THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESIDENTS' LOCUS OF CONTROL ORIENTATION

AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLES OF THE RESIDENT ASSISTANT

by

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(Under the Direction of Merrily S. Dunn)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine what Resident Assistant (RA) roles or job responsibilities are most important to first-year residential students in their transition into the college. Specifically, is there a relationship between students' perceptions of their personal control as they negotiate the many challenges presented them in the collegiate environment and how helpful they perceive the RAs to be to them in their first year of college? Employing a quantitative approach to data analysis, this study of students' perceptions utilized a paper questionnaire which combined two validated instruments from prior research: Conlogue's (1993) *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* and Levenson's (1973a, 1981) *The Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Locus of Control Scales*. In addition, participants were asked to complete five open-ended questions and provide demographic information that was tabulated and quantitatively analyzed. Findings in this study concluded that there appears to be a slight statistically significance in the correlation between high scores on Internality Scale and the belief that all RA roles are important. The research findings substaniate that parents continue to be powerful others in the lives of students. In addition, findings provide insights as to how students perceive their autonomy within the collegiate environment. Finally, the RA position continues to

attract undergraduates as a position where leadership experience can be obtained and financial

assistance can be found to combat the rising costs of attending college.

INDEX WORDS: Dormitories, College administration, College housing, College student, Locus of control orientation, Resident assistant, Residence halls, Student paraprofessionals

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DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my parents, Glenn Clayton Sargent, Sr. and Leona Louise Ray Sargent. Throughout my childhood, I was afforded opportunities for a better education through their hard work and sometimes sacrifices. No matter what, I experienced their constant encouragement to do my best always in whatever career I chose to pursue.

Although my father passed several years ago, I have felt his support and guidance throughout my journey as a doctoral student. My mother, to whom I owe a great deal of gratitude, has been a constant cheerleader and always faithful that I would complete this process. She always knows just what to say.

It is my hope that the quality of the work contained within this document reflects the high standards they have modeled for me throughout my lifetime. Thank you for all that you have done for me in my life and for making it possible for me to pursue my goals and dreams.

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I would like to begin my acknowledgements by thanking my family for all their encouragement while I completed my education. The thought of returning to school after 23 years of working full-time as a student affairs administrator was very scary. I had reached a point in my career where I had begun to question whether or not it was time to leave the profession. During this time, my family offered their strong support as I agonized over the decision as to what would be my next step. When I chose to return to UGA and become a full-time doctoral student, members of my family were delighted due to fact that they had heard me talk about it for so long and it would bring me closer to home for the first time in many years.

Since my return, many individuals have played a significant role in my life during my journey as a doctoral student. First, I believe that any success that I have had during my career as a student affairs professional has been the result of the solid educational foundation I received in my Masters program at UGA. Faculty mentors, Dr. Theodore K. Miller and Dr. Roger B. Winston, Jr., worked hard to prepare the students of my cohort to see the endless opportunities ahead working closely with students and positively influencing their college experiences. We, as a group, believed that Ted provided us with the inspiration to go forth and do great things; however, Roger provided us with the necessary tools for our entry into the profession. Today, I believed I have been truly blessed to have been able to study and learn from these two great scholars who have remained as strong role models for me throughout my career.

I especially want to thank Dr. Merrily Dunn for all her help and support as my primary faculty advisor and committee chair. You have always been there with your encouraging words

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would not have been possible. As a result, I was able to identify a very healthy sample size, which has made my findings more significant.

In addition, I would like to thank the Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA) for their support for my research. The grant I received enabled me to pay for some of the expenses associated with my study. I am looking forward to presenting my findings at the next annual conference this fall.

I would like to thank my special doctoral buddies, all whom have made my journey more enjoyable. To those who have graduated, J.D. White and Gail Cole-Avent - you provided the inspiration to complete the journey. To Lisa Sperling, Mark Whitesel, Scott Oliver, and Marc Cordon - cheers to the Cohort of Fall 2006! To Jamie Riley and Candace Maddox - keep moving. The end is in sight. To Rick Gibson, my writing buddy - your graduation is just around the corner. Get it done! Finally, to Karen Boyd – enough said dudette! We made it! Finishing up and walking together – that's the best!

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Overall, entering into the doctoral program at UGA was a very good decision. The experience has afforded me the opportunity to understand and prepare for the challenges that students and campus administrators may face in the future. Personally, this time has also been one of self-reflection and professional renewal.

So, there it is! One of my life's dreams has come true!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Residential living can be a powerful force in shaping both the essential character and the developmental impact of an individual's college experience" (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994, p. 39). According to Pascarella et al. (1994), students who live on campus have several advantages over their peers who commute to college. Pascarella et al. indicated that residential students:

> 1) participate in a greater number of extracurricular, social, and cultural events on campus; 2) interact more frequently with faculty and peers in informal settings; 3) are significantly more satisfied with college and are more positive about the social and interpersonal environment of their campus; 4) are more likely to persist and graduate from college; 5) show significantly greater positive gains in areas of psychosocial development such as autonomy and inner-directedness, intellectual orientation, and self-concept; and 6) demonstrate significantly greater increases in aesthetics, cultural, and intellectual values, social and political liberalism, and secularism. (1994, p. 39)

In an earlier study, Astin (1973) reported that students who lived on campus were more satisfied with the friends that they made in college, the quality of the interactions they had with faculty members, and the overall reputation of the institution. Chickering (1974) reported similar findings one year later and further suggested that students who lived on campus were more involved in campus activities and more satisfied with their overall collegiate experience than their peers who commuted to campus. Astin and Chickering suggested that first year

students benefitted the most from living on campus, supporting earlier research conducted by Greenleaf (1969). According to Greenleaf:

> The freshmen year is probably the most crucial of all the college years. Then a student's enthusiasm for college, [his or her] curiosity, and his [or her] willingness to work can be snuffed out or reinforced. The majority of freshmen who fail do so not because they lack ability to do college work, but because of insufficient maturation, failure to adjust to the campus environment, and the inability to develop self-discipline and to accept self-responsibility. (1969, p. 67)

Therefore, taking into consideration the positive educational benefits that students could gain by living on campus, Blimling (1981) strongly promoted that campus administrators should develop meaningful experiences within the residence halls that would attract and involve students, discouraging them from moving off-campus after their first year. He encouraged campus administrators not only to consider the educational aspects of the milieu management as outlined by Miller and Prince's seminal work, *The Future of Student Affairs* (1976), but also to consider the educational programming and social aspects of the living environment that housing staff could establish within the facilities.

Because of this growing emphasis to promote the educational aspects of living on campus, housing administrators were challenged to design appropriate staffing patterns and create positions that could effectively deliver programs and services. Much of the focus, therefore, centered on one unique and influential student paraprofessional position, the resident assistant (RA), which had been established many years ago within the housing departments of most colleges and universities. In 1988, Winston and Ender reported that 95 percent of four-year residence hall programs used paraprofessionals to deliver such services directly to students. The

individuals in these positions have proven to be effective in working with residential students.

Today, RAs are a key component to the overall administration of residential programs and are

seen as a "powerful force" within the residence halls (Butler & Campbell, 2003, p. 4).

The Importance of the Resident Assistant Position

Resident assistants are typically undergraduate students who are hired to work directly

with a group of their peers within the residence halls (Blimling, 1993, 1999, 2003; Winston &

Fitch, 1993). They serve as strong role models eager to assist other students, while possessing

affective interpersonal skills and leadership qualities (Winston & Fitch, 1993). RAs are

recognized as having the ability to monitor students' needs and attitudes through their day-to-day

interactions with their designated students (Jaeger & Caison, 2006). They often have more

contact with their residents than most student affairs practitioners (Jaeger & Caison, 2006) and

most faculty members during the students' first year of college (Winston & Anchors, 1993).

Given their proximity to their peers, they have the ability to influence a wide range of

developmental issues and have almost limitless opportunities to affect the lives of their students

(Winston & Anchors, 1993). In addition, RAs' positive peer relationships and their role

modeling behaviors have a significant impact on their residents' overall development (Blimling,

1999, 2003; Ender & Carranza, 1991; Winston, Ullom, & Werring, 1984). Students closely

watch RAs as they perform their assigned responsibilities and interact with other members of

their floors (Winston & Fitch, 1993). Therefore, the RAs' influences have greater educational

implications for the campus community beyond the residence halls (Blimling, 2003). According

to Winston and Fitch (1993),

the preeminent power of the RA is directly correlated with his or her ability to persuade

or influence residents by the force of example and the quality of personal relationships. It

is because the RA is a person that residents view as being effective in most areas of her or his life, as successfully measuring up to the institution's expectations, and having satisfactorily handled the pressures of young adult life that she or he is worthy of emulation. (p. 321)

While the RA job description continues to reflect expectations associated with traditional tasks such as completing administrative paperwork, enforcing campus policies and procedures, and responding to emergencies, campus administrators' expectations have continued to elevate the tasks to higher levels of responsibility and complexity as residential programs respond to the ever-changing needs of the student population (Crandall, 2004; Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Minor, 1999). More and more students are entering college with greater developmental needs, including additional personalized assistance due to mental and physical challenges, complex learning disabilities, and the issues presented by the changing diversity of the student populations (Jaeger & Caison, 2006). Thus, the RA job description continues to grow in length and detail (Buhrow, 1999; Dodge, 1990). These emerging issues have caused today's housing professionals to begin to question just how much more resident assistants should be expected to assume since they are primarily full-time students (Arvidson, 2003; Crandall, 2004; Minor, 1999; Porter, 1999). Furthermore, they wonder how useful resident students will see the RA roles and responsibilities in the future (Minor, 1999).

In addition to knowing about every office and service on our campus, we expect them to be our front line of defense and triage unit in myriad areas such as dating violence, eating disorders, sexual identity, sexual abuse, substance abuse, first aid, fire safety, policy enforcement, community development, cultural insensitivity, and every other "ism" in our broad lexicon. (Minor, 1999, p. 6)

In the past, the roles and responsibilities assigned to RAs were in response to what campus administrators believed to be the needs and concerns of the existing residential students (Blimling, 1999). However, are those needs still present in the current resident population.

Characteristics of College Students Today

According to Hoover (2009), campus officials have often labeled their incoming student populations with past stereotypes, but as the 21st century has arrived and forced higher education to rethink its goals, he believed that the time was right for a closer look at a new generation of students—one that appears to be somewhat different from its predecessor. In 2003, Howe and Strauss suggested that faculty and staff members would have to make adjustments in campus protocols and services in order to effectively engage with a new generation of students who are entering institutions with different needs and desires, especially given the number of students attending college and their level of determination to obtain a college degree. Newton (2000) suggests that students today are still experiencing the same developmental issues that previous generations of college students, however, they have grown up during very turbulent times that impacted not only Americans, but also touch many individuals around the world. From their extensive research, Howe and Strauss (2000, 2003) concluded that the new generation of college students does indeed possess some unique characteristics and these include:

- They remain very close with their parents and high school friends;

- They are intently focused on academic performance and grades are important;

- They keep very busy outside the classroom in various extracurricular activities;

- They willingly participate in community activities, a trait developed while in high school;

- They are very technologically savvy and have grown up with new technology
  readily available;

- They are more interested in professions that involve math and science, and less
  interested in the arts and humanities;

- They seek a secure and regimented environment;

- Although able to voice their opinion, they appear to be respectful of individuals in
  authority positions and follow rules and regulations for the most part;

- They do not take risks and are of somewhat conventional mind. They tend to
  agree with their family values while verging on conformist thinking;

- They are more ethnically diverse and do not see race as much as a social/political
  issue as older generations;

- The majority of college students today are female and all students do not see
  gender as much as a social/political issue as older generations. (Howe & Straus,
  2003)

While these characteristics are considered positive attributes by some Campbell and

Twenge (2010) indicated that there are members of the current student population who may now

be exhibiting narcissistic tendencies. Given the lifelong parental encouragement to feel special,

some students may be somewhat less interested in having supportive and caring relationships

with others (Campbell & Twenge, 2010). They may display a wide range of behaviors which

include: "taking credit for success and blaming others for failure, trying to associate with popular

peers; name-dropping; buying fancy cars or clothing; [and] jumping at chances for attention or

status" (Campbell & Twenge, 2010, p. 27). In order to respond to these characteristics,

Campbell and Twenge (2010) encourage campus administrators to create environments that are

conducive to learning how to accept responsibility for their actions, build relationships with peers and colleagues, and increase their internal "passion." They refer to passion as meaning the internal motivation (Campbell & Twenge, 2010) that can inspire students to do the things that bring them joy and satisfaction.

Once again, the role RAs may play in creating such environments and the influence they may exert on their designated residents may assist students in becoming less narcissistic. Therefore, the students may be able to experience a smoother transition into the collegiate environment. Acting as role models and creating a community atmosphere in the residence halls, RAs may be able to combat the students' narcissistic tendencies and redirect students in their development of positive social skills.

Social Learning Theory and Locus of Control Orientation

The combination of social learning theory and students' locus of control orientation provides a basis from which student affairs professionals may gain useful information about how students learn from their immediate environment and how they perceive their relationships with RAs. According to the basic premises of social learning theory as outlined by Rotter (1966, 1975), individuals may differ in the degree to which their behaviors are reinforced within their surrounding environments. In addition, they may differ in the degree to which the students may attribute reinforcement as a result of their own actions (internality) or to outside factors (externality) such as fate, chance, or powerful others, hence, determining their locus of control orientation. Social learning theory attempts to describe not only how individuals learn through their interactions with their immediate surroundings and how their behaviors are reinforced, but also how the reinforcement is shaped by the individuals' cognitive perceptions of the environment. By understanding students' needs and their expectations as defined through their

locus of control orientation, as well as being able to identify their possible behavioral

reinforcements within the residential setting, RAs may be able construct environments having

the potential to influence positively the first-year students during the transition from home to

college (Blimling, 1993; Greenleaf, 1970).

Locus of control orientation has been one of the most widely studied personality

constructs (Carton & Nowicki, 1994; Phares & Chaplin, 1997). Researchers (Pratt et al., 1993)

have attempted to analyze students' locus of control with a wide variety of variables that affect

the students' overall ability to be successful. Studies have involved the locus of control construct

and its impact on students': a) academic achievement (Keith, Pottebaum, & Eberhardt, 1986;

Kirkpatrick, Stant, Downes, & Gaither, 2008; Prociuk & Breen, 1974); b) incidental learning

(Dollinger, 2000); and c) stress levels (Abouserie, 1994). Realizing that each student may

possess a different locus of control orientation, RAs and other campus administrators may be

able to make decisions as to what programs and services are most helpful to students taking into

consideration the more common perspectives (Phares & Chaplin, 1997). This knowledge may

also provide insight about how some students may react or respond to the residential

environment (Phares & Chaplin, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

Student paraprofessionals are crucial to the overall delivery of student programs and

services for several reasons. First, previous research supports that they have been effective in

working with their peers, who respond favorably when their assistance is offered (Zirkle &

Hudson, 1975). In addition, students who serve in these leadership positions also benefit (Ames,

Zuzich, Schuh, & Benson, 1979; Powell, Plyler, Dickson, & McClellan, 1969). Finally, given

the financial stress that many colleges and universities have experienced over the course of time,

these paraprofessionals have become a very effective and economical way to continue providing or offering new services when it was not possible to hire additional full-time professionals (Arbuckle, 1953; Blimling, 1993). Although some of the various roles and responsibilities assigned to the resident assistants have existed since the establishment of the position, campus housing administrators recently have added new expectations to these jobs reflecting greater complexity and higher levels of responsibility (Crandall, 2004; Dodge, 1990; Minor, 1999).

Given the changing student characteristics, it is important to question whether the roles and responsibilities currently assigned to resident assistants are still effective and do men and women percieve these roles differently. In addition, it is important to understand how resident students perceive their environment as they enter college given that many of them may have had immediate family members attended college prior to their entry. Although prior research has attempted to evaluate residents' perspectives, most of it was conducted without asking students for input. As a result, there is a void of information that is critical for a complete assessment to determine the overall effectiveness of the RA position as it is described today.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what RA roles or job responsibilities were most important to first-year residential students in their transition into the collegiate environment. Specifically, was there a relationship between how students perceived reinforcement for their behaviors as defined by their locus of control orientation and how helpful they perceived the traditional roles and responsibilities assigned to the RA? Data were collected using the combination of two validated and previously tested instruments: *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* (Conlogue, 1993), and *The Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Locus of Control Scales* (Levenson, 1973a, 1981).

Significance of the Study

Paraprofessionals have been utilized in college housing since the colonial period (Winston & Fitch, 1993). From the early 1900s until the 1970s, many of the responsibilities assigned to these individuals, often referred to as personnel assistants or proctors (Powell et al., 1969), were primarily focused on controlling student behavior and assisting faculty members assigned to manage on-campus residential facilities (Blimling, 1993; Powell et al., 1969). These roles continued to be defined in a similar manner as the management of the residential facilities was slowly transferred from faculty to specially trained staff (Blimling, 1993).

In the 1970s, the concept of student development theory began to evolve and influence the individuals responsible for the functional areas within student affairs (Miller & Prince, 1976). At that time, RA roles began to incorporate responsibilities that were seen as enhancing the educational aspects of living on campus (Blimling, 1993). Throughout time, the role has continued to be viewed as critical in the administration of college housing departments for delivery of services (Blimling, 2003; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1981; Riker, 1980). However, changes in student characteristics, growing numbers of students living on campus, and dwindling financial resources have contributed to higher job expectations being placed on the RA. Housing administrators added to these roles to address more complicated and complex student behavioral issues. The result potentially led to greater authority/autonomy and less supervision for these student staff members (Buhrow, 1999; Crandall, 2004; Dodge, 1990; Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Minor, 1999).

The vast majority of research conducted about the RA roles and responsibilities has been focused on obtaining information/feedback from those individuals in the position or from college housing administrators (Aamodt, Keller, Crawford, & Kimbrough, 1981; Bailey & Grandpré,

1997; Carns, Carns, & Wright, 1993; Dixon, 1970). The relevant literature regarding the effectiveness or influence RAs have on students has rarely taken into account direct student feedback (Kuh & Schuh, 1983; Schuh et al., 1982). When students have been involved in research, it has been more likely an attempt to ascertain their overall satisfaction with those in the position (not the position itself); they have generally not been asked whether RA roles and responsibilities are important or not important to them (Pratt et al., 1993).

