feel that it's around you but you're not afraid and you do it anyway because you know that that's what you want, and you gotta do it whether you're looking to your side and people are like don't do that man. And you're like I'm filled with fear but I'm not afraid anymore. So then you do it.

The participants did not paint leadership in an easy light in which having an open mind and confidence meant that leadership would be easy. When Brenda, a ninth grade leader, was asked to describe influence, she was honest in the struggle of how difficult it is to influence others. She defined influence as, "To not be bossy and mean I guess. It's a really fine line and it's hard to not step over that. You can't just be passive and sit by. If you see something it's really hard to speak up. And like if you see someone doing something wrong or you know a better way to do it you should probably tell. And it's hard to tell them a lot."

Amanda and Abigail, seventh and sixth grade leaders respectively, both concluded their interviews by reflecting on the difficulty of leadership is the fact that people may not always like the leader. As Abigail shared, "It's hard sometimes. Well it's just hard because not very many people are leaders in a way so it's just hard to be like that. It's just hard in general 'cause you have to be the bad guy sometimes as a leader." Amanda had a similar description as well, recognizing that being a leader does not always mean everyone will be happy with you: "Being a leader is more than just looking

good and being able to talk on camera. It's about having qualities that people genuinely think matter in the world. If someone is idiotic but can be look good on camera, it won't make them a good leader, it will make them likable. And likable isn't being a good leader."

When Kendra was asked to recall a certain time that stood out, when she really felt herself using her influence, it was a difficult situation that came to mind:

Even though it might be hard, you still have the ability to do what's right. There was a sixth grader who was basically getting picked on. I don't know if it's been constant but it, he was getting picked on in front of the (location). That's where most of the hustle and bustle happens so most people don't pay attention to it because they don't know if they're just messing around or not. I was standing there and I was right in front of my class. I usually just chill in the hallway until the bell rings and then I go in. And they were like kind of picking on him and messing up his hair and they pushed him a little bit. He asked them politely to stop and one of my friends was there and was like, "Should we say something?" And I was like, "Yeah, let's go over." And so I start walking and she kinda pulls me back. And she goes, "I said *should* we, not *can* we." And I said, "Yeah we should, that's not an option. We should just go up and say something." And she kinda hesitated and I was like, "What's wrong?" And she was like, "I don't know, I just have never stood up for anyone before, I don't know how to do that. And I don't want to make myself a target." And I said, "You're not going to be a target because I'm going to be there with you." And she was like, "Ok, let's go." And so then we went and stood up for the guy. And then the other sixth graders or seventh graders were like, "Ok." And then I was like, "How 'bout you give him his books back?" And they gave them back. And the little sixth grader just looked at me and says, "What's your name?" And I said, "Kendra, what's yours?" and he says his name and goes, "Thank you" and walks away.

Grace also explained the challenge of being a young leader and risking unacceptance by peers for keeping to the principle of doing the right thing:

Sometimes with the things you do not everyone is going to agree with what you're doing. Or like you in general. Because being a leader it's not necessarily, most people think like the word leader in general is like leading people. And it can be but in a different sense. You're leading by going against the crowd and doing what's right. And it doesn't necessarily mean you're like in charge of a group of people or something like that. And so not everyone is going to like you and people won't always agree with what you're doing and sometimes it's going to be hard

because normally leaders are different from other people, and their peers are like their same age. And so it isn't always easy but it makes me happy know that at the end of the day I'm doing the right thing as hard as it may be.

When asked about how it felt to use her influence, Grace again acknowledged that it was hard, but the end result made it worth it:

I think that no matter how hard it is for me in school sometimes with being different, it's just all worth it. Knowing that you can help someone and you can be a life changer for them. That sometimes with some of the struggles and like it just makes it all worth it. And it's not necessarily that being a leader is a negative thing at all, I'm not trying to say it is. I'm just saying with being different there is hardships but it's totally worth it and there's a little bit of a bitter sweetness to it. It's you're different. Obviously in the past people have not always liked people who are different, like in the Holocaust for example, but that doesn't mean that you're a bad person. I don't know, it's really hard to explain. It's a good kind of different. It's what helps our world still have the good in it and not just go completely bad.

Table four outlines the key characteristics theme along with a sample of significant statements and meaning units.

Table 4

Key Characteristics of Influence: An Open Mind and Confidence

Significance statement	Meaning Unit
You're not always right	Need to be open minded
Be willing to change	Consider other opinions
Listen to the people you're leading	Understand and accept your followers
Confidence and trust are two of the biggest things you have to have	Confidence is a necessity to leadership
It's just hard in general because you have to be the bad guy sometimes as a leader	Leadership is not easy
I'd say be fearless	Leaders overcome their fears
Sometimes with the things you do not everyone is going to agree with what you're doing. Or like you in general.	Leadership causes a risk of unpopularity among youth

Using influence feels good, scary, and powerful all at once. Participants were asked to recount personal experiences in which they had used their influence as a leader. In addition, they were asked further questions to describe what it felt like when using their influence and how they could tell they were being influential. The participants shared a variety of adjectives in their responses, both positive and negative, in regard to their feelings. While the overall answer was simply, “good,” participants also went on to share that it was not always a good feeling and most often was accompanied by feelings of anxiety. This anxiety was expressed by saying they had feelings of being scared, they felt small and that being a leader required the individual to be brave. Participants felt a lot of pressure upon their shoulders when using influence.

Abigail, a sixth grade leader, shared these mixed feelings of influence being both good and scary, “It feels good to know I'm doing it but it's sort of scary. You don't know how they're going to react.” Brenda, a ninth grade leader, echoed similar sentiments as well by saying, “If I do something I wouldn't normally do and it kind of scares me a little bit but I think it will have good influences at the end.” When asked what scares her about doing something new, she elaborated further: “It's really scary because I know if it doesn't get done they won't have a positive image of me. And that's what I want, I want them to think I'm a great worker and work really hard.” Ethan, a leader in the 12th grade, gave a similar response of being anxious about letting others down as well: “It's kind of scary. It's a good feeling because you must be doing something right I guess if he wants to be more like you. But it's a scary thought too because they look so much up to you that you feel like you can't make mistakes.” When Colin, an eighth grade leader, was probed

for further description on how to handle the pressure when such a mistake is made, he provided the following example to describe his feelings:

Sometimes even though you might be really excited, the worst feeling is when you get all these people rallied up for something and you realize you might be wrong and something might be better. So like when you're doing something and you're like, "Alright, change of plans, we're doing this now. The other person was right." That can sort of like cause a guilt or whoops. But also really pleased with yourself when something goes through. You might have some sympathy for the other group saying, "sorry that it didn't work." You can't always have two ideas at the same time. But I think it sort of depends on the outcome, of what you're trying to influence to happen in the first place.

Emma, an 11th grade leader, seemed to think that the feelings she experienced were a mixture of good and bad when it came to using her influence. She provided the following example:

Like it made me feel like, ok this is going to sound super weird but I can make it make sense. Like it made me feel like kind of small. But small in the way that like I was contributing to something that was outside of myself. So I think like a lot of the things that I do and my friends do is really centered on ourselves, like building our resumes, or getting good grades or whatever. But that when I was like using my influence in helping other people with their goals. Just like making that positivity outside of myself it was like feeling small but in the best way possible.

A seventh grade leader, Matthew's response began by supporting the earlier mentioned theme of influence being a positive or a negative but took it a step further. He explained that the feelings will change depending on how you used your influence, "Um, if it's bad, I mean you're going to feel guilty afterwards. If it's a good influence then you'll feel like, a good like, you'll feel, um, if it's a good influence someone has felt on you, you'll uh you'll think of the person who had an influence on you differently" Furthermore, Matthew illustrated how powerful influence can be as it spreads beyond just the people one interacts with directly, "As being like the person who started it and put it

on other people. ‘Cause they put it on you and then you put it on other people and it just passes along.’”

Macy, an 11th grade leader, also recognized that using influence can make her feel scared because of the power aspect, “It makes me feel kind of powerful, but then again it kind of scares me that I could be so powerful because I don’t want anyone to feel like uncomfortable with how vocal I am or anything.” Colin also recognized the authority that influence can command by describing it as powerful as well. When asked to define influence he replied, “Having the ability or power or capacity to have someone think along the same lines as you. Or convincing and influence are very similar.” Later in the interview, when asked if he could provide an example of a time that stood out to him using his influence as a leader, he returned to the issue of power. This time, Colin felt that the position on student council provided him power with which to back him up when using his influence. “Again being in a position of power, saying ‘this will work, trust me, I know what I’m doing.’ In student council or lunch table, again something that’s happening, you can talk to people and be like no ‘this is correct, they’re wrong, I got this.’”

While Emma, an 11th grade leader, did not hold a designated position of power as a student, she did lead a book drive at her school and shared her experience with others looking up to her while doing so.

Just realizing that like I have the ability to be that person for someone else was really powerful. So working through the rest of the book drive I was really intentional about making sure I was asking them questions and getting to know them. Building that relationship so that they have someone they can ask about this class or what do I do when a friend is doing this and stuff like that.

Amanda, a seventh grade leader, also expressed her views that feelings can change depending on how one uses their influence:

Honestly if I use it to get something that I want it can feel greedy and guilty after that. But also if you're using it for something good it can feel like prideful that you did something to help out. But also if you're trying to like go somewhere with your parents and you influence them by saying you do something it can also be a little sneaky and maybe a little bit powerful like you go what you want. But most of the time when you influence someone you feel good and kind of happy and like you did the right thing.