Data collected by this study provided insight as to how today's students perceive their autonomy within the collegiate environment and how much control they believe they have on events occurring in their lives. Students' overall locus of control orientation was assessed. In addition, the insight gained from the overall findings may aid practitioners, especially those working in college housing, in assessing how students perceive the work of paraprofessionals being used in large numbers in the many student affairs functional areas.

Research Questions

The following questions directed this study and addressed the issues involved to understand how resident students perceived the role and responsibilities of the RA:

RQ 1: What is the locus of control orientation among the students who participated in this study?

RQ 2: Is there a difference in students' locus of control orientation between men and women?

RQ 3: Who (powerful others) do students believe influence them in things that happen in their lives?

RQ 4: What perceived RA responsibilities do students report to be important to them as they transition into college?

RQ 5: What perceived RA responsibilities do students report not to be important to them as they transition into college?

RQ 6 : Do first-generation residential students perceive the RA responsibilities differently than students who have had at least one immediate family member live in college housing?

RQ 7: Is there a relationship between the students' locus of control orientation and the level of importance they perceive in the different responsibilities assigned to individuals in the Resident Assistant position?

Delimitations

The first delimitation for this study was the availability and accessibility the researcher was able to obtain with the resident population on the campus. The campus housed approximately 2,500 students who met the criteria for participation in this study. Although employed by the campus housing department at the time of the study, the researcher was not directly involved in the recruitment, selection, or supervision of the resident assistant staff, nor did the researcher have any responsibilities that necessitated any regular contact with the resident population being studied. The second delimitation was that the structure of the study's instrumentation did not ask the participants to rate or evaluate the performance of their current RAs. In addition, residents were not asked to provide any information that would easily identify them as participants. Therefore, they should have been able to answer honestly the questions appearing in the instrument without any fear of the information being communicated back to their RAs. The third delimitation was the researcher's ability to assert control of the distribution and collection of the questionnaires during the data collection. This facilitated consistent instructions being given to each group as well as consistent answers to any questions the

participants may have had while completing the questionnaire. Finally, the campus' RA job description contained the fourteen tasks that were originally represented by Conlogue's (1993) *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire,* which was utilized in this study.

Operational Definitions

Dormitory

Historically, dormitory was a term used to describe campus-owned residential facilities where students were assigned to sleep and eat while attending the institution.

First-Year Resident

A first-year resident is a student entering the institution without any prior collegiate experience. He or she is between 18 and 21 years of age and is not married.

First Generation Student

A first generation student is defined as someone who is the first person within their immediate family (parent or siblings) to have attended college and live in a residence hall.

In loco parentis

In loco parentis is a concept that "places the student under the jurisdiction of the college which is able to stand in place of the parent and which regulates the student in any manner it chooses up to the limit that the parents would (or should)" (Young, 1970, p. 8)

Locus of Control

Locus of control refers to a person's belief about what generally controls the reinforcements he or she receives when responding to external stimuli (Phares & Chaplin, 1997).

Residence Hall

New terminology for "dormitory" primarily beginning in the 1970s when campus administrators began to focus their efforts on educating the "whole" students and formally recognized the

educational aspects of living on campus. Residential facilities built after this period were

reflective of student lifestyles and desired amenities (Frederiksen, 1993).

College Housing

College housing refers to the residential facilities owned and operated by professionally trained

campus administrators and directly located on the campus.

Traditional Residence Hall

A traditional (conventional) residence hall is defined as single-sex or co-educational residential

facility where two students reside in a room designed for two occupants. All residents of a

designated floor or wing share a common bathroom that is located either in the middle of the

hallway or at the end of a corridor. There are no special activities planned or conducted by the

residence hall staff for the residents beyond those outlined and typically coordinated by the

Resident Assistant Staff as they complete their duties as outlined in their job descriptions. In

other words, there are no established living-learning communities or "special interest" floors

(Blimling, 1993).

Resident

A resident is a full-time undergraduate student who lives in the campus-operated residential

facilities.

Resident Assistant (RA)

A resident assistant or resident advisor (RA) is a full-time undergraduate student who lives on a

designated floor or wing of the residence hall and is responsible for performing a variety of tasks

as they relate to their assigned residents. These tasks typically involve enforcing university rules

and regulations, managing facilities concerns, promoting a sense of community, coordinating

social activities, serving as a campus resource agent, and other administrative tasks associated

with the day-to-day function of the residence hall (Blimling, 2003; Winston & Fitch, 1993).

Student Paraprofessional

For the purpose of this study, the Winston and Fitch (1993) definition was used:

> A paraprofessional is defined as a student who is selected, trained, and supervised in
>
> assuming responsibilities and performing tasks that are intended to (1) directly promote
>
> the individual personal development of his or her peers, (2) foster the creation and
>
> maintenance of environments that stimulate and support residents' personal and
>
> educational development, and/or (3) perform tasks that ensure the maintenance of secure,
>
> clean, healthy, psychologically safe, and esthetically pleasing living accommodations.
>
> (p. 317)

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study sought to determine if there was a relationship between residents' locus of control orientation and their perceptions of the RAs' roles and responsibilities. To begin this exploration, the first section of this chapter reviews relevant literature pertaining to what roles RAs assumed within college and university housing programs as they were established in the United States. The next section outlines characteristics of current students attending college and universities and defines the perspectives through which students may have perceived the various roles of the resident assistant. The chapter concludes with information pertaining to the concept of social learning theory as it is interpreted though an individual's locus of control orientation. This construct provided the investigative basis for how the residents' perceptions of the roles of the resident assistant may or may not have been influenced by their locus of control orientation.

The Evolution of the Resident Assistant Role in College Housing

Historically, American college housing programs have used student paraprofessionals in a more extensive and consistent manner as staff members than any other functional area within student affairs (Ender, 1984; Winston et al., 1984; Zunker, 1975). Winston and Fitch (1993) defined a paraprofessional related to college housing as:

> a student who is selected, trained, and supervised in assuming responsibilities and
>
> performing tasks that are intended to (1) directly promote the individual personal
>
> development of his or her peers, (2) foster the creation and maintenance of environments

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that stimulate and support resident's personal and educational development, and/or (3)

perform tasks that ensure the maintenance of secure, clean, healthy, psychologically safe,

and esthetically pleasing living accommodations. (p. 317)

Although students serving in these positions have been called various titles, the most

common has been either resident assistant or resident advisor (Conlogue, 1993; Powell et al.,

1969; Stange, 2002; Winston & Fitch, 1993). RAs are typically undergraduate students selected

through rigorous processes and trained to work directly with a group of their peers living on

campus (Blimling, 1993; Greenleaf, 1969; Winston & Ender, 1988). They are characterized as

strong role models possessing effective interpersonal skills and leadership qualities as well as

being eager to assist other students in their collegiate experiences (Winston & Fitch, 1993). RAs

have been so effective in their assigned roles that housing administrators have seen them as a

critical component for the delivery of services within residence halls (Harshman & Harshman,

1974). As a result, they have become so vital that "the foundation of nearly every residence hall

program across the country is the resident assistant (RA) position" (Blimling, 2003, p. ix).

However, in order to understand how the position has arrived to this point, it is helpful to be

aware of some of the historical aspects of the American higher education system and the

evolution of campus housing facilities.

The basic premises of the American higher education system were heavily influenced by

English and German educational systems dating back to the twelfth century (Cowley, 1934;

Frederiksen, 1993). Early U.S. colleges, including Harvard College, New Jersey University,

Yale University, College of William and Mary, King's College, Philadelphia Academy, College

of Rhode Island, Queens College, and Dartmouth College (Blimling, 2003; Blimling &

Miltenberger, 1981, Rudolph, 1962) were fashioned on the English principles and traditions

possessed by their founders who were graduates of Oxford and Cambridge Universities (Cowley, 1934; Frederiksen, 1993; Rudolph, 1962; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). While American campuses attempted to replicate a similar educational environment, they did not have the same political support or financial resources available as their English predecessors (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968; Frederiksen, 1993; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). Therefore, U.S. institutions were slow to develop the same academic initiatives (Cowley, 1934).

At Oxford and Cambridge, residence halls served as the core of the institutions (Schroeder & Mable, 1994) and were intensive living/learning communities (Zeller, 1976). Faculty members lived in campus housing facilities alongside students and ate in the same dining facilities. They were responsible for educating students through formal classroom instruction as well as during informal gatherings outside of class and in the residential facilities (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968; Cowley, 1934). However, other individuals were responsible for the overall supervision of students, disciplinary matters and other administrative tasks (Powell et al., 1969; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). This allowed faculty members to become strong mentors and friends with their students and to engage actively in their scholarship (Cowley, 1934; Blimling, 1993).

American campuses initially attempted to imitate the English collegiate system (Zeller, 1976). They created similar residential communities and faculty members were hired to live in and manage the campus facilities (Frederiksen, 1993) as well as perform other duties that may be seen as the basis for future "student services" (Fenske, 1980, p. 4) such as academic advising, career planning, and other aspects of campus life. Like in the English system, "dormitory" living was seen as an essential component of the collegiate environment (Winston & Fitch, 1993). However, due to the early American colleges' primary educational objective to prepare students for civic and religious leadership, faculty members were intrusively involved in all

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aspects of students' lives and created much more rigid environments within the residential

facilities than did the English (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968; Powell et al., 1969). As American

faculty members found themselves dealing with a growing number of youths traveling from

great distances to attend the institutions who, therefore, found it necessary to live on campus

(Blimling, 1993; Frederiksen, 1993; Schroeder & Mable, 1994), many stringent rules and

regulations were created and imposed (Powell et al., 1969). Faculty members assumed parental

roles with young students, many of whom were only 14 or 15 years of age (Frederiksen, 1993).

They approached their responsibilities under the concept of *in loco parentis,* acting in place of

the students' parents or guardians. Unlike the English system, faculty members were assigned

more administrative responsibilities related to both managing the residential facilities as well as

the overall administration of the institution in addition to their scholarly pursuits (Blimling,

2003; Rudolph, 1962). As their responsibilities continued to increase and campuses grew larger,

faculty members began hiring upper-class student staff members to assist in the overall

management of the residential facilities and relied on them to act as "proctors;" these students

were viewed as "personnel" assistants (Winston & Fitch, 1993).

> The first use of student staff members in residential life programs cannot be established
>
> precisely, but probably occurred during the colonial period. It became apparent to those
>
> responsible for operating housing facilities that there were not enough "adults" available
>
> to monitor what was happening with students. (Winston & Fitch, 1993, p. 316)

In the American higher education system, the responsibilities primarily associated with

student discipline became a stressful and an unwanted task for the faculty. It created a great deal

of conflict with the students and many of the faculty began to question their roles within the

residential setting (Frederiksen, 1993). As the average age of the student attending college

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increased to 19 or older (Shay, 1964), the tension between faculty and residents continued to rise (Frederiksen, 1993). This resulted in an increase in the number of incidents of inappropriate student behavior that prompted faculty to respond with greater degrees of authority (Frederiksen, 1993). This battle caused great strife within the residential facilities and led many campus administrators to begin questioning if the residential programs were worth all of the faculty members' energies and the monies being expended to manage them (Frederiksen, 1993; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). It appeared that America's attempt to make the residential facilities as essential to the collegiate experience as found in English institutions had failed and the "core of the educational program has been lost in the disciplinary muddle" (Cowley, 1934, p. 710). With their educational value eroding, the American housing facilities were then seen as places for students to sleep and occasionally eat (Arbuckle, 1953; Brubacher & Rudy, 1968; Cowley, 1934).

Influenced by the prevailing mood of the time, American campuses experienced a decline in their resident populations (Cowley, 1934; Shay, 1964). Many institutions attempted to fill their beds based on financial needs rather than promoting on-campus living as having any educational value (Shay, 1964). During the latter part of the nineteenth century, campus housing programs assumed a less prominent place in the educational experience of the students. Faculty became heavily involved in discussions of curriculum reform (Zeller, 1976). As a result, campuses began to move from a universal curriculum to one that involved more elective courses deemphasizing out-of-class experiences (Zeller, 1976). Life within the residence halls and the programs and services offered became non-existent in the minds of both the college administrators as well as students attending the institutions (Shay, 1964).

During the early 1900s, administrators of American housing programs experienced a shift in philosophy influenced by elements of the German educational system, which was gaining in popularity (Cowley, 1934; Frederiksen, 1993; Powell et al., 1969; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Shay, 1964). As noted earlier, the residential facilities at Oxford and Cambridge were integrated into the overall academic nature of the institutions bringing faculty and students together (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968). This was not reflected in the German higher education system. "This period of influence in higher education enriched the academic caliber of most colleges and universities, but it almost abolished the humanistic importance of the college experience" (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1981, p. 15). In the German system, students were considered adults and campus administrators did not believe that the institution should be responsible for providing housing for them (Frederiksen, 1993). The American college officials who had studied at German universities, in turn, were therefore influenced by this philosophy (Powell et al., 1969; Shay, 1964).

Given the decline of the practice of *in loco parentis* and the rise of German influence, American students were now recognized as adults and responsible for their own housing needs (Cowley, 1934; Frederiksen, 1993). Teaching and research were emphasized on campuses and little attention by campus officials was given to activities that occurred outside the classroom (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968; Cowley, 1934). Expectations for faculty members to be involved in service to external constituencies and in scientific research increased (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). As a result, faculty members spent less time focused on the development of the "total" student and devoted more time to their respective disciplines (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). "These influences led to distinctions and separation between in-class and out-of-class aspects of the undergraduate experience" (Schroeder & Mable, 1994, p. 7). Residence halls were no longer

seen as an essential part of the academic life within the institution (Schroeder & Mable, 1994).

Housing programs across the nation began to decline as campus funds were diverted to building

better academic facilities with newer classrooms and laboratories and paying faculty members

higher salaries (Frederiksen, 1993; Shay, 1964). Faculty members managing residential facilities

were replaced with other non-essential personnel such as coaches and housemothers, who did

continue to provide the students with a parental figure (Frederiksen, 1993). The popularity of

housing programs was further damaged as new institutions opened across the nation and did not

include any residential facilities in their campus master plans (Arbuckle, 1953; Frederiksen,

1993).

Around the turn of the 20th century, students attending college became "more concerned

with higher education as a means of their worldly advancement rather than a means to spiritual

salvation" (Fenske, 1980, p. 6) and campus administrators, such as members of the board of

trustees and the faculty, were less associated with the clergy (Fenske, 1980). In addition,

American colleges began to experience a great deal of growth in their number and size that

would continue over the next several years, stimulated by the passage of the Morrill Act in 1862,

establishing land-grant institutions across the nation (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968; Frederiksen,

1993). Many all-female colleges were also established during this time that incorporated

residential living as an important element of the collegiate experience (Frederiksen, 1993). Now

women had a variety of institutions of higher education to choose from and the female

population began to increase (Frederiksen, 1993). This renewed emphasis on living on campus,

along with the overall increase in enrollment, students' dissatisfaction with overcrowded off-

campus housing accommodations, and the students' increased involvement in extra-curricular

activities led to the resurgence of campus housing programs (Frederiksen, 1993). In addition,

"these changes in the perceived mission of higher education, and thus the residence halls, also coincided with the spread of coeducational institutions and the creation of the first 'student personnel' staff positions" (Winston & Fitch, 1993, p. 316). Individuals hired in these positions began offering a variety of new services unrelated to direct academic instruction not only to the students living in the residence halls, but also to those who commuted to the campus (Deegan, 1981; Schroeder & Mable, 1994).

During the 1920s, enrollment at American colleges and universities began to grow and more students chose to live on campus (Blimling, 2003). Additional residential facilities were constructed at a faster pace than ever before (Cowley, 1934) and more staff members were required to manage them. Making the residence halls more like "home" became the prevailing philosophy (Blimling, 2003). Campus administrators now promoted living on-campus as a means of setting the academic tone for the campus especially for freshmen students (Powell et al., 1969). Programs and activities affecting students' lives within the facilities were guided by the renewed practice of *in loco parentis* as outlined earlier in a decision by the Kentucky Court of Appeals in *Gott v. Berea College* (1913; Blimling, 2003). In this case, the court defined the relationship between campus administrators and students attending the institution as one of a contractual nature. "The theoretical construct of the *in loco parentis* doctrine was not related to the duties owed to the student by the university, but rather the powers and rights the university possessed to exercise control over students" (Melear, 2003, p. 127).

During the 1920s, college students openly challenged the existing social mores (Powell et al., 1969). However, campus officials witnessed students engaging in great debates and discussions about issues affecting the United States as well as other parts of the world. Though somewhat less academically motivated than students of previous generations, students on college

campuses during this time were more focused on "extra-curricular activities" than academics (Powell et al., 1969). Student behavior within the residence halls became much more unruly as students experimented with smoking and alcohol (Powell et al., 1969).

In the early 1930s, the campus environment returned to a more serious academic atmosphere (Powell et al., 1969). Unlike most of the nation's financial agencies, colleges and universities appeared not to have suffered as much from the pressing economic effects of the Great Depression. Students were vocationally focused while remaining very concerned about worldwide issues (Powell et al., 1969). Institutions began to create special positions such as deans of men or women and hire individuals to manage the residential facilities (Blimling, 1994; Deegan, 1981; Greenleaf, 1970). These individuals were responsible for creating an atmosphere conducive to academic activities outside the traditional classrooms and within the residential facilities. However, their primary focus was once again devoted to controlling student behavior and promoting good social graces (Arvidson, 2003; Blimling, 2003; Boyer, 1987; Frederiksen, 1993; Rudolph, 1962; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Winston & Fitch, 1993).

Colleges and universities experienced further change and growth following World War II with the passing of the G. I. Bill (1944) and Title IV of the Housing Act of 1950 (Blimling, 2003; Frederiksen, 1993; Stange, 2002). The faces within the student population also appeared to be changing with more women, Black, and older students enrolling in larger numbers (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). Additional non-academic services were needed on campus to address the growing variety of students' needs (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). This resulted in an increase of non-faculty (staff) members being assigned to oversee the development of students' interpersonal skills, leaving faculty responsible for the development of the students' intellect (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). As non-faculty staff assumed more and more of these

responsibilities, the foundation was laid for a new and "distinct profession" and led to furthering

the "specialization of personnel functions" (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968, p. 335). These

responsibilities reflected the ones that had been earlier outlined in the 1937 seminal publication,

The Student Personnel Point of View (American Council on Education) which has been

recognized as the beginning of the formal formation of student personnel services as a profession

(Arbuckle, 1953).

During this time, college housing administrators were challenged to provide programs

and services to a larger and wider variety of students, many of whom were returning from war

and bringing their families with them to campus (Blimling, 2003; Frederiksen, 1993; Powell et

al., 1969). Although Title IV, in addition to the Higher Education Facilities Act which was

passed in 1963, did make affordable funding available to campus administrators so that they

might quickly build additional residential facilities, buildings were not constructed from an

educational perspective, but more so to accommodate the increased number of students

(Frederiksen, 1993; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). "The dormitories were built to house and feed

students and to maximize the number of beds constructed for the dollars available, with little or

no regard to the quality of the students' educational experiences and personal development"

(Frederiksen, 1993, p. 172).

In the 1960s, student activism generated challenges to many existing campus policies and

procedures, which included those found in residential facilities (Blimling, 2003; Riker, 1965;

Schroeder & Mable, 1994). Strict restrictions on dress codes, visitation policies, and curfews

began to wane (Blimling, 2003). In 1961, campus administrators were forced to develop new

strategies for managing the institutions in light of the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court's decision in

Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education (1960; Winston & Anchors, 1993). The ruling in

this case established the need for due process rights for students and ended the long-standing practice of *in loco parentis* (Winston & Anchors, 1993; Stange, 2002). In addition, the U.S. Congress passed new laws concerning confidentiality of student records and information (Arvidson, 2003) and issues of access so that more students were able attend higher education institutions (Schroeder & Mable, 1994).

As a result, campus administrators found it necessary to redefine the relationship between the institution and the students (Arvidson, 2003). The remaining housemothers and coaches were gradually removed from positions of managing residential facilities. Individuals specifically trained to work in the residence halls and to address students' needs outside the classroom (Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Winston & Fitch, 1993) replaced them.

> The arrival of staff members in large numbers who possessed graduate educations
> (usually in guidance and counseling) also heralded the more widespread, institutionalized
> utilization of student paraprofessionals, who came to be known by such titles as resident
> assistants, hall counselors, house fellows, or resident advisors. (Winston & Fitch, 1993,
> p. 316)

Although student staff members had been present in the residential facilities throughout the previous years, their roles and job responsibilities had focused primarily on controlling student behavior as stated earlier and did not appear to contribute significantly to the educational atmosphere (Winston & Fitch, 1993). However, as the campus environments became less rigid with imposed policies regarding student behavior, housing administrators began to review and re-conceptualize these paraprofessional roles (Arvidson, 2003; Stange, 2002). In this process, they were influenced by the writings of Chickering, Perry, and Maslow, popular theorists at that time that promoted aspects of psychosocial and cognitive developmental growth of students

while attending college (Stange, 2002). As a result, campus housing administrators believed that students would more likely seek out their peers for advice and information, as well as more positively respond to any challenges by these individuals to their inappropriate behavior (Ender & Carranza, 1991; Greenleaf, Forsythe, Godfrey, Hudson, & Thompson, 1967). Therefore, the student staff members' job descriptions were revised and expanded. Responsibilities were then added that would facilitate the return of the educational aspects to the residential facilities that had been lost in past years. However, the literature does not reflect that there was a consensus reached among housing administrators across the United States as to what roles and responsibilities would be assigned to the RA.

In 1962, Aceto encouraged housing administrators to incorporate the use of RAs in the residence halls as an "effective and economical" (p.23) way of linking the administration with the students. To accomplish this, Aceto suggested that these staff members connect the two constituencies by:

1. Helping students to become acquainted in the hall, both with other students and staff.

2. Becoming well acquainted with every student in [his or her] section, knowing their special interests, abilities and problems.

3. Referring students for help when the [academic] undergraduate is not competent to give such help.

4. Knowing the student resources in the hall for special tutorial help.

5. Distributing information which helps all the students keep well informed on both hall and college wide activities and regulations.

6. Helping to promote good hall government.

7. Helping to create and maintain a friendly atmosphere.

8. Recognizing moral problems early through helping the head counselor understand sources of student discomfort. (p. 26)

In 1967, the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors (NAWDAC) published *Undergraduate Students as Members of the Residence Hall Staff* (Greenleaf et al.). Within this document, Greenleaf et al. (1967) encouraged all housing administrators to find ways to maximize the RAs' potential. They suggested that resident assistants be responsible for "1) helping to establish the environment within the halls; 2) assisting groups and individual students; 3) advising student activities; 4) enforcing rules and regulations; and 5) assisting with administrative responsibilities" (Greenleaf et al., 1967, p. 16). In that same year, Hoyt and Davidson (1967) indicated that RAs should be responsible for enforcing policies that protected the facilities and controlling student behavior in addition to teaching students good study habits, referring them to appropriate campus offices, and helping each resident feel accepted within the living unit.

Although less emphasis was placed on enforcing campus policies and procedures (Arvidson, 2003), more duties associated with administration of the facilities began to be added. These included administrative tasks such as inventorying furnishings and reporting maintenance problems within the facilities (Blimling, 1999; Delworth, Sherwood, & Casaburri, 1974; Harshman & Harshman, 1974; Schneider, 1977; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Winston & Fitch, 1993). In 1966-67, Dixon (1970) conducted a study involving 310 institutions (both public and private) and reported that resident assistants were being utilized in campus housing programs across the country. As a result, he indicated that the 244 institutions who responded reported that they included the following areas of responsibility in the RA job description: "1) maintaining order (88%); 2) counseling (83%); 3) room checks (74%); 4) telephone desk duty (60%); 5)

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disciplinary (52%); 6) advising hall government (52%); 7) supervising hall events (48%); and 8) public relations (39%)" (Dixon, 1970, p. 139).

Up until the early 1970s, little, if any, research had been conducted to measure the RAs' effectiveness in working with students (Delworth et al., 1974). Most of the research that had been conducted regarding the importance of the roles and responsibilities assigned to the RAs up until this point sought feedback either from students who had been hired as an RA or from campus housing administrators who were responsible for their oversight. When students were involved, the researchers sought to determine student satisfaction with their resident assistants rather than asking them about the relevance of various tasks assigned to the RAs. One example of this was a study conducted in 1966 by Zunker and Brown. As a result of their attempt to determine the overall effectiveness of paraprofessional staff used in various student affairs functional areas including residence halls, Zunker and Brown reported that students were more highly satisfied with the services that were provided by the paraprofessionals than their interactions with full-time staff. In addition, in a study that specifically targeted the role of the resident assistant, Wolff (1969) concluded that activities that were conducted by the paraprofessional staff working in housing (i.e., RAs), positively influence the overall interpersonal relationships of first year students.

In the 1970s, a new philosophical concept known as "student development" (Miller & Prince, 1976) was adopted on many college campuses. Winston and Anchors (1993) noted:

The term *student development* has been used in student affairs for decades. In the early years of the profession, however, it had no meaning other than "helping students grow up." *Student development* was principally a description of what ideally happened to students as they progressed through the institution, but it had no identifiable theoretical

grounding and did not describe any particular set of principles or practices that student

affairs staff members tried to apply or use in systematic ways. (emphasis in original, p.

27)

Student personnel administrators now focused on creating an atmosphere that would

educate the "whole" student (Miller & Prince, 1976). They approached their work with guidance

from the principles outlined in the *Tomorrow's Higher Education (THE) Project* published by

the American College Personnel Association (ACPA, 1975; Miller & Prince, 1976). As a result,

practitioners attempted to "maximize the integration of the students' cognitive development with

the development of the whole personality" (ACPA, 1975, p. 341).

By this time, the construction of new residential facilities reflecting current students'

lifestyles began appearing nationwide, as college officials attempted to meet the growing student

demand for on-campus accommodations (Frederiksen, 1993). Facilities now included bedrooms

arranged in suite-type accommodations and "cluster units," rather than the traditional, double-

loaded corridors with community baths found in older residence halls (Schroeder & Mable,

1994). Housing staff members with highly specialized skills were hired (Schroeder & Mable,

1994) and began to concentrate on activities that maximized the educational aspects of the

students' on-campus living experience (Frederiksen, 1993).

In addition to changes in physical facilities, the student development concept was

extended into programmatic aspects as well. Residential educational initiatives to complement

the students' academic classroom experiences while creating a strong sense of community and

belonging for on-campus students were intentionally established (Frederiksen, 1993).

Expectations for new programs and activities were created. RAs in their role as peer educator

were considered influential to residents in the educational process inherent in the new

programming design (Riker, 1980). To reflect this change in philosophy, the facilities where

students lived were now frequently referred to as "residence halls" instead of dormitories

(Frederiksen, 1993). The overall positive impact such changes had on residential students has

been significantly documented (Astin, 1973; Blimling, 1993; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1981;

Chickering, 1969, 1974; Riker & DeCoster, 1971).

During this time, RAs continued to maintain a key role in the overall success and

effectiveness of housing programs (Riker, 1980; Schuh et al., 1982). They began serving as the

primary liaison between the university administration and the students (Ender & Carranza, 1991)

though from time to time, they may have appeared to be more of an advocate for the

administration than the students (Zirkle & Hudson, 1975). New responsibilities were added to

these positions and words such as peer counselor, advisor, and resource person were found in the

expanded job descriptions and provided an emphasis on communicating information to residents

about policies and procedures as well as promoting available campus resources. Delworth et al.

(1974) promoted the following RA roles in response to the renewed emphasis on the educational

value that residence halls could provide students living on campus: counselors, advisors, and

limit-setters, as well as administrators (p. 49-50).

Much of the research regarding the role and responsibilities of the resident assistant

during this period focused primarily on their selection and training processes (Arvidson, 2003).

Both German (1979) and Ostroth (1981) provided well-documented information regarding

effective RA selection processes found in select institutions across the nation. However, there

was little research conducted regarding the nature of the position itself (Arvidson, 2003).

In the 1980s, campus housing administrators became more interested in advancing the

RA position. They sought to expand (Arvidson, 2003) and better understand the role (Upcraft &

Pilato, 1982). This investigative approach was also reflected in literature promulgated during this period (e.g., Aamodt et al., 1981; DeCoster & Mable, 1980; Durden & Neimeyer, 1986; Ender, 1984; Forsyth, 1983; Hayes & Burke, 1981; Krouse & Rodgers, 1981; Kuh & Schuh, 1983; Lillis & Schuh, 1982; Riker, 1980; Schuh et al., 1982; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). Many researchers began suggesting various new responsibilities for RAs (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1981; Frierman & Frierman, 1981; Upcraft, Pilato, & Peterman, 1982; Winston et al., 1984). Although there were a few consistent roles assigned to RAs from campus to campus (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1981), no uniform job description appeared to exist during this time (Aamodt et al., 1981).

Blimling and Miltenberger (1981) described their concept of the RA as serving four significant roles within the residence halls. These included role model, counselor (or advisor), teacher, and student (pp. 4-8). Frierman and Frierman (1981) noted that the roles and responsibilities of the resident assistant were comparable to that of a business manager. They suggested the RA acted as: a "figurehead" for his or her designated floor; a "liaison" between the residents and the university's administration; a "monitor" for what was happening on the floor or wing; a "disseminator" of information for both the residents and the administration; a "spokesperson" for the residents; a "disturbance handler" who mediated conflicts between residents; a "resource allocator" who could assist in identifying appropriate funding for programs and activities; a "negotiator" who could deal with various opinions; and finally, a "motivator" who recognized and capitalized on moments when students needed encouragement (pp. 457-459).

In 1982, Upcraft et al. reported the roles and responsibilities of the RA as: "a) provide personal help and assistance; b) manage and facilitate groups; c) facilitate social, recreational,

and educational programs; d) inform students or refer them to appropriate information sources; d) explain and enforce institutional rules and regulations; [and] e) maintain a safe, orderly, and relatively quiet environment" (p. 4). By 1984, Winston et al. reported the seven roles and responsibilities of the RAs as being a: "model of [an] effective student, peer helper, information and referral agent, socializer, leader and organizer, clerical worker, and limit setter and conflict mediator" (pp. 53-54). However, Winston et al. indicated that the roles and responsibilities assigned to the position seemed to be fundamentally conflicted as RAs attempted to serve both as peer helper as well as disciplinarian. As a result, RA training programs reflected an emphasis on RAs developing strong interpersonal skills so that they establish positive relationship that would maximize their effectiveness with residents with their growth and development (Winston et al., 1984).

In 1988, Winston and Ender conducted a national study involving a stratified random sample of divisions of student affairs pertaining to the use of paraprofessionals. They reported that 95 percent of all housing programs at four-year colleges involved in the study utilized RAs. They also reported that the RA supervisors ranked the following as the most important RA roles: "1) providing information and explaining policies and procedures; 2) performing administrative-clerical tasks; 3) providing personal counseling; and 4) implementing social activities" (p. 467).

The various new roles and responsibilities added to RA job descriptions during this period appeared to be well received by the students living in the residence halls (Deluga, 1989). They responded positively to the programs and services provided to them, which led to the campus administrators perceiving the RAs as having significant influence on the students' overall developmental growth (Carns et al., 1993). This supported Zirkle and Hudson's (1975) previous work noting that individuals serving in RA positions significantly influenced their

residents in a number of ways. In situations where the RAs had established strong peer

relationships with their residents, the residents matured more quickly, had higher GPAs, and

tended to readily approach their RA with personal matters and concerns (Zirkle & Hudson,

1975).

As residential programs continued to grow and develop, living on campus returned as an

attractive option and educational component of the overall collegiate experience for most

students (Blimling, 2003). In addition, the number of undergraduate staff members, primarily

serving in the RA role, continued to grow in response to increase in services addressing the

students' changing needs (Blimling, 1993). As a result, housing administrators became so

dependent upon RAs for the delivery of these services that the position transformed from being

seen as a key role to one that was irreplaceable (Blimling, 2003). However, Boyer (1987)

warned campus officials that possibly too much of the overall administrative responsibilities for

the residence halls had been delegated to individuals in these positions, leaving the officials with

little first-hand knowledge about student life within the buildings unless there was a crisis. He

noted:

> These "R.A.s" confront daily the realities of dormitory life. . . . It is a twenty-four hour
>
> job, one not just "keeping order" and finding light bulbs, but becoming deeply involved
>
> in shaping the lives of students and helping the college to accomplish its most
>
> fundamental goals. (p. 199)

In the early 1990s, RA job descriptions continued to grow and expand (Dodge, 1990;

Stange, 2002). Individuals who were hired for these positions found themselves dealing with

residents' increasing mental health concerns (Dodge, 1990; Fotis, 1999). RAs now were more

often addressing issues surrounding student suicide, homophobia, racism, date rape, eating

disorders, and rising students' stress levels (Dodge, 1990). As a result, Dodge (1990) argued that the role had become too extensive and complicated for full-time undergraduate students and encouraged campus housing administrators to begin to re-think the position due to the increasing complexity of these issues.

In 1993, Winston and Fitch updated previous research (Winston et al., 1984; Winston & Ender, 1988) and suggested the roles or responsibilities associated with the RA on many campuses could be identified in six categories. These included:

1. *Being a role model of an effective student*. RAs should set an example as a strong student with a solid academic record and be a leader in various campus organizations.

2. *Fostering community development*. RAs should be a strong organizer and socializer with members of their designated floor or wing.

3. *Providing system maintenance and control*. From time to time, the RAs are responsible for the dissemination of information, rule enforcement, and custodial tasks associated with maintaining the facilities.

4. *Supplying leadership and governance*. RAs should participate in hall council functions and promote leadership opportunities for other residents.

5. *Acting as a helper/facilitator*. RAs are often called upon to act as a conflict mediator and crisis intervener. They must maintain an awareness of campus resources and serve as a referral agent.

6. *Contributing or assisting with educational programming*. RAs should act as a promoter of educational opportunities within the residential facilities as well as across campus. (Winston & Fitch, 1993, p. 320)

In 1994, Bierman and Carpenter noted more consistency from campus to campus in the RA job expectations from the responses by campus housing administrators from the 46 institutions within the Southwest Association of College and University Housing Officers (SWACUHO) involved in their study. Bailey and Grandpré (1997) altered the terminology for the RA job description, bringing it more in line with terms used and more readily understood by students attending U.S. colleges and universities at that time. They described the roles of the RA as: a) team member, b) counselor, c) crisis manager, d) administrator, e) community builder, and f) educator (Bailey & Grandpré, 1997, p. 41). Updating his previously published work, Blimling (1999) summarized RAs' primary tasks as: a) maintaining campus residence halls, b) enforcing policies, c) developing residents, and d) assisting students.

However, echoing Dodge's (1990) earlier warnings, Minor (1999) once again cautioned campus administrators that the RA positions were growing too large and the expectations of the individuals in these positions may be unrealistic. In an article appearing in the *Talking Stick*, a publication by the Association of College and University Housing Officers – International, Minor stated:

As new issues arise, we repeatedly use the "bolt on" approach, adding, but rarely reducing, expectations and responsibilities to these part-time positions, while professing that they [the RAs] are students first and foremost. The time for us to seriously re-examine the RA role is long overdue. We can no longer continue to use the additive model; we must begin to examine the fundamental assumptions we have for these peer leaders, and apply the design concept that form follows function. (1999, p. 6)

In that same edition of the *Talking Stick*, Porter (1999) outlined some of the many ramifications to the training and selection practices associated with the growing demands being

placed on the RAs. She indicated that students might not find the position as attractive as once thought given the amount time required by undergraduates to fulfill their expectations. In addition, the increasing level of responsibility was not something that many undergraduates desired to take on during their own collegiate experience (Porter, 1999). Without any alterations to these expectations, Porter indicated that recruitment of future RAs may be in jeopardy.