Christine, a leader in the ninth grade, felt happy as well when she shared her experience of helping a quiet student join in the group conversation, "It makes me feel happy. 'Cause that girl probably wouldn't have shared. And it ended up being a really good idea and if she... probably wouldn't have spoken up." Hailey, a ninth grade leader, didn't seem to experience any feelings of anxiety when asked how she felt using her influence: "It's an amazing feeling. You feel like you really are making a difference in someone's life." James, a 12th grad leader, also recognized the ability to use influence to make a difference: "It's awesome, it feels really good 'cause you know you're making a difference and not just wasting an opportunity." Megan, a leader in the sixth grade, really lit up when she was also asked how she felt when using her influence, describing it as, "One of the greatest feelings that you can feel. Especially if you're influencing them in a good way. It can be in a bad way but if you're influencing them in a good way it feels great to know you're helping move them to the right direction."

Table 5 outlines the theme of influence feeling good, scary, and powerful, along with a sample of significant statements and meaning units.

Table 5

Using Influence Feels Good, Scary, and Powerful all at Once

Significance statement	Meaning Unit
Using influence, it creates a certain really good feeling because you're not just telling people you should do this. You're saying this is what is happening and I hope you'll do this and here's why you should make that decision.	Good feelings associated with using influence
It makes me feel powerful, but then again it kind of scares me that I could be so powerful.	Using influence can be scary because it's powerful.
It felt good being able to help others	Using influence to make a difference creates good feelings
It's really scary because I know if it doesn't get done, they won't have a positive image of me	Influence creates pressure for youth and they feel scared because of that pressure
It feels good to know I'm doing it but it's sort of scary. You don't know how they're going to react.	It feels good to use influence but also has a sense of anxiety in not knowing how others will react.
Realizing that I have the ability to be that person for someone else was really powerful.	Influence is a powerful tool

Defining Influence: Setting an example for others. All participants were asked to provide a definition of what influence meant to them. This was asked through three questions throughout the interview, beginning with a simple statement, "please describe influence for me." Additionally, participants were asked to describe in personal terms what influence meant to them and then to condense their definition into just one sentence, as if they had to explain to someone else what influence meant. It was during these questions that an evident theme became apparent. Rather than believing that influence

meant persuading someone to do something or convincing them of a point of view, the 11 of the 29 participants viewed influence as setting an example for others to follow. While there were mentions of influence creating an impact or some sort of change, this was most often tied to others wanting to be like the leader. Many participants thought influence could also simply be described as being kind to others. As John, a fifth grade leader, succinctly put it, “I’d say just like being a good role model and being nice to people. Help other people. Just taking leadership over whoever’s looking up to you.” When asked if he had anything additional to add to the definition, John commented, “I’d say influence means taking a role or being a strong leader.”

When Macy, an 11th grade leader, was asked to describe influence, her response was, “Basically that you’re a role model and that people look up to you. So you have to make good decisions no matter what.” Rachel, a 10th grade leader, also had a similar opinion defining influence in one sentence as, “Setting a positive example on someone who takes after that.” Nathan, a fifth grade leader, also noted influence as being a role model for others to follow, with a bit of persuasion focus as well. “Being able to persuade and set an example for others.”

When Andrea, a seventh grade leader, was asked for her definition she replied, “You do something and it makes other people want to do that.” A probing question as then asked in follow up to provide an example of what she was referring to. She then shared an instance with her brother at home. “I cleaned my room first. And then I helped him clean his room.”

Colin, a leader in the eighth grade, also had an illustration to share of how he set the example for others to follow:

I can be a very loud and outspoken person. So sometimes in class you know if it's sort of a quiet thing and we're working, my volume may suddenly rise. And as that starts to happen other people start to match that volume and it can rise into this huge, all of sudden before you know everyone is shouting at everyone else. I think that happens a lot, even when you're eating lunch, even three or four people, and suddenly you say something and someone says something. It's all snowballing into this big idea or this big volume. I think sort of without saying right out. And I feel like that's a really effective way to influence people, is without saying, "I'm going to convince you to do this." It's just subtly doing something and leading by example. And if they don't, then you change your tactics and do what you need to do. But I feel like that's a good base.

Grace, an eighth grade leader, also talked about how influence affects those around you in an indirect way. She defined influence as the way people look up to someone, but also provided additional information around the consequence this influence may have.

I think influence is the way people around you or people you look up to, how they sort of, the way they act and the things they do and their own morals and things like that, how it reflects on another person. And so if you're always around really good people then that influence is going to go into everyone in that group. And if you're around bad people you're going to have their influence and so you won't have very many good thoughts in your head because you're always surrounded by those bad thoughts.

While Brenda, a leader in the ninth grade, also described influence by similarly stating, "When someone thinks you're a really good person and they want to be just like you and have a lifestyle like you. And work harder in their lives to be more like you are," she also discussed the way this example setting influenced her. Most other participants gave examples of ways they saw influence affecting others and Brenda offered a unique response that varied slightly: "To me, it's everyone I meet. If I see a quality that I like in them, I'll immediately try to see if I can be like that. And if I like someone a lot and if that person is really popular for being just a great person, I'll work towards being more like them." She also tied her response to the previously mentioned theme of influence as

both a positive or negative by saying, “Positive or negatively someone wants to be like you and they try to be like you.”

Jennifer, an eighth grade leader, agreed as well that influence involved others wanting to be like you: “Part of being a leader is having an influence on other people and having people look up to you and want to be more like you and all that.” Amanda, a seventh grade leader, noted how big of an impact influence could have on an individual by recalling a story she had heard from one of her teachers:

Personally if I’ve ever been under the influence of someone else I try to make it be my friends and try to make it be good. If I’ve ever influenced someone else I hope it’s been in a positive way cause sometimes you don’t know have influenced them. Like just the other day my teacher told me about this girl who was her student. And after she went to high school she had come back to visit her, the librarian and the 7th grade language arts teacher. And one day she came back after she had graduated college and said the reason I always kept coming back to visit you is that you changed... I wanted to be a language arts teacher because of something you all three said to me. So that was an influence that kind of shaped her career and who she wanted to be.

Three sub-themes also arose in the research on how youth define influence. These were persuasion, change, and impact.

Defining influence: Influence involves persuasion. While the majority of participants focused on influence from the aspect of setting an example that would in turn cause others to want to be like them, four other respondents approached the definition from the angle of persuasion. Barbara, a 10th grade leader, provided a very succinct definition: “Influence is the way people persuade you to do things.” Megan, a sixth grade leader, also responded in a similar manner, “Influence is when someone is trying to persuade you to do one thing or another.” As noted previously, Nathan’s definition encompassed the aspect of setting an example for others, but also noted that persuasion

played a role in the definition of influence as well. His definition was, “Being able to persuade and set an example for others.” Colin also discussed persuasion in his definition by stating it as, “Persuasion or influence is using the power of persuasion to have other people with similar goals and using those goals to have a certain outcome.” Another comment to note from the interviews was made by Tamara, a sixth grade leader.

Although she did not specifically reference persuasion directly, she shared a very serious situation where she had used her influence to persuade someone not to hurt themselves, “My friend Margaret texted me and she was having a very bad day. She was going to cut herself and I ended up helping her and stopping her by talking her out of it.” This was a clear example of Tamara using her persuasive abilities to influence her friend in a positive light.

Defining influence: Influence creates a change. Participants also described influence by looking at the end result of its effect; that is influence creates a change. Arah, a 10th grade leader, shared her definition of influence in light of change by defining it as, “The act of supporting or changing what a person thinks about certain things.” Ethan, a leader in the 12th grade, also discussed how influence is shown through creating change. His definition was direct and to the point: “Making a difference and changing how you want to do something.” Ninth grade leader Hailey’s definition also reflected Ethan’s thoughts by stating, “Influence is somebody changing something for the greater good.”

Emma, an 11th grade leader, shared her description of influence with the following definition: “Influence is when someone has the capacity to create lasting change. So rather than just changing one event or like changing how someone’s day goes,

you're really changing how people grow and how relationships develop by leading and creating consistent and sustainable change." It is evident that to Emma the true measure of influence is that it has a long-term impact on others. When asked if she could recall a time that she had created a lasting change, she provided the following story:

Um last year I was a spelling tutor for this girl named Natalie and she was like really struggling with spelling all of elementary school. And so she, then her parents asked me, "Could you help her? 'Cause we don't know what else to try." And I was like, "Yeah I'll try." Like I'm a student too I know how to study and stuff. And she was in fifth grade at the time. And I remember when she got her first 100% on her spelling test and she ran to my house. And she was like, "Emma I got 100% on my spelling test, thank you so much!" And it just meant so much that she finally got what she wanted and I helped her.

In Emma's example above it is clear that Emma was able to create a change in Natalie's life. Through this change, Emma was able to see herself influencing Natalie.