In 2003, Arvidson conducted an extensive review of the literature regarding the role of the resident assistant position since the 1970s. During the 30-year span of time included in his review, he stated:

> Even though it may seem on the surface to be a 'the more things change the more they stay the same' situation, the reality is that change has occurred. Indeed, differences between and shifts in the terms used to describe the RA roles have occurred over time. These changes, though subtle, facilitate appreciation of the RA roles. (Arvidson, 2003, p. 33)

Today, it appears that the emphasis on controlling student behavior and implementing disciplinary rules and regulations, although still important, has been replaced by responsibilities more associated with that of being an educator (Arvidson, 2003). Campus administrators now view individuals hired for RA positions as "important student leaders rather than disciplinarians" (Arvidson, 2003, p. 34). The vision of the RA role as a teacher and role model that Greenleaf and her colleagues foretold in 1967 had been realized (Arvidson, 2003). At the conclusion of his literature review, Arvidson (2003) indicated that during the last 30 years, little research had been conducted that was designed to seek feedback directly from the residents as to the effectiveness of the RA roles and responsibilities as they related to the students. He, therefore, questioned

what role expectations residents now have for individuals hired for the RA position. This sentiment served as the impetus for this study.

From the review of the literature, it appears that only three studies have been conducted that specifically asked resident students what roles or responsibilities RAs should perform as they directly relate to students. In 1982, Schuh et al. distributed a paper questionnaire, *The Resident Assistant Functions Inventory (RAFI)*, to five different campus constituencies: current resident students, current RAs, campus housing administrators, faculty members, and parents of resident students. The roles and responsibilities included in the *RAFI* were taken from the RA job description utilized by the campus housing program at the institution where the study was conducted (Schuh et al., 1982). At the conclusion of their research, they noted that all five constituents strongly agreed that the RAs play a significant role in the overall success of the residential program, but there was little consensus about the specific roles that the RAs should fulfilled among the groups (Schuh et al., 1982). In a later study, Kuh and Schuh (1983) distributed this same questionnaire to a group of new students at three different institutions at the beginning of their first semester living on campus and then re-administered it near the conclusion of the academic year. Kuh and Schuh reported that over time, students' perceptions of the roles and responsibilities change slightly. Attempts were made to retrieve a copy of the RAFI directly from its creators for this study; however, the information was not available due to the length of time that has passed since the studies were conducted.

Pratt et al. (1983) also sought to obtain a better understanding of how resident students perceived the RA position. Like the two previously mentioned studies, the questionnaire distributed to residents was developed from the roles and responsibilities outlined in the RA expectations on the campus identified for their research. In this particular study, however, the

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researchers analyzed the results of their study as they related to the students' overall satisfaction of their RA's performance.

Therefore, this researcher has been unable to identify any previous study that approached the investigation of the residents' perception in the manner of this study. In the three previously mentioned studies, the roles and responsibilities were taken from a particular campus job description. The researchers did not cite any review of the existing literature as a basis for determining the roles. With this in mind, this researcher has attempted to identify a listing of RA roles and responsibilities that has resulted from a comprehensive review of the literature as well as from past studies.

In 1993, Conlogue investigated how RAs perceived the importance of their assigned responsibilities as they related to both their residents and to the overall administration of the campus housing programs with whom they were employed. His research was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Upon the completion of an extensive review of the literature available at that time and a document analysis of job descriptions from the campus housing programs involved in his study, Conlogue identified 14 specific tasks that appeared consistently throughout all the materials. He then designed a paper questionnaire containing these tasks along with several relevant open-ended questions and distributed to the RAs included in his sample population. In addition to asking RAs how important each task was to their employers, he also asked them to indicate how important the tasks were in relation to their residents. Finally, he asked the RAs how much satisfaction they gained from completing each task.

From the researcher's review of the literature, Conlogue's (1993) instrumentation appeared to be the most concise and represented the most common roles as noted by previous

studies contained within this literature review. As such, his work warrants further discussion and serves as a portion of the foundation for this study.

As noted to this point in the review of the literature, living on campus provides an additional educational experience for students living in the residence halls (Arbuckle, 1953; Blimling, 1993). According to Arbuckle,

> For many students . . . [residence halls] will be the first experience in living on intimate terms with a group of individuals of the student's own age. For many, the term "social responsibility" will for the first time come to have some real meaning. (1953, p. 202)

The responsibility for establishing this educational environment so that residents may mature and develop has been primarily delegated to individuals hired for the RA position (Boyer, 1987). In the past, RAs have been present to assist students in coping with the various transitional issues such as homesickness and other personal adjustments as they enter the collegiate environment (Blimling, 2003). They have also served a friendly face to those who may find it difficult to make friends (Blimling, 2003; Dodge, 1990). Part of the RAs' effectiveness with students has been through the personal relationships that they have been able to establish with residents (Blimling, 2003; Deluga, 1989). However, their effectiveness is also dependent upon how receptive the residents are to the RAs' effort to assist them (Deluga, 1989). This is dependent on the residents' views the role of the RA (Sacrey, Klas, & Boak, 1977). Therefore, to understand how students today may perceive the importance of the various roles and responsibilities assigned to RAs, it is necessary to understand their needs and characteristics.

Characteristics of College Students Today

American colleges and universities are currently experiencing significant growth in student enrollment (Moore, 2007). By 2012, college administrators may expect to see an overall

12% increase in enrollment from 2007 (Moore, 2007). According to Coomes and DeBard (2004), the students who will make up at least 75% of this increase will be traditionally aged (18 or 19 years old) and possess some very different characteristics than previous generations of college students. They have "distinct demographic characteristics, views of people different from themselves, political and social values, and attitudes about social justice issues" (Broido, 2004, p. 73). Although they may have grown up challenged by the same developmental issues as the previous generations, their worldly perspectives are vastly different (Broido, 2004; Newton, 2000). According to Newton, students today have experienced "a world in revolution, where rapid changes have provided new expansiveness in information, a multiplicity of potential life experiences, advancing technology sophistication, and pluralistic social models to emulate" (2000, p. 8).

Many researchers have referred to this group of students, born in or after 1982 with various labels such as "Gen Yers" (Martin & Tulgan, 2001), "Generation Me" (Twenge, 2006), or "The Net Generation" (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). However, the more common label noted in recent literature has been "The Millennials" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Although there has been much written regarding the unique characteristics associated with this group of incoming students (e.g., Broido, 2004; Coomes, 2004; Coomes & DeBard, 2004; DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003; Lowery, 2004; Newton, 2000; Sax, 2003; Wilson, 2004), this study will not attempt to generalize broadly these characteristics in a manner that will depict all students attending colleges and universities today. In addition, it is important not to generalize these characteristics to all students identified within this population. Reith (2005) cautioned, "when considering peer or generational personality, it is important to keep in mind that generations transition over time. They do not change abruptly, and their

descriptive norms and trends do not fit all members singularly, but rather the cohort as a cohesive whole" (p. 321).

However, given the anticipated size of this student population and their potential influence within the collegiate environment on the availability of campus programs and services, it is important to be aware of their developmental issues and needs (Coomes, 2004; Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Lowery, 2004). Hoover (2009) calls for campus officials to review their policies and procedures in light of this new generation of college students and not to perpetuate the stereotypes of yesteryear.

Much of the literature regarding characteristics of today's students has most often cited Howe and Strauss's extensive research (2000, 2003; DeBard, 2004). According to Howe and Straus (2000, 2003), the current generation of college students "are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse" (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 14) and possess seven "unique" characteristics or core personality traits. Howe and Strauss (2003) have identified the seven characteristics describing today's students as special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving.

Special

Today's students have been made to feel "special" by their parents, as well as other authority figures since birth (DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003; Twenge, 2006). Born during a time of a shift in American cultural values towards parenthood, these students have been raised in an environment where adults have gone to great lengths to conceive and adopt children (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003; Twenge, 2006). "They have been made to feel vital to their parents' sense of purpose" (DeBard, 2004, p. 35) and they consider their parents strong role models (Lowery, 2004). Today's students have also been encouraged to develop a strong sense

of self and self-worth by their families (Reiser, 2008). They "are also more willing than other recent generations to acknowledge the importance of their own personal choices and actions" (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 53). They also believe that other individuals have their best interests at heart (Howe & Strauss, 2003). They have high expectations of other individuals (Reiser, 2008) as well as in the academic environment that their institutions of higher education should provide (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). DeBard (2004) noted, " it follows not only that these students are to be considered special by the high expectations placed on them but also that they would perceive themselves as special and highly expectant" (p. 35).

Sheltered

Today's students have grown up during a period when the nation looked for ways to protect them (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003). This is reflected in the numerous pieces of federal child protection legislation that has been enacted since 1982 (Reith, 2005). "From the surge in child-safety rules and devices to the post-Columbine lockdown of public schools, [these students] are the focus of the most sweeping youth-protection movement in American history" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 51). As a result, parents have in the past and will continue to play a significant role in their lives (Howe & Strauss, 2003). However, Newton (200) warned that parents may be less influential in their emotional support and guidance due to the fact that many of these students grew up having spent a great deal of their time with alternative parental figures, peer groups, and the Internet.

As children, today's students were kept busy throughout their childhood by their participation in multiple activities before and after school by various community organizations (DeBard, 2004), therefore, they now seek rules and structure in their lives (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003; DeBard, 2004). As a result, they tend to follow rules (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003)

and have come to expect that rules and expectations be clearly communicated to them (Lowery, 2004; Martin & Tulgan, 2001) and enforced with due process (DeBard, 2004). "True to the wishes of adult America, [today's students] are protected, feel protected, and expect to be protected—even, some might say, overprotected" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 54). Lowery (2004) suggests that the combination of the previous two characteristics—special and sheltered—may explain why parents are often readily involved in matters that affect their students while attending college.

Confident

Today's students possess high levels of trust and optimism regarding their future (Howe & Strauss, 2003) related to their strong sense of self-confidence (DeBard, 2004). They "equate good news for themselves with good news for their country" (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 51). They are more insightful about the future than their parents were at their ages and they do believe in the "American Dream" (Howe & Strauss, 2003). They believe in themselves as they have been nurtured to do throughout their lives (DeBard, 2004). As young children, they learned to trust individuals in authority "because it has worked on their behalf" (DeBard, 2004, p. 36) and now they depend upon them (DeBard, 2004). Growing up, they were constantly rewarded with trophies and positive accolades for almost everything they did whether or not they had successfully completed a task (DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2003; Twenge, 2006). Today's students are very civic-minded (Howe & Strauss, 2003) and believe in the concepts of community service as long as they get credit for their actions (DeBard, 2004). According to Sax (2003), more and more students seek to make a personal contribution to society.

Many of the incoming students entering institutions of higher education today intend to pursue future degrees beyond the bachelor of arts or science. According to Coomes and DeBard

(2004), "three out of every four" students indicated that they intend to earn a graduate degree (p. 12). However, DeBard (2004) cautioned that students, as well as their parents, may have the tendency to underestimate how much education the students should obtain to be successful in their desired careers. He questioned if the degree that students have been "sheltered" throughout their lives may lead to them "being directionless when they are liberated by the college environment" (p. 36). In addition, students may not possess the necessary coping mechanisms and be less able to deal with disappointments and failures as they navigate the campus and their academic work (Lowery, 2004; Reiser, 2008).

The use of technology also provides today's students with a strong sense of confidence because they are better informed than prior generations. They have never known life without access to the Internet, and its use has been integrated into all aspects of their lives (Chapplow, 2000; Levine & Cureton, 1998). These students have grown up with computers in their classrooms, interactive electronic games, and knowledge of vast resources made available through the Internet (Lloyd, Dean, & Cooper, 2007; Newton, 2000; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). They have also grown accustomed to having a great deal of electronic information in front of them at one time (Sargent, 2008). They find it easy to conceptualize new ways to incorporate technology in their daily living and have mastered multi-tasking as an art form (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b). However, students' use of technology does have some negative influences on their ability to communicate with others face-to-face (Barnard, 2003) and has had an impact on students' interpersonal communication skills and their socialization while attending college (Blimling, 1993). Students have been able to maintain their valued high school friendships and close families ties with great ease (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005), to the degree that they arrive on campus with multiple communication devices allowing them to connect several times throughout

their day, often being the initiator of the contact (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). Their social networks now "transcend geographical (and time zone) boundaries, and relationships are sustained across generations, institutions, and interest areas" (Moneta, 2005, p. 3). They frequently communicate with their friends and family using email and instant messaging (Gemmill & Peterson, 2006). However, Windham (2005) indicated that even though many students use the Internet to communicate, they still "leave the computer screen craving actual conversation and interaction with their classmates" (p. 58).

Team Oriented

Today's students are more comfortable working in small groups rather than projects or tasks that require independent efforts (Howe & Strauss, 2003), especially since they do not like working in situations where they perceive a risk of failure (DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2003). They like to congregate in various places throughout campus, including the residence halls (DeBard, 2004). They value honesty and hard work from their peers (Howe & Strauss, 2003). "In choosing their peer leaders, [students] say they look for maturity, friendliness, and quality of moral character ahead of an imaginative or independent mind" (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 57). However, Lowery (2004) warned that students may avoid confrontational situations in their attempt to maintain a cooperative atmosphere within their immediate environment. However, when a situation arises that may challenge this environment, they look to those in authority for resolution.

Conventional

As noted earlier, today's students are more accepting of adult authority than previous generations, and they respect institutions (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Reiser, 2008). Howe and Strauss (2003) found students' personal value systems to be more aligned with their parents and

reported that students share a great deal of information about their daily lives with parents. Students and their parents often share entertainment and cultural interests (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Campus administrators have reported that students have displayed a renewed interest for activities such as pep rallies, award ceremonies, and other campus events that were once popular in the late 1950s (Lowery, 2004). Today's students are focused on "brand names" when shopping for clothing and cars, and where they will work is important to them (Campbell & Twenge, 2010; Reiser, 2008). They do not like to stand out among their peers and are cautious about attempting to challenge the "status quo" (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Lowery (2004) noted that today's students "are often more modest about their own bodies than images in the popular culture would suggest" (p. 93).

Pressured

Today's students feel a great deal of pressure that has come from being "pushed to study hard, avoid personal risks, and take full advantage of the collective opportunities adults are offering them" (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 52). They have been told constantly to do their best (DeBard, 2004; Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004). Their perception of pressure keeps them moving ahead, constantly busy, and attempting to push their plans for their future ahead (Howe & Strauss, 2003). It is as if they are driven in every task they attempt (Moore, 2007). Many of today's students "have experienced highly scheduled lives for years and considerable pressure to get into the right college" (Lowery, 2004, p. 93). College women are especially stressed as they are under pressure to develop successful career paths in highly competitive fields (Newton, 2000). Students are also very concerned about the amount of debt they are accumulating as they complete their education, and approximately two-thirds of them expect that they will need to work while attending college (Sax, 2003). In addition, Kadison and DiGeronimo (2004) reported

that the increase in students' stress levels has contributed to a "multitude of hidden problems [and] caused a steady and alarming rise in the severity of students' mental health problems" (p. 5).

Achieving

According to Howe & Strauss (2003), "today's students are probably the most all-around capable teenage generation this nation, and perhaps the world, has ever seen" (p. 123). Grades are very important and students expect to be rewarded with good marks (DeBard, 2004). This is reflected by the fact that students and their parents are more than willing to pursue many different venues to contest an unacceptable grade (Howe & Strauss, 2003). "Given how structured their lives have been, [today's students] may struggle in the transition to college as they face more ambiguity and a greater call for self-responsibility" (Wilson, 2004, p. 65). Wilson (2004) warned that the high expectations that the students bring to the classroom will challenge faculty and staff to develop clear expectations and well-structured syllabi. Students' preference to work in groups within their classes provides unique opportunities for them to learn and grow from each other (Wilson, 2004). Students also worry about falling behind their peers in their academic work and not being involved in as many programs and activities outside the classroom (Reiser, 2008). They often seek opportunities so that they may be able to build impressive résumés as a means of an advantage in future employment (Howe & Strauss, 2003). However, today's students have grown up in an age and culture where "a clear sense of who created intellectual products is not valued or understood" (Lowery, 2004, p. 94). This, along with their preference to work in teams and pressure to perform, has contributed to a rise in academic dishonesty among students (Reiser, 2008).

In recent literature, Campbell and Twenge (2010) have indicated that some of the students entering college today may be exhibiting some less socially accepted behaviors that may have a negative impact on the overall environment. In their book, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, Twenge and Campbell (2009) examined current narcissism trends among Americans, which seem to be growing at a rapid rate. They described how our society has promoted a culture in which more and more individuals have come to possess a "grandiose view" of themselves to the detriment of others (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). They cited the major contributors to this trend as being: "1) changes in parenting and childhood education with greater permissiveness and self-esteem; 2) shifts in the media towards fame; 3) the rise of social networking; and 4) the availability of easy credit" (Campbell & Twenge, 2010, p. 28).

These prevalent narcissistic tendencies have reached colleges and universities as campus administrators witness students demanding special treatment and greater attention by faculty and staff, an increase in the numbers of incidents of academic cheating, a greater number of incidents of interpersonal conflicts among students, and a rise in drinking, gambling, and sexual behaviors (Campbell & Twenge, 2010). To address and minimize these narcissistic tendencies, Campbell and Twenge (2010) suggested that college administrators develop strategies encouraging students to accept responsibility for their thoughts and actions, connect and engage with the collegiate environment, and develop ways to use their internal motivation for pursuing their dreams.

Now that student characteristics have been placed into context, how do we explain students' perceptions of their collegiate environment as well as how they perceive the roles of the resident assistant? For this study, this task analyzed students' perceptions through their locus

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of control orientation. The concept of locus of control orientation originated from social learning theory.

Social Learning Theory and the Determination of Locus of Control

DeCoster and Mable (1980) noted that three important conditions must exist before the maximum educational atmosphere within a residence hall can be achieved. These included:

1. Student residents must be consciously aware of the goals and objectives relevant to their living experience. They must possess a "common understanding" regarding their cooperative living arrangement.

2. Student residents within the community must approve of the group's objectives and be in full support of those ends.

3. Student residents must agree to adjust and regulate their own behavior in order to achieve objectives that are in the best interest and well-being of community members. (DeCoster & Mable, 1980, p. 32)

If these three conditions are present, then the environment within a residence hall is more conducive to learning and enhancing the personal growth and development of those who live there (DeCoster & Mable, 1980).

As this literature review has indicated, RAs play a significant role in the creation of this environment (Blimling, 1993; Powell et al., 1969; Riker, 1980; Winston & Fitch, 1993). Resident assistants have been recognized for their positive influence on their residents at a time when many students are attempting to formulate personal values and develop their own identities (Mable & DeCoster, 1980). The suggested roles and responsibilities for the RAs as discussed previously in this chapter have included: a) serving as roles models for their assigned residents; b) acting as a liaison between the campus administration and the students; c) being

knowledgeable about campus resources and referring students to appropriate sources when they have questions; d) addressing inappropriate student behavior; and e) completing administrative functions needed by their employers to facilitate programs and services that address the existing needs of the students who live on campus (Blimling, 1993; Winston & Fitch, 1993).

Given the educational and developmental aspects of on-campus living and the influence RAs have on their assigned residents, individuals living in the residence halls may be positively socialized, which according to Arbuckle (1953) is one of the responsibilities of any institution of higher education. By interacting with the RAs and their peers, resident students may learn to accept personal responsibility for their behavior and develop qualities of good citizenship (Arbuckle, 1953) and may be less susceptible to narcissistic trends (Campbell & Twenge, 2010). By incorporating elements of social learning theory into the community atmosphere within a residence hall, RAs may be able to identify how students are responding to their environments and what factors are present that reinforce their behaviors.

Learning theory provides one effective way to better understand and gauge responses individuals may have when interacting with elements within their environment and the way they may behave in the future (Phares & Chaplin, 1997). However, social learning theory further enhances this understanding by promoting "an appreciation of the power of the environment for influencing and constraining behavior with the recognition that people actively perceive, process, interpret, and influence the environment" (Phares & Chaplin, 1997, p. 380). The way people interact with the environment and what conclusions they reach based on their past experiences can influence how they behave within the given moment (Phares & Chaplin, 1997). Therefore, social learning theory can be a useful tool in assessing the students' perceptions of the

educational environment found within the residence halls and how important they perceive the roles and responsibilities of the RAs.

Although Dollard and Miller (1950) were the first individuals to use the term "social learning" within in their research (Phares & Chaplin, 1997), Rotter's work, *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology,* published in 1954, has been given the most attention within the literature (Carton & Nowicki, 1994; Lefcourt, 1982) and labeled as the true beginnings of the first social learning theory of personality (Phares & Chaplin, 1997; Rotter, 1990). Bandura (1977) and Mischel (1966) are two additional theorists who have been influential in the promotion of social learning theory. Bandura's work differed from Rotter's (Phares & Chaplin, 1997). Bandura's approach to social learning theory focused primarily on how people learn their behaviors through modeling, whereas Rotter sought to provide an explanation on "how people choose between different possible actions" (Phares & Chaplin, 1997, p. 363). Mischel's (1966) work primarily focused on situational variables for predicting behavior such as individuals 'competencies and how they internally code information they obtain from the environment (Phares & Chaplin, 1997). Neither Bandura nor Mischel took into consideration how an individual's expectancies would influence an individual's decision-making on how to respond to a situation as did Rotter (Phares & Chaplin, 1997).

Like other personality theories, Rotter's (1954) *Social Learning Theory of Personality* was derived from a set of assumptions about human behavior. These included:

- *"The unity of investigation for the study of personality is the interaction of the individual and his [or her] meaningful environment"* (Rotter, 1954, p. 85). According to Rotter (1954), a person develops his or her personality as a result of the interaction with his or her environment. To understand an individual's

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behavior, it is important not only to consider the individual's personal characteristics and needs, but also to understand the situational parameters that the individual encounters. An individual's personality can be seen as a project in progress as it is always changeable depending upon each new situation or environment the individual encounters (Rotter, 1954).

- *"Personality constructs are not dependent for explanation upon constructs in any other field (including physiology, biology, or neurology)"* (Rotter, 1954, p. 88). Social learning theory is less focused on an individual's biological and instinctual characteristics (Phares, 1976). A greater emphasis is placed on the individual's "learned attitudes, values, and expectations" (Phares, p. 11).

- *"Not all behavior of an organism may be usefully described with personality constructs"* (Rotter, 1954, p. 92). According to Rotter (1954), there are physiological and other variables that may be utilized to describe some conditions when personality characteristics are first obtained.

- *"A person's experiences (or his [or her] interactions with his [or her] meaningful environment) influence each other. . . . Personality has unity"* (Rotter, 1954, p. 94). Individuals may not behave exactly the same way in similar situations; however, Rotter (1990) indicated that the individuals will be able to generalize their responses from one situation to another. "The common thread is their personality with all its stable aspects" (Phares, 1976, p. 11). Rotter (1954, 1982) refers to this "unity" as "relative stability and interdependence. As the individual becomes more experienced, personality becomes increasing stable" (Rotter, 1982, p. 8).

- *"Behavior as described by personality constructs has a directional aspect. It may be said to be goal directed. The directional aspect of behavior is inferred from the effect of reinforcing conditions"* (Rotter, 1954, p. 97). Individuals adapt their behavior to the situations they encounter and the reinforcement they receive as a result (Phares, 1976; Rotter, 1990). Therefore, individuals may receive positive reinforcement for a particular behavior in one situation; however, they may receive negative reinforcement for the same behavior in a different situation (Phares, 1976). Ultimately, they learn to adapt their behavior to the situation taking into account the cues they receive from others around them (Phares, 1976).

- *"The occurrence of a behavior of a person is determined not only by the nature or importance of goals or reinforcements but also by the person's anticipation or expectancy that these goals will occur. Such expectations are determined by previous experience and can be quantified*" (Rotter, 1954, pp. 102-103). Rotter's assertion that there was more to human behavior than just reward and gratification made his work noteworthy (Phares & Chaplin, 1997). By including expectancy as part of the motivational rational, Rotter was able to introduce concepts as to how people make decisions based on what reinforcement they are seeking from the situation at hand in combination to individuals' anticipated needs (Phares & Chaplin, 1997).

To summarize, Rotter (1954) was able to construct his social learning theory with the understanding that a person develops his or her personality as a result of the interaction with his or her environment. To understand an individual's behavior, the individual's history of learning and experiences must be combined with the experiences that the person has been aware of and

responded to. An individual's personality can be seen as a project in progress as it is always

changeable depending upon each new situation or environment the individual encounters. In

addition, the "role of reinforcement, reward, or gratification is universally recognized . . . as a

crucial [element] . . . in the acquisition and performance of skills and knowledge" (Rotter, 1966,

p. 1). Therefore, social learning theory of personality "involves both a 'process theory' (that is, a

theory of acquisition and change of learned, relatively stable, personal characteristics) and a

'content theory'—a descriptive schema of individual differences" (Rotter, 1982, p. 3).

People behave in a manner that aligns with their personal goals and seek to maximize

their potential, rather than acting in a certain way to avoid punishment (Rotter, 1954). *Social

Learning Theory,* according to Rotter (1954), initially contained three basic components for

predicting how someone would behave. These components were: "behavior potential,

expectancy, [and] reinforcement value" (Rotter, 1954, p. 105). Later, Rotter added a fourth

component—the psychological situation (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972, p. 11). A description

of each of these follows.

Behavior Potential

"Behavioral potential may be defined as the potentiality of any behavior occurring in any

given situation or situations as calculated in relation to any single reinforcement or set of

reinforcements" (Rotter, 1954, p. 105). Rotter (1954) noted that there are multiple behaviors that

can be exhibited in a situation; however, individuals tend to choose the one that has the highest

or greatest potential for reinforcement.

Expectancy

"Expectancy may be defined as the probability held by the individual that a particular

reinforcement will occur as a function of a specific behavior on his [or her] part in a specific

situation or situations. Expectancy is independent of the value or importance of the reinforcement" (Rotter, 1954, p. 107).

Reinforcement Value

"The reinforcement value of any external reinforcement may be ideally defined as the degree of preference for any reinforcement to occur if the possibilities of their occurring were all equal" (Rotter, 1954, p. 107). This component serves as the individual's motivation. Individuals are motivated by different things, therefore, each individual's experience may be different (Phares & Chaplin, 1997).

The Psychological Situation

"Behavior does not occur in a vacuum" (Rotter et al., 1972, p. 13). According to Rotter (1954), an individual is continuously responding to his or her external and internal environment. Given the selectivity that an individual may choose to use to filter the various kinds internal and external stimulations simultaneously, it can be expected that the selectivity is consistent with his or her unique experience and the different aspects of his or her environment mutually affect each other.

Of the four components noted above, the "expectancy" element has been studied most by many of Rotter's followers (Lefcourt, 1982; Levenson, 1973b; Phares, 1976; Rotter et al., 1972).

In further analysis, Rotter (1954) was able to distinguish between specific expectancies (those that related to one situation alone) and generalized expectancies (those could be found in many other situations). By blending examples of both of these types of expectancies, he concluded that researchers would be able to more accurately measure why individuals behave in a situation and be able to predict their behavior in similar situations in the future. Overall, however, the expectancies that individuals possessed were the results of any type of

reinforcement the individuals experienced as a result of their behavior in a situation. According

to Rotter, reinforcements then aided the individual in determining how he or she would behave in

the future as well as to what extent the type of reinforcement could be generalized to different

situations. "Therefore, expectancies for a given situation are a function of the reinforcement

history in that situation and a generalization of expectancies from other related behavior-

reinforcement sequences" (Carton & Nowicki, 1994, ¶16).

In 1966, Rotter published his most cited work, *Generalized Expectancies for Internal*

Versus External Control of Reinforcement (Carton & Nowicki, 1994; Phares, 1974; Phares &

Chaplin, 1997). In this monograph, Rotter outlined his belief that individuals behave and

interact with their environments based on their overall ability to expect that a reinforcement or

outcome of their behavior would be based their own behavior or personal characteristics

[internally] verses the degree to which people expected that any reinforcement was the result of

chance, luck, or fate or was under the control of powerful others [externally]. This monograph

also introduced his *Internal-External Scale of Locus of Control* (Rotter, 1966).

Questioning the validity of Rotter's work tying the expectancies of fate, chance, and

powerful others, Levenson (1973a) sought to further expand the externality element. According

to Levenson, her conception of externality expanded Rotter's initial work as she was able to

differentiate "between two types of external orientation—belief in the basic unordered and

random nature of the world and belief in the basic order and predictability of the world, coupled

with the expectancy that powerful others are in control" (Levenson, 1981, p. 15). She believed

that it was possible for individuals who perceived their behavior to be influenced by powerful

others may also perceive on a regular basis that they may be able to initiate their action,

therefore, exerting some personal control in a situation (Levenson, 1981). This concept would

then resemble the internality that Rotter defined (Levenson, 1981). In addition, an individual who may perceive chance or fate playing a role in their behavior "is cognitively and behaviorally different from one who feels that [he or she] is not in control" (Levenson, 1973a, p. 1).

This belief led Levenson (1973a) to modify Rotter's I-E scale and develop her own instrument, *The Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Locus of Control Scales*. The *I*, *P*, and *C Scales* were designed to differ from Rotter's *I-E Scale* in five important ways.

1. Levenson (1973a) used a 6-point Likert scale instead of a forced-choice format utilized by Rotter. Therefore, the three scales could be analyzed and were determined to be statistically independent of one another.

2. Levenson's (1973a) instrument used more personalized statements that allowed the person completing the instrument to speak from his or her direct experience, whereas Rotter's instrument did not.

3. The items in the scales were worded in a manner that would not allow the person completing it any modifiability of the specific issues.

4. Levenson constructed each of the three scales with parallelism in every 3-item set.

5. Unlike Rotter's *I-E Scale*, any correlations between items on the new scales and the Marlowe-Crowns Social Desirability Scale were considered not to be significant and somewhat negligible (Levenson, 1973a).

Based on studies (Fass & Tubman, 2002; Levenson, 1973b; Levenson, 1974; Levenson & Mahler, 1975; Presson, Clark, & Benassi, 1997) that supported the validity and reliability of her instrument as well as her expansion of the externality component of the locus of control construct, Levenson's (1973a) work has been selected for inclusion in this study.

In previous studies utilizing the *I*, *P* and *C* scales, Levenson (1981) reported that Americans and individuals from other countries with similar cultural mores tend to score higher on the *Internality Scale* than on the *Powerful Others* and *Chance Scales*. She reasoned this was due to Americans' strong desire to succeed and take responsibility for their own lives. From her initial research, Levenson (1973b) reported that male college students tended to score higher than females college students on the *Powerful Others Scale,* but she did not find any statistically significant difference between the scores by men and women on the *Internality* and *Chance Scales.*

In other studies involving college students, Garcia and Levenson (1973b) reported that students from lower income families scored significantly higher on the *Chance Scale*, however, did not differ significantly from the students from more affluent families on the *Internality* and *Powerful Others Scales*. Prociuk and Breen (1974) reported that students who appeared to be academically successful in college and possess effective study skills also scored higher on the *Internality Scale*. Students who possessed an external orientation were less likely to be academically successful (Prociuk & Breen, 1974). Martin and Dixon (1994) reported that internal students were more likely to attend new student orientation programs than externals.

Students who are internally motivated were found to be more likely to seek out answers and gather important information pertinent to their goals and objectives than those who are externally motivated (Crandall & Crandall, 1983; Dollinger, 2000; Kirkpatrick et al., 2008, Phares, 1976). These students generally ask more questions and challenge issues presented within their environments (Davis & Phares, 1967). They also appear to be excellent trivia players in that they are able to pick up little facts and bits of information (Dollinger, 2000).

Students who are externally motivated are less willing to admit their academic deficiencies and tend to blame their challenges on outside forces, such as bad teaching methods or unfair grading systems utilized by their professors (Kirkpatrick et al., 2008). "An internal student is one who (a) accurately discerns viable options for intervening in his or her own academic success and (b) actively employs those options as appropriate" (Kirkpatrick et al., 2008, p. 494).

To summarize, this review of the literature has chronicled the roles and responsibilities assigned to individuals who have served as RAs as college housing programs have evolved within the United States. From earliest accounts, RAs have served as a critical component to the overall success of housing programs. As noted, RAs have been so successful working with their peers that campus administrators have continued to depend upon them to a level that has many individuals questioning how much more these undergraduate students can assume and remain effective (Dodge, 1999).

In addition, the characteristics of students attending colleges and universities today have been explored. These characteristics combined with students' locus of control orientation may influence how students see the RA responsibilities and how helpful they perceive the RA to be. To determine students' perceptions of RAs, it is important to understand how much "power" residents attribute to their designated RAs in their day-to-day living environments.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between students'

locus of control orientation and the way they perceive the RA's roles or job responsibilities. In

addition, the researcher sought to determine what RA responsibilities are more important to first

year residential students in their transition to the collegiate environment. Specifically, the

researcher sought to answer the following research questions with this study:

RQ 1: What is the locus of control orientation among the students who participated in

this study?

RQ 2: Is there a difference in students' locus of control orientation between men and

women?

RQ 3: Who (powerful others) do students believe influence them in things that happen in

their lives?

RQ 4: Do first-generation residential students perceive the RA responsibilities

differently than students who have had at least one immediate family member live

in college housing?

RQ 5: What perceived RA responsibilities do students report to be important to them as

they transition into college?

RQ 6: What perceived RA responsibilities do students report not to be important to them

as they transition into college?

RQ 7: Is there a relationship between the students' locus of control orientation and the level of importance they perceive in the different responsibilities assigned to individuals in the RA position?

This study employed a quantitative approach to data collection. Two validated research instruments were incorporated into a paper questionnaire and were distributed to first-year students living in university residence halls. In addition to the instruments, participants were asked to respond to five open-ended questions and provide some demographic information (sex, ethnicity, and age). Students were asked to report if they were the first member of their immediate families to have lived in a residence hall on a college campus. Finally, students were asked if they were interested in becoming a resident assistant in the future.

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from the first-year residential student population at a large, land and sea grant, research institution located in the Southeastern United States. The institution's total enrollment was reported as approximately 33,000 students, including approximately 24,500 undergraduates. The institution had an undergraduate housing capacity of 6,826 beds, filled primarily with 4,800 incoming, first-year students. There were approximately 700 men and 1,800 women housed in traditional-styled residence halls. For this study, participants had to be at least 18 years of age and living in a traditional (conventional) residence hall, and they must have agreed to participate in the study.

The institution defined a first-year student (freshman) as an incoming new student to the institution who was under 21 years of age and was not married. Supporting previous research regarding the positive effects that residential students (especially incoming new students) experience by living in campus-operated residential facilities (Blimling, 2003; Pascarella &

Terenzini, 2005; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1994), the institution had instituted a first-year live-on requirement. As stated on the institution's website, all incoming new students who were under 21 years of age and were not married were required to reside in one of the university-owned residence halls during their first year of enrollment. Students who believed they had a compelling reason for not living on campus were allowed to apply for an exemption (UGA Housing Assignments Office, personal communication October, 9, 2009). Most exemptions to the first-year live-on requirement were granted only to students who were currently living in one of the five counties surrounding the institution and who wished live at home with their parents or guardian while attending college (UGA Department of University Housing, 2009).

For this study, a traditional (conventional) residence hall was defined as a single-sex or co-educational residential facility where students resided in a room designed for two occupants. All residents of a designated floor or wing shared a common bathroom that was located either in the middle of the hallway or at the end of a corridor (Pike, 1999 Terenzini et al., 1996; Winston & Anchors, 1993). Of the 20 residence halls located on campus, only nine met this definition. Three of these halls housed only women. In the co-educational facilities, same sex residents were assigned to a wing or floor. In addition, there were no special activities planned or conducted by the residence hall staff for the residents beyond those typically coordinated by the RA staff as they completed their duties as outlined in their job descriptions (Blimling, 1993; Pike, 1999; Terenzini et al., 1996). There were no established living-learning communities or "special interest" floors eliminating one hall initially identified. Therefore, this study involved the remaining eight residence halls. For the remainder of this document, "traditional residence halls" is used to refer to the students' place of residence.