Defining influence: Influence involves having an impact. Similar to the theme of change, participants defined influence as having an impact on another's life. Jennifer, an eighth grade leader, also tied it to the overall theme of setting an example for others: "Influence is impacting another person's life through how you act, not by telling them how to be." Hannah, an 11th grade leader, also recognized that influence can be positive or negative by defining it as, "Someone or something that has made an impact on your life, whether it's good or bad." Erin, a leader in the ninth grade, was a bit shorter in her response by simply stating influence as, "Something that has an impact on you, greatly." Another participant, Chris, a sixth grade leader, also defined influence in a similar manner by saying, "When someone or something has an impact on your life that helps you decide what sometimes you want to do in your life." In a later question, he expanded a bit further to add to what kind of impact this could create: "When someone has a big impact on your life, it gives you hope to do something."

Table 6 outlines the defining influence theme along with a sample of significant statements and meaning units.

Table 6

Defining Influence

Significance statement	Meaning Unit
When someone thinks you're a really good person and they want to be just like you.	Influence is setting an example for others
Having people look up to you and want to be more like you	Influence is about being a role model
Basically that you're a role model and that people look up to you. So you have to make good decisions	Influence requires one to be aware of their actions at all times
Influence is setting an example and then people will take after that	Influential leaders are often emulated
Influence is somebody changing something for the greater good.	Influence causes change
Influence is the way people persuade you to do things	Influence involves persuasion
Something that has an impact on you	Influence creates an impact

Structural Themes

To reiterate, structural themes capture how the respondents experienced influence in the context of youth leadership. During the interview responses, participants showed that their initial reactions to the word “influence” had both positive and negative sentiments. Their experiences in class, on sports teams, as a member of drama groups and as leaders in student council all contributed to how these participants experienced and described influence. An overview of the structural themes are presented in Figure 6.

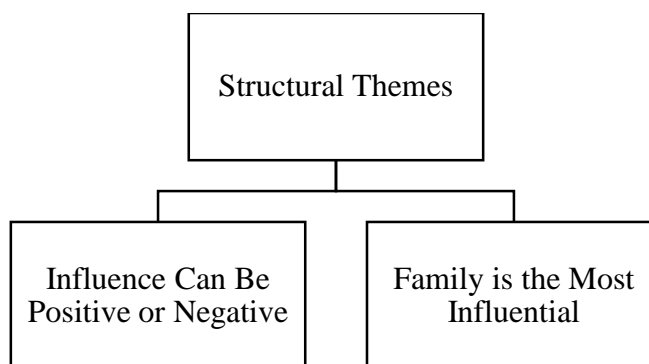


Figure 5. An overview of the structural themes in the current study.

Influence can be positive or negative. Twelve of the participants in the study described the contrast between using influence for good and using it for bad. The young leaders recognized that influence they use can be for both good and evil and the influences around them can also be making a positive or negative impression. When Christine, a ninth grade leader, was asked to recall a time when she felt that others were influencing her in a decision she faced, she immediately asked, “Like a good way or bad way?” She was encouraged to respond in either way and shared this: “Ok. Maybe in a bad way just typical high school peer pressure. Like everyday stuff, like ‘we can be late to this, people won’t care,’ stuff like that. But in a good way, kind of like I said Catherine’s influencing me to be more extraverted and that’s definitely helped.” Brenda, another ninth grade leader, was asked to define influence in just one sentence and her definition was, “Positive or negative, someone wants to be like you.”

To some participants, the word “influence” had an immediately bad connotation, as in being under the influence of drugs. This is what Barbara, a leader in the 10th grade, recounted when she was also asked to describe the term: “Something or someone that persuades you or pressures you, a good or bad thing. Now, for my age, I think influence is something that people think negatively about, like oh my friends do drugs and alcohol

and influence you to do it. But in my opinion influence is something or somebody who wants you to do something, not bad.” Drugs were also the first thought that came to seventh grade leader Amanda’s mind when asked to define influence:

Influence can be good and bad. Like we were studying this in health the other day, when people are under the influence of drugs and stuff like that it can make them do things they wouldn’t usually do. Which can make them seem like bad people but they’re usually not. You can also be influenced by your friends to make good decisions which can help you be a positive person. But you can also be influenced by bullies to do things you wouldn’t do which is sad. But if influence is used the right way it can be a pretty good thing.

Matthew, a seventh grade leader, also shared his definition of influence as, “Something that has an influence on you.” But immediately after he said that he amended the statement, “Well no. Something that has an effect on you that can be positive or negative.” Jason, a fifth grader leader, also echoed the same thoughts and summed it up by saying, “There’s both kinds of influence and you need to know which one to follow.” It became apparent that the participants faced these decisions on a regular basis as many recalled examples of both positive and negative situations where they had witnessed influence in action. Jason shared an example of positive influence by talking about students who set a good example in school, “They respect their teachers and stuff like that. Quiet in the hallways.” Hailey, a leader in the ninth grade, raised the point that it does not matter the way it is used, good or bad, influence is powerful regardless: “Influence is somebody, could be positive or negative, but someone changing a given person or a given event. Just having an effect on it overall.”

Tamara, a leader in the sixth grade, also felt that influence could be defined as both positive and negative. Her simple definition was, “The way people effect your opinions, good or bad.” Grace, an eighth grade leader, had high standards when it came

to displaying good influence. Not only did it have to have a good outcome, the people involved needed to feel good about the situation as well:

I think influence for me is being around the right people and it's also, being around the right people in a way that they also make me feel good about myself. Because if you're around maybe they are like, they get good grades, those people, and they do good in class, but they could make you feel really bad about yourself. So a good influence is not only someone who does the right thing or a group of people that are just good people, but they also make you feel good about yourself.

While not quite as in depth as Grace, Hannah, an 11th grade leader, also recognized that influence has possibilities of being positive or negative. She stated it as, "Someone or something that has made an impact on your life whether it's good or bad." When asked how she felt when using her influence, Megan, a sixth grade leader, lit up and became very passionate in her response: "It's one of the greatest feelings that you can feel. Especially if you're influencing them in a good way. It can be in a bad way, but if you're influencing them in a good way it feels great to know you're helping move them to the right direction.

Table 7 highlights this theme along with some of the significant statements and corresponding meaning units to that theme.

Table 7

Influence can be Positive or Negative

Significance statement	Meaning Unit
If it's bad, I mean you're going to feel guilty afterwards. If it's a good influence then you'll feel good.	Influence can be self-serving or self-sacrificing
Something or someone that persuades or pressures you, a good or bad thing.	Influence can be positive or negative
Someone or something that has an impact on your life whether it's good or bad	Influence is powerful either way, whether it's positive or negative.
Positive or negatively someone wants to be like you and then try to be like you	Youth leaders set an example with both their flaws and their strengths.

Family is the most influential. Interview questions aimed to learn not only how young leaders define influence and use it themselves, but also to understand how they experience influence from others as well. This was discovered through questions posed to recall a time when they had been influenced by another during a decision they had to make and also by gaining opinions on who they felt was most influential in their lives. Some mentions of friends and mentors were made, including their senior NHRI counselor; however, the overwhelming response was that parents and siblings held the most influence to youth leaders. Throughout the interviews, 27 mentions were made about familial influence on participants. Youth leaders experience influence by learning first how to positively influence through their families.

Parents arose as the most common response to questions regarding who the participants considered to be most influential in their lives. The researcher wanted to learn if participants chose their parents as most influential simply because of the fact that they were the disciplinarian and authoritative figure in their lives or if there was a deeper

reason specific to relationship they held. Abigail, a sixth grade leader, named her father as the most influential figure in her life because of his decision-making ability: “He kind of has a way that he says things like that makes me know he means them in a way. He’s pretty firm in what he thinks and what he wants for me. So that’s pretty influential.”

Emma, a leader in the 11th grade, also stated that her parents had influenced her most in her life:

They are just like really understanding and like they always ask questions about what’s going on or what do you think the best idea for this is or stuff like that. And I think they know me really well and like yeah. They’re just like always there and they’ve shaped a lot of what I want to do and what I think is important.

Barbara, a 10th grade leader, valued her relationship with her mother because of her guidance in decision making:

She’s always been with me and always helped me see what’s the right thing to do and helped me make hard decisions that I probably wouldn’t be able to make if I was alone. She’s one of my biggest role models. Someone that I look up to and I know that she’ll always be able to influence me and she’s one of the people that I want to be like. I do things not because she tells me to do them, but because I want to do them based on how she would view me.

Hailey, a leader in the ninth grade, also mentioned how helpful her mother is when she is faced with a decision, “Whenever I was like given the chance to make a decision, my mom would help me to like go through the pros and cons of making the decision. Of how it could affect not only me, but the others around me. So I would always keep that in mind when making a decision and just thinking through everything.”

Kendra, an eighth grade leader, felt that both her parents were extremely influential in her life as they balanced each other out:

Most people at this age start disobeying and not listening to their parents. They get in more arguments with them and don’t really care to listen to them and what they say. And I’ve always had a very positive relationship with my parents.

Sometimes I take that for granted. So with the fact that I know that I have them, it makes me more pleased with who I am because I know that no matter what I do, they have that unconditional love. I don't have to worry 'cause I know that I'll always have them. So whenever I have any situation whether it's like educational or like friends or drama or whatever, I just go to them. My mom gives me the emotional side. She helps me emotionally and advice and what to say. And my dad takes me to the more logical approach. And he'll say like look, this is how it is, this is the definition of this, this is what the most logical decision is but you may need to go ask your mom to see what your heart wants. So my dad's the brain and my mom's the heart. So with having them I get the full influence and I know that I'll always in the end make the decision that I wanted because I had both sides brought out to my attention.

Megan, a sixth grade leader, also talked about her mom being influential in the fact that she wants to be just like her. The sentiments align with the definition of influence when someone sets an example that other want to follow. Megan said, "When I picture myself in the future, I just want to be like her. I just think of my mom as like a great, loving person. She's always been there for me in the past and I know she'll always be there for me in the future." Nathan, a fifth grade leader, also echoed similar sentiments when asked who he considered most influential in his life: "Probably have to be my parents because they're my role models and they pretty much set the example for me." When asked how he thought they were able to set this example, he replied, "By trying to be the best parents they can be, by being nice, respectful, safe and not doing anything that would be bad for their health or doing something that's bad for them."

Grace, an eighth grade leader, also talked about her mother in the way she became a role model to her, beyond the typical mother-daughter relationship.

I think not only that sort of mother daughter bond that you naturally get but it is also like her just always being there for me. And if I have all these positive feelings about my mom, then when you're a little girl you always strive to be like some sort of strong feminine figure in your life. And that was, she was that for me. So I would strive to be like her because I have all these positive feelings about who she is as a person and her decisions and morals and stuff like that.

Siblings were also mentioned as some of the most influential figures in participants' lives. Christine, a leader in the ninth grade, identified her older brother, Peter, as someone with a lot of influence in her life: "My older brother, Peter. He's a runner and he ran in high school. I went to every meet and that really kind of made me want to run. Now he's one of my coaches on the track team and he teaches too and he's going to teach right down the street from my high school. He helps me a lot and he's always at all my games." When probed further to determine how Christine felt he influenced her, she provided additional information: "I admire how he chose to go into teaching. He went to (location) for one year and then transferred to (location). And that kind of like, he just did what he wanted and like didn't let anything hold him back. And he went after it and ended up getting a job right out of college." Sarah, a seventh grade leader, also admired her older sister, Linda, and wanted to be like her when she grew older,

My sister is a very good role model to me, she resembles me in a lot of ways. We like to do the kinds of things. She's a cheer-leader so I think I want to be a high school cheer-leader when I grow up, when I'm there. She's very organized. She tries to be very organized. She plans in her planner a lot so I try to plan in my planner a lot so my life isn't as crazy. (My NHRI Counselor) has been in my life 2 years approximately. She taught me a lot about leadership and how to work through hard things and easy things. I notice we have a lot in common too. We have some of the same ideas and things like that. And she's definitely a good leader like I am.

Tamara and Ethan, sixth and 12th grade leaders respectively, shared about their younger siblings who they felt were influential in their lives. Tamara felt her younger brother was so influential because he made her always be aware of her actions and what she said. She shared her reasoning why, "Because he's six and his mind is still malleable. There was a quote I said, I can't remember it at the moment, and he started repeating it

and he did his own little twist on it.” Ethan also noticed how much his younger brother followed his example and keeps that in mind with anything he does, “At home with my little brother, if my parents ask me to do something and I just do it. Then they ask him and he’ll just do it. But if I don’t then he’s not going to either.”

Respondents indicated multiple family members who they believed were most influential in their lives. Additionally, participants felt they themselves were particularly influential at home, especially with their siblings. Youth leaders look toward their families for learning how to develop their influence.

Table 8

Family is Influential

Significance statement	Meaning Unit
My parents, especially my mom, I can go to her with anything and she'll help me make decisions.	Parents offer advice
My parents influence me a lot I think. My dad is a great role model.	Parents set example
My parents. I have a lot of influences but they're someone I spend 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with and the way they raised me, that's a huge influence already.	Parents are some of the first influential figures for youth
Probably my mom. I'm always around her and she's always having good influences on me.	Youth spend much time with parents which gives parents much opportunity to influence
My little brother looks up to me.	Recognize need to be example for siblings
With my little brother, if my parents ask me to do something and I just do it and then they ask him and he'll just do it.	Siblings have powerful influence on each other

Textural Description

The composite textural description captures “what” the study participants experience (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). For the current study, this section will summarize “what” the participants experienced with regard to influence among youth leaders.

The respondents' experiences with influence in the context of youth leadership showed four main areas of “what” influence meant to them. Participants sought to define influence in terms of being a role model to others. When setting an example for others, they experienced persuasive tactics to convince others of their goal. Many participants

struggled to provide a clear, distinct definition of influence as they felt it was something they just knew was happening or not happening. To judge whether they were influential, participants expressed the fact a change would be created or an impact would show after they had successfully used their influence.

In order to be influential, respondents discussed two main characteristics that they had found to be non-negotiable: having an open mind and being confident. The term “confidence” was mentioned by 12 participants throughout the interviews and dubbed as an absolute necessity to be a young leader. Respondents recognized the fact that appearing confident at all times is difficult, especially when a mistake had been made. However, confidence is one of the characteristics they admired most in others. The other characteristic was the ability to keep an open mind. Participants explained the “open mind” as thoughtfully considering the ideas and opinions of others. They also took it one step further by conveying the need to proactively illicit the opinions of others when a leader, especially working to include those who may be quieter or less prone to share. As several respondents explained, they had experienced instances in which the quiet individuals were the ones with the best ideas.

When using their influence, respondents struggled to portray the exact feelings they experienced. This was partially due to the conflict of feeling good, scared, and powerful when using their influence. An overlap was seen of both these different aspects of feeling good at accomplishing a positive outcome, while also recognizing the position of power they held because of this and, in turn, experiencing anxiety (feelings of being scared) due to the pressure of their leadership role. Participants felt that using their influence was a satisfying experience in the end as long as it was used for good. When

this was the case, they admitted to being scared, but also feeling good about what they were able to accomplish.

While adults may experience influence in a professional setting in which they need to win others over to an idea, youth instead viewed influence as a way to accomplish tasks. This was described in the context of a school setting in which teachers had given an assignment. Participants felt this situation provided ample opportunity to use their influence to keep classmates focused on the task at hand. While others may “goof off,” youth leaders were able to complete the assignment and guide their classmates back to what needed to be done. Respondents shared the need to “be serious” while others became distracted, and through this example they were able to lead others’ focus back to the task. Their ability to help others concentrate helped portray their influential capabilities as a youth leader.

Structural Description

The structural description captures “how” the participants experienced the phenomenon, that is the environment or setting in which the phenomenon occurred (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). For the current study, this structural description section summarizes “how” the participants experienced influence as a youth leader.

As the conflicting positive and negative feelings were seen in the textural themes, respondents further described influence as occurring in both positive and negative situations as well. Participants stated that influenced could be used for good, such as standing up for a student being bullied, or for bad, such as trying to convince their parents to let them do something they should not. Respondents reaffirmed the idea that influence involves making an impact and further illustrated that this impact can be either good or

bad. 12 participants raised a concern that the responsibility of the leader is to ensure they are setting a positive example and always influencing others with a positive impression. Many youth recognized that at their age the term “influence” often held negative connotations associated with drugs or alcohol. Youth leaders stressed the importance of determining which influence was a good kind to follow and which should be avoided.

The home environment and family became apparent as the most influential aspect of the youth leader’s life through the research. Participants repeatedly spoke of their parents as role models and the individuals they look to when making large decisions. They described the parent-child relationship as one of caring and respect in which their parent molded them into the leader they are today. A trickle-down effect was seen as participants felt that they held the most influence over their siblings who looked to them to set an example. Accounts of younger siblings repeating what the participant said or refusing to clean their room unless the participant cleaned their own were shared throughout the interviews. Respondents felt the need to be a good role model for their siblings just as they viewed their parents as the most important role model for themselves.

Essence

The essence section of a phenomenological study is designed to capture a composite viewpoint of both the textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). For the current study, this section describes the “essence” of the participants’ experiences with influence as a youth leader. This section will provide a comprehensive picture of both the textural and structural descriptions that contributed to the participants’ experiences of influencing in the context of the youth leader.

In essence, the participants ascribed meaning to their experiences with influence in the context of youth leadership by learning how to lead from their families. While participants in this study were not yet to a point in their lives of holding a career with managers or mentors they looked up to for a role model, the youth leaders instead found examples set by their own parents. As a result of the influence of their families, participants defined influence as “setting an example.” This involved being someone others would look up to and want to be like. Influence was further described as creating a change, making an impact and using persuasion on others.

Participants agreed that confidence and an open mind were necessary in order to be an influential youth leader. To be an example others wished to follow it was important for the youth leader to display confidence in their decisions and to illicit the opinions of others when making those decisions. Failure to do this would limit their influential abilities. Respondents also acknowledged that being confident in their leadership could be challenging. Standing up to do the right thing in difficult situations can be scary, but in the end youth leaders felt good knowing they had made a positive impact. Seeing the change that had been created made them feel powerful, though also scared feeling the pressure to be a role model for others to follow.

Most often the youth leaders used this powerful influence to accomplish tasks. Common tasks participants faced involved completing school assignments, rallying teams together in sports and leading out in school council events. Participants used their influence to focus classmates back to a project at hand when individuals became distracted or did not express motivation to complete the assignment. Similarly, in the

athletic realm, when team members were not listening to their coach, the youth leader would step forward to gather attention to the task at hand.