The housing department employed approximately 150 RAs. These staff members were selected through a rigorous process that included group activities and individual interviews. Once hired, they were required to complete a training program that occurred approximately two weeks before the beginning of the fall semester. First-year resident assistants were also required to complete a class specifically designed to continue their training during the first semester of employment. Some topics presented in this class address transition issues that new students may experience as they enter college (e.g., homesickness, creating an effective study schedule) as well as issues that may or may not affect all residential students (e.g., alcohol/drug abuse, sexual assault, stress, suicide). Upon successful completion of this class, the RAs received three academic credit hours.

The researcher closely reviewed the RA job description utilized by the campus housing department identified for this study and compared the stated expectations and responsibilities with information found earlier in Conlogue's (1993) research. Given that all of the 14 responsibilities exist in the current job description of the designated institution, the researcher concluded that Conlogue's instrument would be a viable tool for the present study. More information regarding Conlogue's research follows in the discussion of *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire.*

Instrumentation

This study of students' perceptions of the roles of the resident assistant was conducted using a paper questionnaire which combined two previously tested instruments from earlier research: Conlogue's (1993) *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* and Levenson's (1973a, 1981) *The Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Locus of Control Scales*. Permission to use these instruments was obtained from both authors.

The Resident Assistant Questionnaire

The first instrument used in this study was adopted and modified from earlier research identifying the various responsibilities that were assigned to RAs who worked in college housing programs. Although a wealth of literature regarding this subject exists (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1981; Winston & Anchors, 1993; Winston et al., 1984), much of the research had been conducted and documented primarily from professional housing administrators' perspectives. However, Conlogue (1993) noted that there was a "paucity of research on the Resident Assistant position from the perspective of those currently in the role" (p. 49). Therefore, his research was intended to provide insights directly from the RAs who were employed by the campus housing programs he identified for his study. Using two different research methods, one quantitative and the other qualitative, Conlogue (1993) specifically sought to determine how RAs perceived their various responsibilities in relation to their importance to their assigned residents. He also solicited the RAs' perceptions of their responsibilities in relation to their employers. In addition, Conlogue was interested in learning how satisfied the RAs were in performing their assigned responsibilities.

Although the qualitative portion of Conlogue's (1993) research provided significant insights as to how the RAs at the time of his study may have perceived the role of the RA, his quantitative approach and the stated findings have been reviewed and incorporated into this study. As a result of an initial extensive survey of the existing literature at the time of his study, Conlogue (1993) identified 14 RA responsibilities or roles that consistently appeared in RA job descriptions from campus to campus of the institutions he contacted, though he noted that there were slight variations of terminology used within the different campus housing programs. These 14 roles or responsibilities are:

1.   Provide personal counseling/assistance to residents;

2.   Provide academic counseling/assistance to residents;

3.   Respond to crisis/emergency situations;

4.   Refer students with questions/problems to appropriate university resources;

5.   Provide social/recreational programs for residents;

6.   Provide educational/cultural programs for residents;

7.   Distribute and post information for residents;

8.   Encourage residents to respect and appreciate individual differences;

9.   Complete paperwork required by the RA position;

10.   Enforce residence hall policies and procedures;

11.   Mediate conflicts which arise among residents;

12.   Act as a positive role model for residents;

13.   Be visible and available to your residents;

14.   Initiate informal contacts with residents. (Conlogue, 1993, p. 57)

Conlogue (1993) used this list to create *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* that he distributed to 193 current RAs at three different institutions to obtain feedback as to how important they perceived their responsibilities as they related directly to their residents and to the overall operations of the campus housing department. The RA participants were asked to respond to the 14 different statements describing a particular RA role or responsibility from three different perspectives using the same five-point rating scale (1 = Not Applicable; 2 = Unimportant; 3 = Somewhat Important; 4 = Important; and, 5 = Crucial). First, the RAs were asked how important they believed each of the 14 identified responsibilities were to their assigned residents. Second, they were asked to respond to the statement in regard to how important they perceived the responsibilities to be for the overall operation of the housing

department. Finally, participants were asked to provide their overall level of satisfaction in performing the identified responsibilities. Subsequently, the participants were asked to estimate how much time per week they spent performing each of the 14 responsibilities. Conlogue (1993) concluded his questionnaire with two open-ended questions:

1.   What do you like best about being a Resident Assistant? Why?

2.   What do you like least about being a Resident Assistant? Why? (p. 59)

Conlogue (1993) reported in his overall findings that RAs believed their most important responsibility to their residents, as well as to their employer, was to respond to crisis/emergency situations. This responsibility was also the one that provided the RAs the greatest personal satisfaction. Conlogue also reported the RAs found all of the remaining responsibilities to be important or crucial to the overall administrative operations of the housing department with the exception of the responsibility associated with "providing academic counseling/assistance to residents" (pp. 73-74).

Although Conlogue's original instrument was distributed in 1993, elements of the 14 various roles and responsibilities identified in his work continue to appear in RA job descriptions (Minor, 1999). Housing professionals have continued to expect resident assistants to perform these roles and assign them similar responsibilities, although with greater levels of authority (Buhrow, 1999). This is why Conlogue's questionnaire was adapted for use in this study with some minor alterations as noted.

First, the questions used in the initial administration of the instrument asked RAs to respond keeping in mind what they perceived to be important RA responsibilities as they pertained to their residents. Therefore, many of the questions were phrased in a manner not specifically targeted for an individual resident to respond. For example, Question #2 on the

original instruments read, "Providing academic/counseling assistance to residents" (Conlogue, 1993). For this study, Question #2 was revised to read "Provide academic assistance to you." Another example is Question #12, which on the original instrument was "Acting as a positive role model for residents." The revised instrument contained the updated statement, "Act as a positive role model for you." By incorporating these revisions, the statements were expected to solicit a more personal response from the individual resident completing it.

Second, in addition to steps to personalize the questionnaire used in this study, questions were revised to reflect more accurately current housing terminology. For example, Question #1 of the original instrument read, "Providing personal counseling/assistance to residents" (Conlogue, 1993). "Counseling" is not a term utilized today in most of the RA job descriptions and staff members have been encouraged to see this aspect of the position in a less clinical way. "The RA might more appropriately be considered to have a helping role" (Blimling, 2003, p. 9). Therefore, the revised version stated, "Provides assistance to you with personal issues."

Data collected from the administration of the modified instrument were compared with comments from the RAs involved in Conlogue's (1993) study. Although Conlogue did not directly involve resident students in his research, the RA insights were useful as they are typically selected from a group of their peers (Ender, 1984; Winston et al., 1984). This allowed the researcher some insights as to how today's students may have perceived the roles and the responsibilities of the RA as compared to the possible perceptions of the resident students in 1993.

Once revisions were completed, the researcher distributed the 14 statements to three students currently employed in the housing office who did not have any prior experience working as a resident assistant. These students were asked to review the 14 statements and

provide their interpretations of their meaning. Based on the students' feedback, the researcher surmised that the wording alterations to the revised instrument had not changed Conlogue's (1993) intended meaning conveyed in the original administration.

As in the original instrument, the researcher also elected to add four open-ended questions at the conclusion of Part II. The researcher believed it to be very important to include the first three questions so that residents may have the opportunity to provide their personal feedback regarding the RA responsibilities. The fourth question was included to obtain information that may have indicated how the role of the RA on the campus where the study was conducted was perceived in general. Though similar to Conlogue's (1993) open-ended questions to the RAs, for this study, the researcher found it necessary to revise these questions as well. The actual questions included in the study's questionnaire were:

1. What resident assistant responsibilities are more important to you? Why?

2. Are there responsibilities you believe your RA should not continue to perform? Why?

3. Are there additional responsibilities you wish your RA did perform? Why?

4. Are you interested in becoming an RA? Why?

The researcher included these questions as a way of checking for consistency in the participant answers. The individuals were asked to rank order the list of 14 responsibilities then indicate what was most important to them. Variations in these responses would indicate that there appeared to be inconsistencies and a lack of thoughtfulness influencing the responses. In addition, the open-ended questions provided the residents the opportunity to voice their opinions as to what responsibilities they thought should be included in the RA job description. In a sense, the researcher found the questions necessary in order to allow the student voice to be heard. The

answers to these specific questions were transcribed and reported in a similar quantitative

manner as Conlogue utilized (1993).

The Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Locus of Control Scales

Levenson developed the second instrument incorporated into this study in 1973.

Building upon Rotter's (1966) *I-E Scale* measuring a person's internal-external locus of control

orientation, Levenson expanded Rotter's work by further defining the external orientation into

two different dimensions (Levenson, 1973a, 1975; Presson et al., 1997). Levenson's (1973a)

Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Locus of Control Scales measured the degree to which

people believed their life outcomes were controlled by three sources: a) their own actions or

characteristics (*I*); b) powerful others (*P*); and c) chance or fate (*C*). Each of the three scales

consisted of eight items, some of which appeared in Rotter's initial instrument. Participants were

asked to rate each item according to a six-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree)

(Levenson, 1981).

Levenson (1973a) created the *I*, *P*, and *C Scales* using the concept that those who

believed in powerful or influential others (which Rotter [1966] had noted as favoring an external

orientation) behaved and thought differently from individuals who see the world as random or

unpredictable (which Rotter included in his definition of the external dimension). Levenson

noted her belief that individuals could still believe in chance or fate intervening in their life

matters, however, how much "control" a person had on the situation did matter. "In the former

case, the potential for control exists" (Levenson, 1981, p. 17).

Although participants from several different populations (e.g.., adults, the elderly,

undergraduates, alcoholics, prisoners, psychological patients) were involved in testing the overall

reliability and validity of Levenson's (1973a) *I*, *P*, and *C Scales*, the researcher reviewed

findings from previous studies using a similar population as the participants identified for this study. From a 1994 study conducted involving college students enrolled in an introductory chemistry class with multiple sections, Levenson reported the instrument's reliability to have an internal consistency between the three different scales to be moderately high when using the Kuder-Richardson analysis (.64 for the *I Scale*, .77 for the *P Scale*, and .78 for the *C Scale*). In further analysis using the Spearman-Brown test for split-half reliabilities, Levenson reported results as .62 for the *I Scale*, and .66 and .64 for the *P* and *C Scales*, respectively.

Regarding the validity of the instrument, Levenson (1973a) first reported the *P* and *C Scales* to correlate slightly (.54) with each other. "The items scored in an external direction are only minimally correlated with items scored in an internal direction" (Levenson, 1981, p. 23).

In her initial factor analysis, Levenson (1973a) utilized a Kaiser-Varimax method where the rotation of the variables resulted in seven of the 24 factors accounting for 52% of the variance. This lead Levenson (1981) to conclude that there was a strong correlation between the three different scales as she had designed them, and they were empirically related. These findings were also supported by Presson et al. (1997), who indicated that the three-factor model created by Levenson provided the "best fit" (p. 101), rather than the two-factor model used by Rotter.

Pilot Study

Prior to finalizing the draft of the paper survey, a pilot study was conducted involving 19 students attending the Freshman College Summer Experience program. Participants of this program were incoming new students who had elected to begin their academic careers early by enrolling in the summer term instead of waiting for the fall. Although the program was only four weeks long, residents should have been able to develop a sense of what the RAs do and their

assigned roles and responsibilities by the time the survey was distributed. The group was

assembled in a large study lounge located on one of the floors within the residence hall by the

RAs assigned to work with the program. The RAs were then dismissed when the researcher

began to explain the purpose for the study. The researcher confirmed that everyone in the room

was at least 18 years of age before distributing the paper surveys. Once everyone in the room

had completed his or her survey, the researcher then asked the participants for their impressions

of the survey. Specifically, the researcher posed questions to the group attempting to ascertain if

the residents clearly understood the word revisions that have been made to Conlogue's (1993)

original instrument.

The feedback collected during this session was quite valuable. It allowed the researcher

to determine the parts of the instrument that students found to be confusing and that lacked clear

instructions, which facilitated changes that were incorporated into the final document. The pilot

study also helped the researcher determine that the survey takes approximately 20 minutes to

complete.

Data Collection

Permission to involve resident students was obtained from the chief housing officer. To

collect data, the researcher elected to administer manually a paper questionnaire (see Appendix

A) to first-year students living in the campus' traditional residence halls in early November.

This approach was utilized as an attempt to ensure that there was consistency in instruction and

information distributed from one meeting to another. In an attempt to promote the study, the

researcher initially met with the residence hall staff assigned to the selected buildings in early

October to explain the study and to request their assistance in setting up the floor meetings that

were to take place in the following November. Waiting until this time to distribute the survey

allowed first-year residents time to interact with their designated RAs and learn more about their

individual job responsibilities, therefore enabling them to have formed opinions about the

position itself.

Each student who attended the floor meetings was provided with a copy of the paper

survey with a cover letter (see Appendix B) explaining the purpose of the study. Consent to

participate in the study was obtained by the participants agreeing to complete the survey as

indicated in the cover letter. Anyone who did not wish to participate in the survey was excused

as well as anyone who was not at least 18 years of age. It was expected it would take each

participant approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey. Participants were allowed to leave

as they completed the forms and returned them to the researcher. To avoid an uncomfortable

situation, the RA assigned to the participants was not present during the administration of the

survey nor did he or she have access to the information once collected from his or her resident

students.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Data Analysis</h2>

Although there were approximately 2,500 potential participants who met the initial

criteria for this study, the researcher anticipated distributing surveys to approximately 1,200

participants, based on the number of participants expected to attend the scheduled floor

meetings. An a priori power analysis using the GPOWER statistical program (Erdfelder, Faul, &

Buchner, 1996) with an effect size of .30, an alpha level of .05, and power of .80 indicated that a

sample size of 278 completed surveys was the minimum number of completed surveys required

for the statistical analysis planned for this study. Once surveys were collected, data were entered

into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 2009) and analysis performed.

Demographic information was summarized.

Mean scores and standard deviations for each of the 14 roles or responsibilities of the RA position were calculated. Answers to the open-ended questions contained within this section were tabulated. Data from this study were then compared to the data collected by Conlogue in 1993.

Scores for *I*, *P,* and *C Scales* were calculated according to the scoring instructions provided by Levenson (1981). Answers to the Likert-type scales were assigned numerical values ranging from -3 (Strongly Disagree) to +3 (Strongly Agree). Scores were determined by adding the numerical value for each item (8 for each scale) and then adding a constant value of 24 so that all scores would be positively weighted. Therefore, each individual had a possibility of scoring from 0–48 on each scale. Data from this study were compared to the prior studies utilizing comparable student populations (Garcia & Levenson, 1975; Levenson, 1973b; Levenson & Mahler, 1975; Prociuk & Breen, 1974). Responses to the question regarding whom the residents consider to be influential in matters that relate to their collegiate success was also tabulated and means were calculated. Similarly, the researcher analyzed the responses to the open-ended questions looking for any reoccurring themes or trends. A two-tailed *t* test was conducted to determine if first-generation students had statistically higher mean scores than the residents who had family members who had lived on campus before them. A correlational analysis using Pearson's *r* was conducted to determine the relationship between students' locus of control orientation and their overall perceptions of the 14 RA roles.

Limitations

One limitation initially identified by the researcher was the recognition that this study was conducted only at one institution and so the ability to generalize from the results would be limited. However, campus administrators at other large, four-year public, research-extensive

institutions may find the information helpful as they recruit students with similar characteristics (e.g., size, student demographics, academic degrees) as those of the participants utilized in this study.

Another limitation is the fact that all the RAs had participated in the same fall training program prior to the initiation of the study. They had received the same departmental expectations that may have influenced how they perceived their responsibilities and how they were to go about carrying them out. To counter this, the researcher attempted to identify participants from several different buildings where supervision expectations may have varied as a result of the RAs having different direct supervisors.

A third limitation was that the type of relationship that each RA had developed with his or her individual residents may have influenced how the resident interpreted or perceived the roles of the RA. This possibly includes the resident's overall impression of the RA's job performance.

The fourth limitation was that the participants were first-year students who may or may not have fully understood the role and responsibilities assigned to their RAs. In addition, given the timing of the distribution of the questionnaire, they may or may not have had the opportunity to interact fully with their RAs in a way as to influence their opinions regarding the position.

Finally, it should be noted that the campus housing program's recruitment of interested individuals for vacant staff positions for the next academic year was in progress during the data collection period. Publicity materials were posted announcing the dates and times of information sessions for students who were interested in participating in the selection process. Therefore, some students may have attended an information session or had a discussion about the resident

assistant position with a current housing staff member in preparation for the selection process

that may have influenced their perspectives in some way.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between residents'

Locus of Control orientation and the way they perceived the roles and responsibilities

traditionally assigned to the RA position. Additionally, the researcher sought to determine if the

traditional responsibilities of the RA are important to first-year students as they transition into

the collegiate environment. Data were obtained through a paper questionnaire containing two

previously validated instruments: *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* (Conlogue, 1993), and

The Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Locus of Control Scales (Levenson, 1973a, 1981).

Data Collection

Data collection occurred in November, 2009. Of the 2,500 possible participants who met

the qualifications for this study, 1,218 individuals attended one of the scheduled floor meetings

held during a three-week period and completed the questionnaire. Through this method, the

researcher was able to solicit information from 48.72% of the identified first-year residential

student population. After inspecting the completed questionnaires, reporting problems were

noted and missing responses were accounted for within the statistical analysis, creating small

variations in the number of responses recorded for each of the items included in the

questionnaire. Overall, 1,195 questionnaires were deemed usable.

For the purposes of clarity and consistency, the findings presented in this chapter are in

order of the participants' demographic information, followed by the results associated with each

of the study's seven research questions. Finally, all additional findings are discussed and

summarized at the end of the chapter to explain the possible relationship between the residents'
locus of control and their perceptions of the various responsibilities assigned to the resident
assistants.

Results

Demographics

Demographic information was collected from the participants in Part One of the
questionnaire and is reported in Table 1. In summary, the participant population consisted of
848 women (71%) and 347 men (29%). It should be noted one individual selected transgender
as a response; however, the participant was removed from the study given the lack of frequency
within the overall participant population for any substantial statistical analysis. It should also be
noted that the gender breakdown was heavily influenced by the fact that the largest residence hall
identified for the study was an all-female facility. In addition, the second largest residence hall
was also over 55% women.

With respect to age, the overwhelming majority of the participants were 18 or 19 years
old (76.2% and 23.8% respectfully). Seven individuals reported being 20 years of age and one
indicated 21. Once again, due to the small number, these eight participants were removed from
the study. The majority of the participants identified as White/Caucasian (80.1%) while 7.1%
identified as Black or African American and 7.0% reported as Asian American. Annual family
income was reported by 3.4 % of the participants as being less than $20,000, 10.6 % between
$20,000 and $49,999, 15.6% between $50,000 and $74,999, 15.1 % between $75,000 and
$99,999, 23.7 % between $100,000 and $149,999, and 17.4% between $150,000 and $249,999.
There were 147 participants (or 14.2%) who indicated that their families' income was more than
$250,000.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	*n*	Percent
Gender		
Women	848	71.0
Men	347	29.0
Age		
18 years of age	910	76.2
19 years of age	285	23.8
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	33	2.8
Multiracial	36	3.0
Asian American	84	7.0
White/Caucasian	957	80.1
Black or African American	85	7.1
Family Income		
Less than $20,000	35	3.4
$20,000 - $24,999	23	2.2
$25,000 - $29,999	24	2.3
$30,000 - $39,999	29	2.8
$40,000 - $49,999	34	3.3
$50,000 - $59,999	66	6.4

(Table 1 continued)

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	*n*	Percent
$60,000 - $74,999	95	9.2
$75,000 - $99,999	156	15.1
$100,000 - $149,999	245	23.7
$150,000 - $199,999	114	11.0
$200,000 - $249,999	66	6.4
$250,000 or more	147	14.2
Father's Highest Level of Education		
Elementary school or less	6	0.5
Some high school	19	1.6
High school graduate	109	9.2
Postsecondary school other than college	30	2.5
Some college	142	12.0
College degree	431	36.4
Some graduate school	48	4.1
Graduate or professional school	399	33.7

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	*n*	Percent
Mother's Highest Level of Education		
Elementary school or less	5	0.4
Some high school	14	1.2
High school graduate	94	7.9
Postsecondary school other than college	37	3.1
Some college	179	15.1
College degree	502	42.2
Some graduate school	60	5.0
Graduate or professional school	298	25.1
First Person to Live in a Residence Hall		
Yes	456	38.2
No	739	61.8

Most participants reported their fathers' highest level of education as a college degree (36.4%) while an additional 33.7% of the participants reported that their fathers possessed graduate or professional degrees. With regards to their mothers' highest level of education, participants reported that approximately 42.2% had obtained a college degree, and 25.1% reported their mothers possessed graduate or professional degrees. Approximately 11.3% of the respondents reported that their fathers had only a high school degree or less education while this was the situation for only 9.5% of their mothers. In addition, 61.8% of the participants reported that they were not the first person in their immediate family to have lived on campus in a residence hall.

Research Question #1: What is the locus of control orientation among the students who participated in this study?

To answer this question, the researcher utilized the participants' responses to the items contained within Part Three of the questionnaire that were associated with Levenson's instrument, *The Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Locus of Control Scales* (Levenson, 1973a, 1981). As stated in Chapter 3, the 24 items contained within this instrument related to one of the three possible orientations of locus of control. Participants were asked to rate each item according to a six-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree). Each participant received three different scores (each ranging from 0 – 48) indicating his or her relative standing on the three orientations. Tables 2, 3, and 4 summarize the items contained in the instrument as they pertain to each scale, along with the mean and standard deviation for each question.

Overall, participants scored higher on the *Internality Scale* ($M = 34.46$, $SD = 4.89$) than the other two scales, *Powerful Others* ($M = 23.95$, $SD = 5.62$) and *Chance* ($M = 23.20$, $SD =$

Table 2

Residents' Responses to Questions Pertaining to Levenson's (1973a, 1981) Internality Scale

Item	*M*	*SD*
23. My life is determined by my own actions.	4.81	1.235
21. When I get what I want, it is usually because I worked hard for it.	4.74	1.229
1. Whether or not I get to be a leader depends mostly on my ability.	4.49	1.294
19. I am usually able to protect my personal interests.	4.43	1.233
5. When I make plans, I am almost certain to make them work.	4.35	1.133
9. How many friends I have depends upon how nice a person I am.	3.82	1.407
18. I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life.	3.73	1.508
4. Whether or not I get into a car accident depends mostly upon how good a driver I am.	3.42	1.367

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree

Table 3

Residents' Responses to Questions Pertaining to Levenson's (1973a, 1981) Powerful Others Scale

Item	*M*	SD
8. Although I might have good ability, I will not be given leadership responsibility without appealing to those in positions of power.	3.71	1.313
20. Whether or not I get into a car accident depends mostly on the other driver.	3.35	1.225
15. Getting what I want requires pleasing those people above me.	3.11	1.220
22. In order to have my plans work, I make sure that they fit in with the desires of people who have power over me.	3.10	1.266
3. I feel like what happens in my life is mostly determined by powerful others.	2.66	1.275
13. People like myself have very little chance of protecting our personal interests when they conflict with those of strong pressure groups.	2.56	1.231
11. My life is chiefly controlled by powerful others.	2.52	1.238
17. If important people were to decide they did not like me, I probably would not make many friends.	2.48	1.203

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree

Table 4

Residents' Responses to Questions Pertaining to Levenson's (1973a, 1981) Chance Scale

Item	M	SD
10. I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.	4.12	1.311
6. Often, there is no chance of protecting my personal interests from bad luck happenings.	3.05	1.219
14. It is not always wise for me to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune.	2.78	1.274
16. Whether or not I get to be a leader depends upon whether I am lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time.	2.69	1.203
2. To a great extent, my life is controlled by accidental happenings.	2.62	1.276
12. Whether or not I get into a car accident is mostly a matter of luck.	2.64	1.251
7. When I get what I want, it is usually because I am lucky.	2.49	1.132
24. It is chiefly a matter of fate whether or not I have a few friends or many friends.	2.45	1.353

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Disagree, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Agree, 6 = Strongly Agree

5.81). Small differences between women and men were noted for each scale. On the *Internality*

Scale, women had a mean score of 34.54 (*SD* = 4.66) while men had a mean score 34.24 (*SD* =

5.42). For the *Powerful Others Scale*, women reported a mean score of 23.63 (*SD* = 5.63) and

men had a mean score of 24.75 (*SD* = 5.55). On the *Chance Scale*, women reported a mean

score of 22.96 (*SD* = 5.84) while the men reported a mean score of 23.82 (*SD* = 5.70).

Research Question #2: Is there a difference in students' locus of control orientation

between men and women?

To answer this question, an independent *t* test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis

that the locus of control orientation may not be different between men and women. Given the

large number of female participants, statistics were calculated conservatively and data were used

so that equal variances among the mean scores were not assumed. Overall, women appeared to

score higher on the items pertaining to the *Internality Scale*, $t(518) = 0.87$, $p = .383$ (effect size =

.0382), though the difference was not found to be statistically significant. However, statistically

significant differences were reported between the two groups on items pertaining on the

Powerful Others Scale, $t(609) = -3.05$, $p = .002$ (effect size = .093), as well as the *Chance Scale*,

$t(590) = -2.27$, $p = .024$ (effect size = .123). This statistical significance found on the *Chance*

Scale was inconsistent with the results Levenson reported in her initial research (1973a, 1981).

She reported that men tended to score higher than women on the *Powerful Others Scale* which

was the situation in this stud*y*, however, she did not find any statistical differences between the

two groups on the *Internality* or *Chance Scales.* A summary of the results of the *t* test analyzing

the women's and men's scores on each of the specific items contained with Levenson's (1973a,

1981) *Internality, Powerful Others and Chance Scales* can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Responses from Women and Men to Levenson's (1973a, 1981) Internality, Powerful Others and Chance Scales.

Item	Women		Men		df	t	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD			(2-tailed)
1. Whether or not I get to be a leader depends mostly on my ability.	4.60	1.135	4.44	1.299	552	1.987	.047*
2. To a great extent, my life is controlled by accidental happenings.	2.64	1.229	2.70	1.297	585	-.774	-.064
3. I feel like what happens in my life is mostly determined by powerful others.	2.69	1.234	2.75	1.228	624	-.831	.406
4. Whether or not I get into a car accident depends mostly on how good a driver I am.	3.40	1.299	3.67	1.323	607	-3.164	.002**
5. When I make plans, I am almost certain to make them work.	4.45	.994	4.31	1.053	586	2.218	.027
6. Often there is no chance of protecting my personal interests from bad luck happenings.	3.07	1.208	3.11	1.114	673	-.604	-.044*
7. When I get what I want, it is usually because I am lucky.	2.47	1.047	2.67	1.173	558	-2.714	.007**
8. Although I might have good ability, I will not be given leadership responsibility without appealing to those in positions of power.	3.80	1.214	3.77	1.255	597	.391	.696

(Table 5 continued)

Table 5

Responses from Women and Men to Levenson's (1973a, 1981) Internality, Powerful Others and Chance Scales.

Item	Women		Men		df	t	Sig.
	M	SD	*M*	SD			(2-tailed)
9. How many friends I have depends upon how nice a person I am.	3.89	1.352	3.87	1.291	644	.227	.820
10. I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.	4.30	1.191	3.94	1.213	602	4.630	.000**
11. My life is chiefly controlled by powerful others.	2.54	1.175	2.66	1.246	584	-1.607	-.127
12. Whether or not I get into a car accident is mostly a matter of luck.	2.65	1.211	2.80	1.175	619	-1.941	.053
13. People like myself have very little chance of protecting our personal interests when they conflict with those of strong pressure groups.	2.54	1.153	2.78	1.234	575	-3.007	.003**
14. It is not always wise for me to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune.	2.75	1.212	3.00	1.247	591	-3.106	.002**
15. Getting what I want requires pleasing those people above me.	3.15	1.151	3.26	1.134	616	-1.504	.133
16. Whether or not I get to be a leader depends upon whether I am lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time.	2.65	1.155	3.00	1.153	605	-4.686	.000**

(Table 5 continued)

Table 5

Responses from Women and Men to Levenson's (1973a, 1981) Internality, Powerful Others and Chance Scales.

Item	Women M	Women SD	Men M	Men SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
17. If important people were to decide they did not like me, I probably would not make many friends.	2.49	1.158	2.64	1.178	600	-1.932	.054
18. I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life.	3.73	1.473	4.01	1.308	684	-3.204	.001**
19. I am usually able to protect my personal interests.	4.57	.994	4.50	1.102	555	1.045	.297
20. Whether or not I get into a car accident depends mostly on the other driver.	3.32	1.127	3.64	1.138	607	-4.275	.000**
21. When I get what I want, it is usually because I have worked hard for it.	4.94	.995	4.57	1.129	547	5.216	.000**
22. In order to have my plans work, I make sure that they fit in with in with the desires of people who have power over me.	3.12	1.178	3.26	1.220	591	-1.781	.075
23. My life is determined by my own actions.	4.95	1.035	4.78	1.135	565	2.369	.018*

(Table 5 continued)

Table 5

Responses from Women and Men to Levenson's (1973a, 1981) Internality, Powerful Others and Chance Scales.

Item	Women		Men		df	t	Sig.
	M	SD	*M*	SD			(2-tailed)
24. It is chiefly a matter of fate whether or not I have a few or many friends.	2.45	1.303	2.61	1.352	590	-1.897	.058

* *p* < .05
** *p* < .01

The most significant differences were found between women and men related the items contained in the *Chance Scale*, where four of the eight comparisons between women and men were found to be statistically significant at a *p* value less than .01. Men reported a statistically significant higher score (*M* = 2.67, *SD* = 1.173) than the women (*M* = 2.47, *SD* = 1.047), *t*(558) = 2.714, *p* = .007, on item 7, "When I get what I want, it usually because I am lucky." For item 10, "I have often found that what is going to happen will happen," women reported a statistically significant higher score (*M* = 4.30, *SD* = 1.191) than the men (*M* = 3.94, *SD* = 1.213), *t*(602) = 4.630, *p* = .000. However, men reported a statistically significant higher score (*M* = 3.00, *SD* = 1.247) than the women (*M* = 2.75, *SD* = 1.212) on item 14, "It is not always wise for me to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune," *t*(591) = 3.106, *p* = .002. For item 16, "Whether or not I get to be a leader depends upon whether I am lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time," men reported a statistically higher score (*M* = 3.00, *SD* = 1.153) than the women (*M*= 2.65, *SD* 1.155), *t*(605) = 4.686, *p* = .000.

One comparison between women and men was found to be statistically significant at a *p* value less than .05. Men reported a statistically significant higher score (*M*= 3.11, *SD* = 1.114) than the women (*M*= 3.07, *SD* = 1.208) for item 6, "Often there is no chance of protecting my personal interests from bad luck happenings," *t*(673) = .604, *p* = .044.

In relation to the *Powerful Others Scale*, two of the eight comparisons between women and men were found to be statistically significant at a *p* value less than .01. Men reported a statistically significant higher score (*M* = 3.64, *SD* = 1.138) than the women (*M* = 3.32, *SD* = 1.127), *t*(607) = 4.275, *p* = .000, for item 20, "Whether or not I get into a car accident depends mostly on the other driver." Men also reported a statistically significant higher score *(M* = 2.78, *SD* = 1.234) than the women (*M* = 2.54, *SD* = 1.153), *t*(575) = 3.007, *p* = .003, for item 13,

"People like myself have very little chance of protecting our personal interests when they conflict with those of strong pressure groups."

In relation to the *Internality Scale*, three of the eight comparisons between women and men were found to be statistically significant at a *p* value less than .01. On item 21, "When I get what I want, it usually is because I have worked hard for it, " women reported a significantly higher mean score (*M* = 4.94, *SD* = .995) than men (*M* = 4.57, *SD* = 1.129), *t*(547) = 5.216, *p* = .000. However, men reported a significantly higher higher score (*M* = 4.01, *SD* = 1.308) than women (*M* = 3.73, *SD* = 1.473) and a *t* score reported as *t*(684) = 3.204, p = .001 for item 18, "I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life." Men also reported a significantly higher score on item 4, "Whether or not I get into a car accident depends upon mostly how good a driver I am." Men's mean score was 3.67 (*SD* = 1.323) while women reported a mean score of 3.40 (*SD* = 1.299), *t*(607) = 3.164, *p* = .002.

Two comparisons were found to be statistically significant at a *p* value less than .05. Women reported significantly higher mean scores (*M* = 4.95, *SD* = 1.035) than men (*M* = 4.78, *SD* = 1.135) on the item 23, "My life is determined by my own actions," *t*(565) = 2.369, *p* = .018. In addition, women scored significantly higher (*M* = 4.60, *SD* = 1.135) than the men (*M* = 4.44, *SD* = 1.299) for item 1, "Whether or not I get to be a leader depends mostly on my ability" t(552) = 1.987, *p* = .047.

Effect sizes were individually calculated for each of the 24 comparisons (eight for each scale). The largest effect size of .218 was noted on item 21, "When I get what I want, it usually is because I have worked hard for it." The remaining small effect sizes ranged from .012 to .185.

Research Question #3: Who (powerful others) do students believe influence them in the things that happen in their lives?

At the beginning of Part Three of the questionnaire, participants were asked to choose among eight different responses as to whom they believed were "powerful others" in their lives. Seven specific responses were listed (i.e., parents, college high school friends, academic advisor, resident assistant, other family members, college peers, and faculty members). The participants also had the opportunity to add an additional person to their lists. Once the participants identified their perceived "powerful others," if any, they were then asked to rank their lists of individuals in order from one (the most influential) to eight (the least). A summary of their responses can be found in Table 6. This information took into account that not all participants completed this section of the questionnaire. In addition, several participants indicated their people of influence, however, failed to rank order them.

Overall, 1,150 (96.2%) of the participants who answered this question indicated that their parents were influential people in their lives. Of these individuals, 62.2% ranked them as the most powerful. Approximately 993 (or 83.1%) of the participants who answered this question indicated that their college peers were influential as this constituency was ranked either second or third (a mean score of 20.5 and 21.4 respectively) by participants. There were 421 participants (35.2%) who indicated that they believed the RA to be an influential person in their lives. Of those who listed the RA, the individuals in these roles were not seen as having a strong influence on the participants as the position's highest average ranking was fifth (with an average mean of 8.8) and was overall ranked near the bottom of the list.

Ninety-seven individuals named additional individuals not previously listed. Some of the examples of "powerful others" that these participants provided included individuals such as

Table 6

Residents' Determination of Powerful Others

Variable	*n*	Average Ranking							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Parents	1150	<u>62.2</u>	15.9	7.9	4.5	1.1	0.2	0.1	0.0
High School Friends	611	2.00	8.7	<u>13.6</u>	11.4	6.6	4.6	2.3	0.1
Academic Advisor	797	6.7	16.7	<u>17.2</u>	11.1	7.6	3.4	1.3	0.0
Resident Assistant	421	0.1	1.1	5.2	6.3	<u>8.8</u>	6.5	6.2	0.1
Other Family Members	637	2.0	<u>20.1</u>	10.2	9.0	5.4	2.8	1.8	0.2
College Peers	993	12.9	20.5	<u>21.4</u>	16.0	6.4	1.1	0.8	0.1
Faculty Members	623	5.9	10.0	<u>11.5</u>	9.6	6.0	3.9	2.7	0.1
Others	97	<u>4.0</u>	0.8	0.8	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.0	1.0

Note: Individuals who responded "yes" were asked to then rank all their responses from 1 (*Most Influential*) to 8 (*Least Influential*). Underlined scores represent the highest average ranking for the individual named by the participant as a *Powerful Other*.

previous high school teachers/school counselors, previous role models or mentors, professional

work colleagues, roommates, significant others such as girlfriends/boyfriends and

fiancés/fiancées, and sorority sisters/fraternity brothers. These individuals were ranked in various

positions by the participants, who provided additional information. However, 44 individuals of

the 97 who replied to this question listed "me" or "myself" as a "powerful other." In addition, all

but two of these individuals ranked this entry as "1" on this list. The other two ranked themselves

as "2," just behind their parents.