As a result of their leadership experience, participants ascribed meaning to their experiences with influence in the context of being a youth leader by recognizing that influence can be either positive or negative. They articulated the need to be intentional about which type of influence to express and which influences of others they should follow. Their leadership experience encouraged participants to become more focused on how to use their influence for positive change rather than negative by not being afraid to stand up for the right thing no matter how difficult the situation. Though participants recognized it may be scary, they are setting an example for others to follow and can accomplish great things by using their influence for the greater good.

Figure 7 provides an essence of both structural and textural themes.

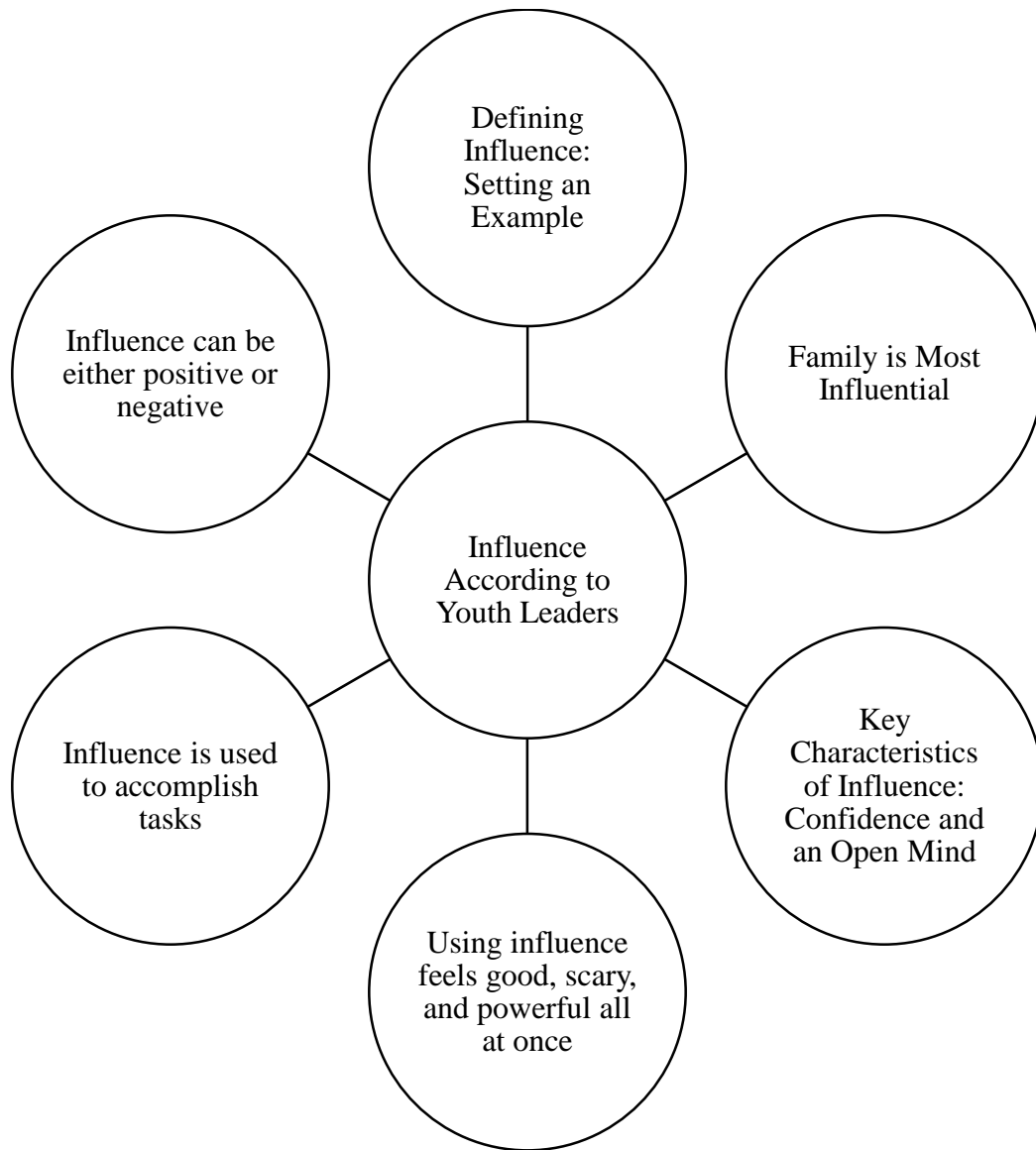


Figure 6. Essence of influence according to the youth leader.

The following chapter integrates data results from the qualitative research phase with interpretations of the researcher. Discussion is presented of the ability of the current study's findings to fill existing literature gaps. Implications and future research studies are also examined.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the experience of influence among youth leaders. Chapter five is dedicated to discussing the results from the qualitative interviews in order to answer the final research question, *How do young leaders experience influence?* Interpretations of the findings are presented on how the current study fills existing literature gaps. Chapter five closes with a dialog of recommendations for future research.

Overview

As stated prior, the purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the role of influence among youth leaders. The qualitative phase gathered descriptions of influence from current youth who have been previously identified as having strong leadership abilities. The data sought to answer the research question, *How do youth leaders describe influence?* The purpose for collecting this qualitative data was to provide a rich description of influence according to the youth who experience it themselves. Phenomenological data analysis of 29 in-depth, semi-structured interviews from the participants revealed several textural and structural themes. These themes indicated that the participants considered influence to be both positive and/or negative and experienced both positive and negative feelings when using influence. Influence was mainly used to guide groups toward accomplishing a task together and including others' thoughts in the process. Participants also indicated that family had the most influence over them.

No other known study examining influence among youth leaders has used a qualitative approach by directly interviewing the youth leaders. Based on the findings from the qualitative data, a better understanding how youth leaders describe influence has now emerged.

Interpreting the Qualitative Results

This section details interpretations of the results from the qualitative research phase in order to answer the final research question, *How do youth leaders experience influence?* and how these findings extend existing research. After presentation of these interpretations, recommendations for future research are offered.

Interpretation #1: Youth leaders struggle to provide a clear, concise definition of influence.

Commonalities were observed from the results of the current study such as themes of influence meaning to make a change or impact or to inspire others to want to be more like you, the leader. Participants recalled episodes of using their influence by setting an example for others to follow. This in turn would cause the followers to want to be more like them, which reflects an impact that was made. Participants agreed that the use of influence could be noticed by the change that it created.

Participants repeatedly described the feelings they experienced when demonstrating their influence as good, scary and powerful, often at the same time. Again, agreement is seen of statements that contradict themselves. The definitions and further explanations given of influence among youth leaders could be impacted by the ages of the participants. Participants ranged in ages of 11-18, which encompass years of much development and change in youth. These years are also filled with peer pressure as youth

attempt to fit in with their fellow classmates and friends. The mixture of different feelings could be partially due to the overall feelings of uncertainty during these years of adolescence. As Erikson's (1982) Stages of Psychosocial Development illustrated, the adolescent years are seen as a time of identity confusion (1982). Thus, it is not surprising to see their attempts at discovering their identities spill over into their views of leadership and influence as well. The results of the current study indicate that youth leaders experience a mixture of emotions when using their influence and feel that this influence can take on the shape of many different aspects, depending on the situation at hand.

Defining the term "leadership" is difficult in the world of adult leadership and this same challenge was also observed in the youth leadership realm. This definition according to Northouse (2013) is, "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 5). By defining leadership in this manner, Northouse provided that leadership is not seen as a trait or characteristic, nor is it seen as a one-way process. Instead, it focused on the fact that leadership is interactive in nature and not solely limited to the leader in the group (Northouse, 2013). Leadership is also often associated with authority and the belief that one must have power in order to be a leader (Klau, 2006).

While the world of adult leadership focuses on power and position, youth leaders view leadership in a different light. Instead, it is described as effecting change and helping others (Mortensen et al., 2014). Youth leadership has been defined as a training activity or process (White, 2004). With a more passive position, youth have been forced to shape their leadership different than that of adult leaders. Matthews (2004) recognized the challenge that this presents and stated that it may never be possible to provide a

universally accepted definition of youth leadership. It is not surprising then that given that youth leadership is different than adult leadership, the role of influence among youth leaders would also be different than that of adults.

Northouse discussed the intimate relationship of leadership and influence. Not only does leadership involve influence, Northouse stated that “Without influence, leadership does not exist” (2013, p. 5). While the absolute definition of adult leadership or youth leadership may be debatable, the direct connection between leadership and influence is widely accepted (Libby, Sedonaen, & Bliss, 2006; Macneil, 2006; McElravy & Hastings, 2014). One aspect of influence that participants did seem to agree was a contradictory statement that influence can be both positive and negative. Many recalled personal examples in which they had experienced others influencing them in both good and bad ways. Some even admitted while they aimed to use their own influence for good, they also had, at times, used it for bad purposes, such as trying to argue with a parents.

The results of the current study indicate that youth leaders, have trouble agreeing on one set leadership definition. This is similar to the inconsistencies of agreement upon one definition of leadership among adult leaders. Because leadership and influence are so intimately related this is not surprising. With this information from the current study at hand, youth leadership development can now address these troubling terms and spend time focusing on youth leaders understanding of what it truly means to be influential. By helping to them to see their own influential power clearer these youth leaders can become even more effective than before.

Interpretation #2: Being a youth leader is difficult and requires the leader to be confident and have an open mind.

Through the qualitative data collection process of the current study, participants openly shared that being a leader and using their influence was a very difficult task. This was explained mostly due to the pressure they felt from others and the pressure they put on themselves to set a good example for others to follow. Mostly this was due to the fact that the participants recognized it was often the responsibility of the leader to be the “bad guy” in situations when no one else wanted to. They explained that doing the right thing is always necessary but can be very challenging to follow through on.

Likewise, leaders need to be brave and confident, especially in times of trial. Participants were proud to share stories of times when they spoke up and gave their opinions, which they viewed as demonstrating confidence. They felt that confidence is what helped them to continually do the right thing, even when it was hard. Also in a similar theme was the consistent mention of leaders needing to be open-minded. This tied directly to their feelings of pride at sharing ideas that may be different than the rest of the group and recognizing the need as a leader to encourage others to be accepting as well. During the adolescent years, youth oftentimes find themselves thinking that adults will not listen to them (Mortenson et al., 2014). This could be a part of the reason that they viewed open-mindedness with such importance if they felt like it is something they are not experiencing on a regular basis in their own lives. Similarly, youth at this age often feel the need for approval from their peers and experience many feelings of uncertainty in their personality identity (Komives et al., 2006). While the world of adult leadership is

centered on the career context, for youth leaders a school context instead needs to be considered. As Eccles and Roeser (2003) stated,

Despite the increasing recognition that schools play a critical role in cognitive and social development, our understanding of the impact of schools on development is still quite rudimentary. Only recently have researchers interested in schools looked beyond the intellectual domain to examine how experiences in classrooms and schools influence adolescents' feelings, identity-related beliefs, and behavioral choices (p. 129).

Confidence is something youth yearn for so that the rest of their peers will not see what they are going through. It is understandable that this arose as one of the main components necessary to be a youth leader as many are experiencing personal identity crises during this life stage (Erikson, 1982; Kroger, 2003).

The results of the current study revealed the emphasis youth leaders place on confidence and open-mindedness as necessities to be an effective leader. With this new-found awareness, youth development programs should now find ways to emphasize this in their curriculum as well. By studying diversity and focusing on the need to consider the opinions of others, such programs will appeal to youths' values and set them up better for success. Providing exercises and techniques to include all individuals, even those, who are not speaking up, will allow these youth leaders to practice their skills in these areas and become more effective leaders.

Interpretation #3: Family is the most influential in youth leaders' lives and youth leaders practice using their influence among their family members.

With school as their main focus of day to day activities, participants in the current study recalled many examples of parents providing them guidance and advice on their academic careers. When unsure of which classes to take, colleges to apply for, or

extracurricular activities to enroll in, parents were the first ones participants turned to. They expressed feelings that their parents had shaped them into the person they are today and how their advice and the example they set for the youth had a great influence over their personal decisions.

Participants in the current study also shared many stories of using their own influence in their home with their siblings. Through examples such as noticing their siblings repeating phrases the participant regularly used to noticing that siblings would clean, or not clean, their room depending on what the participant did, the youth respondents noticed clearly how powerful their influence could be. In turn, they acknowledged a great amount of responsibility to be a good role model to their siblings. Siblings are often some of the first friends one makes in life and a portion of time is spent with them. Many participants did not hold official positions of power and some of their biggest opportunities to flex power happen with younger siblings. They may feel more confident since it is a younger individual and therefore may be more forward with using their influence.

When asked questions about who they felt was most influential in their lives and where they felt they had used their influence, participants repeatedly referenced their families. Parents were seen as the most influential in their lives. Respondents repeatedly cited their parents as those they look to in times of trouble for advice and support and believe the person they have become is mostly due the influence their parents have had on their lives. Parents are the adults children look to for guidance in their actions and the parent-adolescent relationship forms a cycle of feedback on their actions. This cycle is depicted in Figure 8.

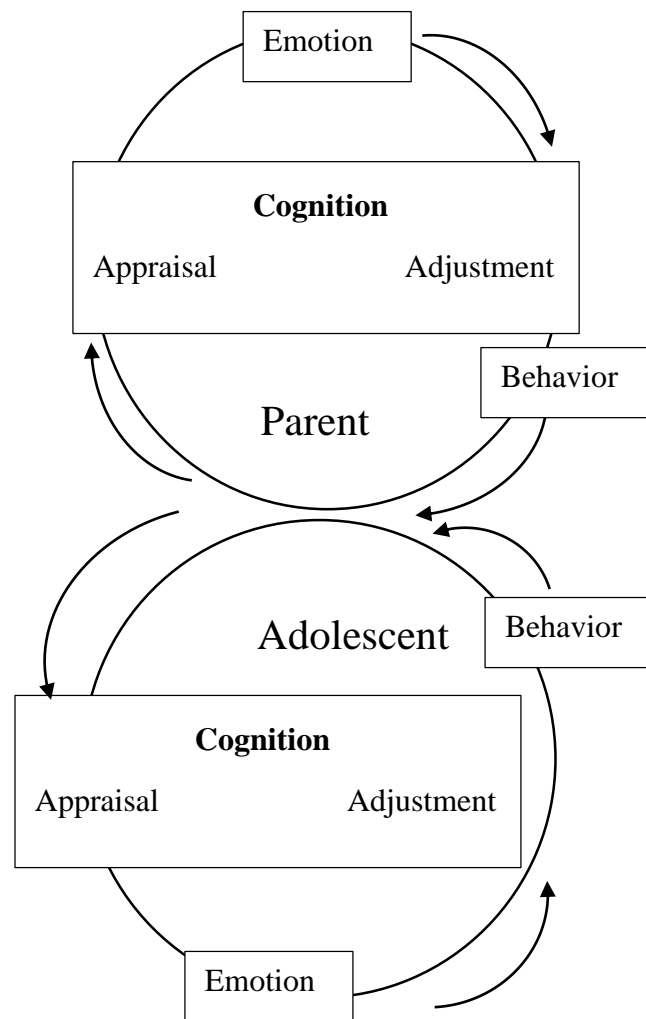


Figure 7. Parent-adolescent interacting feedback loops (adapted from Adams & Berzonsky, 2003).

As adolescents experiment with different actions through determining their identity, they respond to parents' appraisal of those actions (Granic, Dishion, & Hollenstein, 2003). Youth respond emotionally to their parents' judgement and then make adjustments to their actions, thereby starting the cycle over. This cycle does not come into play for adult leadership as they matured past this point in their life. Parental influence is something missing entirely from the literature on adult leadership.

This offered a stark contrast to adult leadership in that most adult leadership do not reference familial life when asked about influential aspects that shape them and their leadership. However youth leaders consider their parents to be the most influential figures in their lives (Otto, 2000) which participants stated in their interviews. This parental context of youth leadership could greatly alter the way youth leadership development is approached.

Integrating this familial influence into youth leadership development understanding should affect the way youth development programs are designed. By recognizing this important and influential relationship, leaders of such programs should use this as the basis to help the youth leaders further develop their influence skills. This understanding provides a foundation for youth leaders to begin to understand the process of influence and appreciate those in their life who have been most influential. In turn, they will grasp the power of influence and the true difference they can make in the lives of others by honing their skills. This can help to motivate them to continue improving their leadership capabilities and press onward even when they face difficult situations where their leadership is put to the test.

Practical Implications

Youth leaders and adult leaders share both similarities and differences. It is important to have a strong comprehension of each of these in order to truly understand what is unique about the youth leader. Building first upon the common ground that youth leaders have with their adult counterparts can pave the way for discovered differences that need to be taken into consideration.

Responses from the current study seem to identify with the style approach of leadership which focuses not on the traits of the leader, but rather their behavior. Youth leaders in the current study identify with this style approach of leadership theory in their descriptions of leading by setting the example, creating change, or making an impact. The style approach divides behavior into two categories, task behaviors and relationship behaviors (Northouse, 2013). One major group of research studies conducted to examine the behaviors of leaders were the Ohio State Studies. These studies used the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) in 1957 and an abbreviated version, the LBDQ-XII, in 1963, with items formulated on different aspects of leader behaviors (Northouse, 2013). Data results from this line of research indicated two types of leader behaviors emerged, initiating structure, similar to task behaviors, and consideration, similar to relationship behaviors (Northouse, 2013). Data results from the University of Michigan studies yielded comparable results as well with behaviors of employee orientation and production orientation (Bowers & Seashore, 1966). Production orientation is centered on leadership behaviors focusing on the production, or task, side of the job while employee orientation approached employees from a relational standpoint (Northouse, 2013).. Participants approached their leadership and influence with task behaviors such as focusing on completing a homework assignment and influencing their peers to concentrate on completion rather than “goofing off.” However, relationship behaviors were also demonstrated through the desire to have an open mind toward the ideas of others and include everyone in discussions and projects.

However, while adult leaders focus on the power aspects of leadership, youth instead are much more collaborative and have to rely on informal peer influence. Many

respondents from the current study described using their influence to include more participants in class discussions and projects, especially those who normally would be bystanders. Through this study, leadership development programs for youth now have the opportunity to have gained insight into the view that youth have on leadership and influence. Rather than crafting programs to follow a traditional leadership development style seen in programs for adults, these programs must be tailored specifically toward the aspects of leadership that directly resound with youth.

Recognizing that youth leaders are more effective when using the style approach in informal influence environments, these programs can capitalize on this by integrating the style approach leadership theory into their curriculum. Instead of focusing on traits of the youth leader, the programs should offer opportunities for the students to learn about task behaviors and relationship behaviors in the context of influence. Rather than emphasizing tasks of adult leadership such as meeting deadlines and hitting sales goals, the tasks of youth leaders can focus on ensuring everyone's voice is heard when it comes to class projects or teams. The task youth leaders identify with is doing the right thing no matter the cost or the situation. The relational behavior tasks are tied directly to this by building relationships with others through hearing their opinions and keeping an open mind.

One stark difference between adult leadership and youth leadership is the weight placed upon the influence of family members. While literature on adult leadership does not discuss adult leaders citing their parents as those who offer them influential advice, youth leaders look to their parents as their role models. In a review of adult leadership

development literature, Day (2001) examined many aspects of leadership development.

These included,

(1) understanding the difference between leader development and leadership development (conceptual context); (2) reviewing how state-of-the-art development is being conducted in the context of ongoing organizational work (practice context); and (3) summarizing previous research that has implications for leadership development (research context) (Day, 2001, p. 581).

Day (2001) discussed several aspects of leadership development such as 360-degree feedback, coaching, mentoring, networking, job assignments and action learning.

With the exception of mentoring, none of these were mentioned by youth leaders as influential aspects of their own leadership development. When participants shared scenarios of using their influence as leaders, the examples related to friends, family and school and the majority focused on helping others and being a role model. Furthermore, in Day's extensive review of literature no mention is made of the role that family plays in the development of a leader (2001), while youth leaders clearly place great emphasis on this aspect. It is clear to see that stark differences exist between the leadership of an adult and that of a youth. By furthering the understanding of youth's view of leadership and influence, opportunity to create programs that better foster this leadership is possible.

Youth leaders have provided the perfect starting point for introduction to idea of influence and how to apply it as a youth leader. Youth leaders can begin to understand influence and how to use it by recognizing its impact on their own lives through their parents. While it may be a difficult term for them to define, these personal examples should provide the link that can assist in clarifying the topic. Furthermore, by recognizing the effect their parents had on them and the effect that they too can have on others, this can serve as a motivating factor to encourage youth during challenging situations.

Conclusion

Youth leaders lead in ways that differ from adult leadership (Kress, 2006). Not all adult leadership theories will transfer to youth leadership, in fact some may even contradict it (Mortensen et al., 2014). While the majority of research focuses on the world of the adult leader, the experiences of adult leaders may be tied to leadership experiences from their early life and childhood (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). The world of research on youth leadership leaves much yet to be learned and one method for decreasing this gap is to turn to youth leaders themselves to fill the void.

The results of the current study demonstrated that youth leaders use influence in their leadership, as do adult leaders. However, their goals and purpose for influencing are different than those of their elders. Rather than looking to careers, coaches and network connections to observe leadership practices (Day, 2001), these youth leaders look to their family for the role model in decision making. Their home life helps to shape their use of influence to accomplish tasks, both good and bad. Rather than relying on power and position to lead, youth leaders believe instead that being confident, having an open mind and leading by example are the key aspects of leadership. They view influence as effecting change or creating an impact and recognize the responsibility that comes with this role. They admit that being a leader is not always easy and understanding leadership and influence is still confusing to them, similar to their adult counterparts.

The study of youth leadership faces a constant obstacle, that obstacle being time. Each day that passes the youth leader moves through adolescence toward adulthood. It is of utmost importance that society takes the time to invest in the youth today who will be the future leaders of society (Seevers, Dormody, & Clason, 1995). By approaching the

research and development of youth leadership in a way that more accurately describes and resonates with how youth leaders influence, a better understanding will be reached by all of how effective these youth leaders can truly be. We can create more effective youth leadership programs and better research the variables involved in youth influence. To truly learn how to effectively invest in these youth leaders, further research needs to be conducted on the field of youth leadership. The most effective way to do this is to go directly to the youth leaders themselves in order to gain their perspective and further knowledge on the subject, as the current study has done.

Future Research

The current body of youth leadership literature maintains aspects of youth leadership and programs in which youth leadership has proven successful. The current study was not aimed to disprove any findings. However, a gap in literature exists of exploring youth leadership from the youth's direct perspective. Additionally, very limited research is available specifically relating the use of influence among youth leaders. While influence in adult leaders is focused on accomplishing organizational goals and objectives, youth leaders instead influence followers to accomplish tasks and include other individuals in the decision-making process. The results of the current study have demonstrated that youth leadership is a field requiring much more exploration and youth leaders themselves have many thoughts to share on it. A longitudinal study could be valuable in examining how youth leaders use their leadership skills as they develop into adulthood. By following the subjects from their educational careers and into their fields of work, data could be collected on their career leadership success to learn how

effectively these subjects use their leadership abilities when they mature into the adult world, and how their views of leadership change in the process.

A second valuable study would be to examine a comparison of views of leadership and influence of youth leaders in the early adolescent years (ages 9-12) to the later adolescence years (ages 13-19). This could easily be done with the NHRI program by using junior counselors just entering the program and comparing them to the group of junior counselors who will soon be graduating. Subjects could be interviewed at the start of the program, part way through, and again at the end. Likewise, a study could also be conducted comparing views of leadership and influence of junior counselors up to age 18, with the NHRI counselors, ages 18-22.

The theme of familial influence in the lives of youth leaders should also be examined through further research. A deeper dive into how exactly family influences leaders and what sort of impact this has on a youth's decisions as leader could provide rich information to help in better understanding the youth leader. A study specifically considering differences among youth leaders from traditional families compared to those from non-traditional families, i.e. single parent homes, step-parents, LGBT+ parent homes, could also provide interesting insight.

Lastly, while this study followed a qualitative design, it could be followed by a quantitative study to further assess leadership among youth and how they describe influence. Questionnaires could be distributed in schools and classes to determine who the students identified as the most influential among their classmates. This study could be expanded to follow these influential students into their careers to see if their co-workers also identified them as the most influential individuals in the company.

Other future research studies to consider may include (1) replicating the current study on a similar program at another educational institution, and (2) using a qualitative phenomenological approach with the NHRI counselors to explore their perspectives on influence. These and other prospective research studies may prove astute into bridging the gap in literature available on youth leadership and more specifically on how young leaders view their leadership and influence.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Interviewee: _____

NHRI Counselor: _____

Project: _____

Date, Time, and Location of Interview: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Introduction: I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today for your interview. Our discussion will be audio recorded and later transcribed. I will later send the transcription to your NHRI Counselor for you to review. It is important I am correctly understanding what you say. It is also important that the transcript is accurate, so it will contain the exact words you used (verbatim) rather than me paraphrasing for me. You may see “um” and “uh huh” in the transcription and that is completely normal. I will remove those if I use any quotes from you in the final project.

Project Overview: As you probably already know, I’m studying youth leaders like yourself and learning from their experiences, in particular how you use your influence as a youth leader.

Review of Consent Form: (Have them read and sign consent form if they agree to participate)

I’m interested in your thoughts, feelings and ideas regarding your experiences as a leader. If at any point during our interview you have a question or would like me to repeat a question, just let me know. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, I’m just interested in learning your opinion. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. What has been your biggest accomplishment as a leader?
 - a. How do you think you accomplished this?
2. What are some of the most important things to know when being a leader?
3. Please describe influence for me.
4. If you had to explain it in just one sentence, how would you tell someone what influence means?

5. In the past month, tell me about some times when you were using your influence.
6. Is there a certain time that stands out when you felt yourself using influence to get something done as a leader?
 - a. What did that feel like?
7. Can you remember a time when you felt like others were influencing you when you were making a decision?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about being a leader?

Conclusion: Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. This concludes the formal portion of our interview. Are there any other thoughts you'd like to add?

Thank you again, I will reach out to your NHRI counselor when the transcript is complete and ready for you to review. I appreciate your participation!

APPENDIX B**Informed Consent Forms**

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IRB# 14961

THE ROLE OF INFLUENCE AMONG YOUTH LEADERS

You are invited to permit your child to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decisions whether or not to allow your child to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Your child is eligible to participate in this study, because he/she has been actively involved as a NHRI Junior Counselor. This parental consent form is necessary for your child's participation, because he/she is under the age of 19. Your child will also be asked if he/she is willing to participate. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role that influence plays among youth leaders. Specifically, we hope to examine their views on influence and how they have both experienced influence in their life and used it themselves.

This study will take approximately 30 minutes of your child's time. The 30 minutes will be devoted to an individual interview. The interview will be conducted in a public building within the community. The interview will be audio recorded, but I will be the only one who will listen to the recording. There are no known risks associated with this research.

While the field of youth leadership research is growing, there currently does not exist any information around how young leaders use influence in their roles. This study will hopefully provide insight into this gap with information directly from the young leaders themselves.

Any information obtained during this study which could identify your child will be kept strictly confidential. The audio files will be stored on the investigator's laptop which is password protected. The information obtained in this study may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences, but your child's identity will be kept strictly confidential.

Your child's rights as a research subject have been explained to you. If you have any additional questions about the study, please contact me at 508-272-2731. Another person you can contact with questions is the Director of NHRI, Lindsay Hastings, at 402-472-3477. If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board (UNL IRB), telephone 402-472-6965.

You are free to decide not to enroll your child in this study or to withdraw your child at any time without adversely affecting their or your relationship with the investigator, NHRI or the University of Nebraska- Lincoln. Your decision will not results in any loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled.



IRB# 20150114961EP
Date Approved: 01/27/2015
Valid Until: 01/26/2016

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

YOU ARE VOLUNTARILY MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE CERTIFIES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE HAVING READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE INFORMATION PRESENTED. YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO KEEP.

☐

I AGREE TO ALLOW MY CHILD'S INTERVIEW TO BE AUDIO RECORDED.

Child's Name

Signature of Parent

Date

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR

Kelly Moguel Cell: 508-272-2731;

ADVISOR

Lindsay Hastings Office: 402-472-3477

YOUTH ASSENT FORM

THE ROLE OF INFLUENCE AMONG YOUTH LEADERS

We are inviting you to participate in this study, because you have been actively involved as a NHRI junior counselor. We are interested in learning about your views of influence and how you use influence as a leader.

This research will take you about 30 minutes to do. You will be interested about your thoughts and ideas on influence in a public building within the community. Your NHRI counselor will also be present with you during this interview. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes and will be audio recorded. I will be the only one who listens to the recording.

There are no known risks associated with this research. Being in the study will not have direct benefits to you, but it may help researchers and other communities understand how young leaders like you view influence.

Your responses will be strictly confidential. We may publish the results in an academic journal or we may present at a conference, but your identity will be completely confidential. Any quotation we use from you will have a fake name.

We will also ask your parents for their permission for you to do this study. Please talk this over with them before you decide whether or not to participate.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or NHRI.

If you have any questions at any time, please contact me at 508-272-2731. Another person you can contact with questions is the director of NHRI, Lindsay Hastings, at 402-472-3477. If you check "yes" it means that you have voluntarily decided to participate and have read everything that is on this form. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form to keep.

_____ Yes, I would like to participate in this study and agree to have be audio recorded during my interview.

_____ No, I do not want to participate in the study.

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Investigator: Kelly Moguel, 508-272-2731 Advisor: Lindsay Hastings, 402-472-3477

CHILD ASSENT FORM (grades 1-8)

THE ROLE OF INFLUENCE AMONG YOUTH LEADERS

We want you to help us with our project because you may have been a NHRI junior counselor. We want to know about what you think about leaders.

We are going to talk to you for about 30 minutes and your counselor will be there with you too. We are going to record what we talk about and I will be the only one who listens to the recording and myself and the other person working on this project are going to be the only ones who know you talked to us besides your parent and your counselor and we tell people about the project, we are going to give you a fake name (called a pseudonym) so no one else will know it was you either.

We will also ask your parents if it is okay to talk to you about this so you should ask them any questions to before you tell us you want to do this too. You do not have to talk to us about what you think about leaders and you can tell us you want to stop at any time also.

If you have any questions at any time, you can call me at 508-272-2731. Another person you can contact with questions is the director of NHRI, Lindsay Hastings, at 402-472-3477. If you check “yes” it means that you want to talk with us and have voluntarily decided to participate and have read everything that is on this form. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form to keep.

_____ Yes, I would like to participate in this study and agree to have be audio recorded during my interview.

_____ No, I do not want to participate in the study.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Investigator: Kelly Moguel, 508-272-2731 Advisor: Lindsay Hastings, 402-472-3477

APPENDIX C

Sample E-mail Script

E-mail Script to Parents of NHRI Junior Counselors - Invitation to Participate

IRB #: 20150114961EP

(Today's Date)

Dear (Name of Parent of NHRI Junior Counselor),

As an NHRI Junior Counselor, your child has been invited to participate in the second phase of my research study examining the role of influence among NHRI junior counselors.

An interview to discuss your child's thoughts on influence will require approximately 30 minutes of their time. This interview would be scheduled during one of their regular meeting times with their NHRI Counselor. The interview will be with me and will be located in the College of Business Administration in the NHRI Student Meeting Space (ACB, Room 5). Your child's NHRI counselor will also be included in the interview meeting to add a level of comfort and familiarity for your child. Additionally, the interview will be audio recorded to ensure that all responses are recorded. Questions will focus on your child's experience with leadership and influence. If you are able to assist me with this research, please reply to this message indicating your intention. I will contact you by e-mail to set up the date, time, and location of the interview.

Any information obtained during this study which could identify your child will be kept strictly confidential. Your child's name will not be included in the project or other documents. A pseudonym will be used in place of your child's name in transcripts of the interview and if any responses are cited in any other documents. The audio files will be stored on the investigator's laptop which is password protected and will only be seen by the investigators until the completion of the study. The information obtained in this study may be published in academic journals or presented at academic meetings, but the data will be reported as aggregate data.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. In the event of any problems resulting from participation in this study, psychological treatment is available on a sliding fee schedule at the UNL Psychological Consultation Center at 402-472-2351.

If you have any questions about this research, you may call the principal investigator, Kelly Moguel, at any time at 508-272-2731. You may ask questions before, or during the study, either by contacting me at the telephone number above or by e-mail: kellymoguel@gmail.com. You may also contact the faculty advisor on this project, Dr. Lindsay Hastings at 402-472-3477 or email her at lhastings2@unl.edu. If you have any questions concerning your child's rights as a research subject that have not been

answered by the principal investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at 402-472-6965.

Participation in this research project is voluntary and you are free to decide for your child not participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your current and/or future relationship with the investigators, NHRI, the NHRI Director, NHRI Staff, or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

There may be no direct benefit to your child as a participant in the research; however, the information they provide will contribute to help determine effective developmental opportunities for young leaders in the future.

I hope you will consider assisting me in this research.

Sincerely,

Kelly Moguel

UNL Graduate Student

APPENDIX D

In-Person Scripts

Verbal Consent Script for meetings with NHRI Counselors

IRB #: 20150114961EP

Hi (Name of NHRI Counselor)!

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you read from Lindsay's e-mail, I'd like to ask your assistance in a research study examining the role of influence among NHRI Junior Counselors. The next phase in this study involves an interview, which will involve me asking your junior counselor questions about how they view influence. This interview should last approximately thirty minutes. Prior to beginning this interview, I would like for the junior counselor to review and sign an informed consent form.

I would ask you to contact your junior counselor to determine if this is something they are interested in. If your junior counselor is interested in participating, please reach out to me and let me know their intent. I'll leave you with my contact information. I will then work with Lindsay to contact the family of the interested junior counselor to obtain the appropriate parental consent and assent from the junior counselor.

There are no risks or benefits associated with this study. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your current and/or future relationship with the investigators, NHRI, the NHRI Director, NHRI Staff, or UNL.

Thank you, again, for agreeing to meet with me today. Your handout will give you a few talking points to use with your junior counselors. Do you have any questions?

Verbal Consent Script- Shared with NHRI Junior Counselor at Start of Interview

IRB #: 20150114961EP

Hi (Name of NHRI Junior Counselor)!

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you heard from your NHRI Counselor and parents, you have been invited to participate in the second phase of my research examining influence among NHRI junior counselors. This phase is an interview phase, which will involve me asking you questions regarding your thoughts and ideas around influence. This interview should last approximately one half an hour. Prior to beginning this interview, I would like for you to review and sign an informed consent form.

To highlight some of what is in the informed consent letter, the interview will be audio taped to ensure that all responses are recorded. Any information you provide during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be included in the project or other documents. In fact, we will replace your real name with a new one so that no one can tell it was you. This new name will be used on all the documents with your answers. The audio files will be stored on the investigator's laptop which is password protected and will only be seen by the investigators until the completion of the study.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your current and/or future relationship with the investigators, NHRI, the NHRI Director, NHRI Staff, or UNL.

Thank you, again, for agreeing to meet with me today!

APPENDIX E**Interview Validation Form**

Title of Project: The role of influence among youth leaders. (IRB #: 20150114961EP)

Dear NHRI Counselor,

Thank you again for connecting me with your junior counselor and providing me the opportunity to speak with them. Attached here you will find the transcript of our recent interview regarding influence and youth leadership. Please review this with (junior counselor) at your earliest convenience and let me know if there are any corrections that need to be made.

If you or (junior counselor) should have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. Again, thank you to you both for your time in participating in this study.

Warm regards,

Kelly Moguel, Principal Investigator

Cell: 508-272-2731

Email: kellymoguel@gmail.com

APPENDIX F**Peer Review**

Peer Review of the Qualitative Findings

The following is a summary of my peer review completed on the qualitative findings of Kelly Moguel's thesis research. The research question for the study was presented as, "How do young leader describe influence?"

As reviewer, I completed the following steps:

1. Became familiar with the overall purpose of the study.
2. Reviewed sample interview transcripts and communicated with the researcher to verify coding.
3. Examined the thematic analysis and the researcher's interpretations and verified that they were consistent with the sample transcripts received.
4. Provided feedback to the researcher to discuss my assessment of the status of her study, in particular the qualitative interviewing phase, including coding procedures and thematic findings.

From this review, I consider the study's qualitative phase to be well designed and thorough. I believe the coding procedures to be an accurate representation of the experiences of the research participants. Moreover, from my review of the process employed by the researcher, this study's qualitative methods appear to have been conducted in an ethical manner using procedures and protocols reflective of rigorous qualitative research.

Signed this 13th day of October, 2015,



Nicole Bauer

Peer Reviewer