Research Question # 4: What perceived Resident Assistant responsibilities do students

report to be important to them as they transition into college?

This question sought to understand what responsibilities assigned to their RAs the

participants found to be important to them as students transitioning into the university. To

determine this answer, data were collected by two different methods. First, participants'

responses to the items contained within Part Two of the questionnaire and associated with

Conlogue's instrument, *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* (1993*)*, were collected and

statistically calculated. Second, the participants were asked to provide written responses to the

first of four open-ended questions at the end of Part Two of the questionnaire: "From the

previously listed items, what RA responsibilities are most important to you?"

A summary of the statistical calculations of responses obtained from the first collection

method is presented in Table 7. Two of the roles/responsibilities were found to have an overall

rating of "Important" to "Crucial," indicating that the participants believed these responsibilities

to be important to them. The participants identified the RA role of "responding to

crisis/emergency situations" as the top responsibility, receiving a mean score of 4.49. This was

followed by the responsibility to "refer students with questions/problems to appropriate

Table 7

Residents' Perception of the Resident Assistant Roles as Reported Using Conlogue's (1993), The Resident Assistant Questionnaire

Resident Assistant Role/Responsibility	M	SD	Rank
Respond to crisis/emergency situations	4.49	0.791	1
Refer students with questions/problems to appropriate resources	4.17	0.805	2
Mediate conflicts	3.98	0.942	3
Complete administrative paperwork	3.96	0.964	4
Be visible and available	3.90	0.889	5
Distribute and post information	3.88	0.851	6
Enforce residence hall policies and procedures	3.87	0.963	7
Act as a positive role model	3.75	1.060	8
Encourage respect and appreciation for differences	3.66	1.032	9
Initiate informal contact	3.19	0.994	10
Provide assistance with personal issues	3.11	0.952	11
Provide social programs	2.95	0.866	12
Provide academic assistance	2.88	0.982	13
Provide educational programs	2.86	0.906	14

Note: 5 = Crucial, 4 = Important, 3 = Somewhat Important, 2 = Not Important, 1 = Not Applicable

resources," which received a mean score of 4.17. The next seven items were fairly consistent in importance given that their range of means differed by only .30. Participants were also somewhat consistent in regards to the three lowest ranked responsibilities as the range of means for the last three items differed by only .09. None of the 14 items contained within Conlogue's (1993) questionnaire received a rating below 2.0, which would have indicated that the responsibility was not "Not Applicable" to the residents. The two lowest ranked responsibilities, "providing academic assistance" and "providing educational programs" (with a mean of 2.88 and 2.86 respectively), were still seen as somewhat important to the residents. Standard deviations for all items fell between 0.791 and 1.060. A comparison of the answers obtained by Conlogue (1993) in his original study and the responses by the participants involved in this study can be found in Table 8.

As expected, students' responses provided by the second data collection method varied. It should be noted that the participants had the opportunity to name more than one responsibility in their responses to the open-ended question. A summary of the tallied responses can be found in Table 9 and was based on the frequency with which the item appeared within the responses provided by the participants. Of the 1,195 participants, 38 did not complete this question, leaving 1,157 participants responding. Five participants responded that all the responsibilities were important.

Overall, participants once again indicated it is important that RAs respond to crisis/ emergency situations, as indicated by that item receiving the highest rank and the most frequent listing. Four additional items also appeared consistently. Ranked fifth by the participants, "enforce hall policies and procedures" was supported by the item receiving the fifth most entries.

Table 8

Comparison of Participants' Collected Rankings verses Rankings Provided by Resident Assistants of the Items Contained in Conlogue's (1993), The Resident Assistant Questionnaire

Resident Assistant Role/Responsibility	2009			1993		
	M	*SD*	*Rank*	*M*	*SD*	*Rank*
Respond to crisis/emergency situations	4.49	.79	1	3.47	.79	1
Refer students with questions/problems to appropriate resources	4.17	.81	2	3.13	.77	2
Mediate conflicts	3.98	.94	3	3.05	.78	4
Complete administrative paperwork	3.96	.96	4	2.53	.92	12
Be visible and available	3.90	.89	5	3.06	.78	3
Distribute and post information	3.88	.85	6	3.04	.78	5.5
Enforce residence hall policies and procedures	3.87	.96	7	3.02	.84	7

Note: 5 = Crucial, 4 = Important, 3 = Somewhat Important, 2 = Not Important, 1 = Not Applicable

(Table 8 continued)

Table 8

Comparison of Participants' Collected Rankings verses Rankings Provided by Resident Assistants to the Items Contained in Conlogue's (1993), The Resident Assistant Questionnaire

Resident Assistant Role/Responsibility	2009			1993		
	M	*SD*	*Rank*	*M*	*SD*	*Rank*
Act as a positive role model	3.75	1.06	8	3.04	.87	5.5
Encourage respect and appreciation for differences	3.66	1.03	9	2.97	.97	8
Initiate informal contact	3.19	.99	10	2.90	.86	10
Provide assistance with personal issues	3.11	.95	11	2.95	.85	9
Provide social programs	2.95	.87	12	2.56	.87	11
Provide academic assistance	2.88	.98	13	2.28	.85	13
Provide educational programs	2.86	.91	14	2.20	.87	14

Note: 5 = Crucial, 4 = Important, 3 = Somewhat Important, 2 = Not Important, 1 = Not Applicable

Table 9

Resident Assistant Responsibilities Most Important to the Residents as Determined by Frequency of Responses by Participants Answering the Open-Ended Question

RA Responsibility	*n* *(n=1951)*	*Percent*	*Rank*
Respond to crisis/emergency situations	492	25.22	1
Distribute and post information	214	10.97	2
Refer students with questions/problems to appropriate resources	209	10.71	3
Be visible and available	193	9.89	4
Enforce residence hall policies and procedures	168	8.61	5
Mediate conflicts	146	7.48	6
Complete administrative paperwork	103	5.28	7
Act as a positive role model	78	4.00	8
Provide assistance with personal issues	77	3.95	9
Provide academic assistance	75	3.84	10
Initiate informal contact	71	3.64	11
Provide social programs	57	2.20	12
Encourage respect and appreciation for differences	43	2.97	13
Provide educational programs	25	1.28	14

Note: Of the 1,195 participants, 38 did not complete this question. Multiple answers were permitted for this question. Five participants responded that all the responsibilities were important.

"Act as a positive role model" was ranked eighth and was eighth in the number of entries noted. "Provide social programs" ranked twelveth. The lowest ranked item, "provide educational programs" (ranked fourteenth), also received the fewest entries by the participants.

Research Question # 5: What perceived Resident Assistant responsibilities do students report not to be important to them as they transition into college?

In research question #5, the researcher sought to identify which of the 14 roles or responsibilities assigned to the RAs were of little significance or not applicable to the residents. To determine this answer, data were obtained from the participants' written responses to the second of four open-ended questions at the end of Part Two of the questionnaire: " From the previously listed items, what RA responsibilities do you believe your RA should not continue to perform?"

Of the 1,195 participants, 112 did not not complete this particular question. There were 878 participants to indicate "no" as a response, 24 of whom stated that all responsibilities listed in Conlogue's (1993) questionnaire were important and should be retained in the position. The remaining 205 participants once again were able to supply multiple answers, if applicable, to this question.

A summary of these answers is found in Table 10. It appeared that the participants' responses to this open-ended question were consistent with the results summarized earlier in Table 7. Of those who responded to this question, participants indicated that providing educational and social programs were the two most cited responsibilities that the resident assistants should no longer perform.

Table 10

Residents' Perceptions of the Roles the Resident Assistants Should Not Continue to Perform as Determined by Frequency of Responses by Participants Answering the Open-Ended Question

Responsibility	*n* (*n* = 287)	*Percent*	*Rank*
Provide educational programs	64	22.30	1
Provide social programs	63	21.95	2
Provide academic assistance	42	14.63	3
Provide assistance with personal issues	41	14.29	4
Initiate informal contact	17	5.92	5
Encourage respect and appreciation for differences	13	4.53	6
Enforce residence hall policies and procedures	12	4.18	7
Complete administrative paperwork	11	3.83	8
Mediate conflicts	8	2.79	9
Act as a positive role model	5	1.74	10
Be visible and available	4	1.39	11
Distribute and post information	4	1.39	12
Refer students with questions/problems to appropriate resources	2	0.70	13
Respond to crisis/emergency situations	1	0.35	14

Note: Of the 1,195 participants, 112 did not complete this question. There were 878 participants to indicate "no" as a response, 24 of whom stated that all responsibilities contained within the list were important and should be retained in the position. The remaining 205 participants were able to supply multiple answers if applicable to the question.

Research Question # 6: Do first-generation students perceive the RA responsibilities differently than students who have had at least one immediate family member live in college housing?

To answer this research question, an independent *t* test was conducted to evaluate if there was a difference in participants' perceptions of the responsibilities assigned to the RA if they had members of their family live in a residence hall prior to their arrival to campus. The hypothesis assumed by this question is that having immediate family members, especially parents, were aware of the roles and responsibilities of the RA may have some influence on the participants' initial perceptions of these individuals. Results of the *t* test can be found in Table 11.

The only statistically significant difference between the groups of participants was found in their responses to "provide social programs" (*p* = .004, effect size = .091). The participants who identified themselves as the first person in their immediate families to have live in a residence hall on a college campus had a mean score of 3.04 (*SD* = .845), while the participants who were not the first member of their families to live on campus had a mean score of 2.90 (*SD* = .875).

Research Questions #7: Is there a relationship between the students' locus of control orientation and the level of importance they perceive in the different responsibilities assigned to individuals in the Resident Assistant position?

This question examined the relationship between the residents' reported locus of control orientation and the responsibilities that are traditionally reported as job expectations for the RA. Each of the 14 RA responsibilities was examined against the mean scores derived for each of the three scales assessing locus of control orientation (*Internality*, *Powerful Others*, and *Chance*) using Pearson's correlation coefficients. Results have been summarized in Table 12.

Table 11

First-Generation Residents to Have Lived in a Residence Hall and Their Perceptions of the Resident Assistant Responsibilities verses Residents Who Had Family Members Live in a Residence Hall Before

Responsibility	Yes	No	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Provide assistance with personal issues	3.10	3.12	994	- .255	.799
Provide academic assistance	2.94	2.84	943	1.688	.092
Respond to crisis/emergency situations	4.49	4.50	917	-.302	.763
Refer students with questions/problems to appropriate resources	4.21	4.14	967	1.527	.127
Provide social programs	3.04	2.90	980	2.869	.004*
Provide educational programs	2.91	2.83	960	1.551	.121
Distribute and post information	3.94	3.85	891	1.691	.091
Encourage respect and appreciation for differences	3.70	3.63	937	1.052	.293
Complete administrative paperwork	3.95	3.97	932	-.374	.708
Enforce residence hall policies and procedures	3.93	3.82	950	1.896	.058
Mediate conflicts	4.04	3.94	975	1.679	.093
Act as a positive role model	3.74	3.76	932	-.391	.696
Be visible and available	3.91	3.89	964	.296	.767
Be visible and available	3.23	3.17	877	-1.572	.116

Note: Students selected "Yes" if they were the first person within their immediate family to have lived in a residence hall.
* $p < .01$

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Table 12

Pearson Correlations Between Residents' Reported Locus of Control Orientation and the Responsibilities Assigned to the Resident Assistant Position

Resident Assistant Role/Responsibility	*Internality*	*Powerful Others*	*Chance*
Provide assistance with personal issues	.078**	.076**	.068*
Provide academic assistance	.055	.057	.084**
Respond to crisis/emergency situations	.111**	-.004	.020
Refer students with questions/problems to appropriate resources	.104**	.036	.024
Provide social programs	.056	.075*	.075*
Provide educational programs	.055	.081**	.080**
Distribute and post information	.146**	.040	.021
Encourage respect and appreciation for differences	.075*	.028	.038
Complete administrative paperwork	.114**	.043	.010
Enforce residence hall policies and procedures	.130**	.002	-.031
Mediate conflicts	.100**	.050	-.001
Act as a positive role model	.099**	.045	.025
Be visible and available	.144**	.018	-.003
Initiate informal contact	.074*	.038	.074*

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Overall, 13 of the 42 correlations between the RA responsibilities and locus of control orientation were statistically significant at a *p* value less than .01. Six of the 42 correlations were statistically significant at a *p* value less than .05, while the remaining 23 correlations were not found to be statistically significant. Although statistical significance was found between these variables, the correlations were not seen as very strong.

In regards to the individual scales assessing locus of control orientation, nine of the traditional RA responsibilities were significantly correlated with the *Internality Scale* at the *p* < .01 level. Two additional RA responsibilities (i.e., "encourage respect and appreciation for differences" and "initiate informal contact") were found to be significantly correlated at the *p* < .05 level. There was no statistical significance noted with the remaining three RA responsibilities (i.e., "provide academic assistance," "provide social programs," and "provide educational programs." Two of the RA responsibilities (i.e., "provide assistance with personal issues" and "provide educational programs") were found to be statistically significantly correlated *p* < .01 level with the *Powerful Others Scale*. Only one RA responsibility ("provide social programs") was significantly correlated at the *p* < .05 level. No significant correlations were found with the remaining 11 RA responsibilities.

However, it should be noted that there was a slight negative correlation found to be associated with the participants' perceptions of powerful others and the RA responsibility to "respond to crisis/emergency situations." With regards to the *Chance Scale*, two RA responsibilities (" provide academic assistance" and provide educational programs") were significantly correlated at the p < .01 level and two ("provide assistance with personal issues" and "provide social programs") at the p < .05 level. Three of the RA responsibilities (i.e., "enforce residence hall policies and procedures," "mediate conflicts," and "be visible and

available") were found to be slightly negatively correlated however, these were not found to be statistically significant.

<center>**Additional Findings**</center>

The third open-ended question in Part Two of the questionnaire asked the participants to identify any additional responsibilities that they wished the RAs to perform. Overall, 1,059 participants responded to this question. Of this number, 894 (84.42%) simply answered the question by writing in "no." There were 20 participants who indicated that they thought the list of responsibilities was complete and there was nothing else to add to the RA position or that their RA already does enough. However, six participants indicated that there were no additional responsibilities needed due to the fact that they "were grown-up" and that RAs were "not my parents." One of these participants remarked, "Nope, I'm 18 – I've got it under control." A similar remark was shared by another participant, "No, because we still need to learn how to be functioning adults who don't have to be coddled."

The remaining 132 individuals did elaborate with some specific suggestions. A few of the participants suggested that the RAs plan and conduct more social activities and find ways for their residents to interact with members of the entire building, not just their own floor residents, so that the residents would get to know everyone who lived in the building. This was somewhat contradictory to information provided by many of the residents as noted earlier in this chapter. However, the majority of the suggestions provided by the residents appeared to be based more on their personal evaluations of the performance of their designated RAs. For example, one participant indicated that he/she wished that the RA would not show as much favoritism among his or her floormates. In another example, a participant noted that the RA needed to be more timely in responding to residents' requests for assistance. Only one comment was supplied that

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did not relate to the 14 responsibilities noted in the questionnaire. The comment was a suggestion that the housing department "maybe have grade checks to keep residents responsible."

Finally, participants were asked one additional question on the questionnaire, "Are you interested in becoming an RA?" Of the 1,186 individual who responded to this question, 236 (19.7%) indicated that they were. However, there were 927 (77.6%) who indicated they were not. Although the participants were not provided an opportunity to fill in a space for "maybe," 23 individuals (1.9%) wrote in this response.

All participants also had the opportunity to provide the rationale for their answers. It should be noted that many of the participants' rationales for both the "yes" and "no" responses contained more than one reason for their answers. Therefore, when the rationales were categorized, the final tallies were greater than the number of participants who responded for each group.

Overall, of the 236 (19.7%) participants who indicated they were interested in becoming RAs, 46 individuals did not add any additional comments. The remaining students reported that they were attracted to the position due to the following: financial benefits (47.89%); like to help/assist other people (36.84%); leadership opportunties and resumé builder (31.58%); and the position appeared to be fun (17.89%). Other random comments were also listed, such as "my sibling was one and recommended it," "I want to be a role model for Christ," and "I like living in the residence hall," which accounted for the remaining 5.26% of the responses.

Of the 927 (77.6%) who indicated that they were not interested, 312 individuals did not elaborate on their answers. The remaining individuals listed the following reasons as to why they were not interested in the RA position: 24.33% did not want to continue to live in the

residence halls; 16.62% wanted to live off campus with friends; 15.43% believed the position had too much responsibility or too much work; 11.87% found the position too time consuming or had other academic commitments; 5.19% intended to move into a fraternity/sorority house; and 5.94% provided various reasons such as not wanting to live with first-year students and transferring next year. It should be noted, however, 20.62% of the individuals who were not interested and provided a rationale indicated that the job "just wasn't for me." Some of these individuals cited that they did not want to "deal with other people's problems" or did not have "the patience to deal with other students." Some doubted that they could be "strict enough" to fulfill the responsibilities. One individual commented that he/she was "not mature enough to handle the job." Another indicated that he/she "did not want to babysit the first-year students." Two individuals indicated that they did not believe that they possess the appropriate social skills to be in the position. One individual simply stated that he/she believed the position was a bad one and no one seemed happy in it.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Students, especially those in their first year of college, who live in the residence halls benefit from their environment in many educational ways (Pascarella et al., 1994). They are more likely to participate in campus activities and organizations as well as interact more often with their peers and faculty members (Pascarella et al., 1994). According to Pascarella et al. (1994), they also experience higher levels of autonomy and inner-directness along with a growth in intellect and self-concept.

As stated previously, resident assistants have played a vital role in campus housing programs in America since the colonial period (Winston & Fitch, 1993). As shown throughout the literature, their effectiveness as a liaison between campus administration and residential students has resulted in work responsibilities that are increasingly complex and reflect a higher level of automony (Boyer, 1987).

Resident assistants have played an important role in the psychosocial development of their assigned residents (Blimling, 1993). They have exerted positive influence and have limitless opportunities within the residential community to contribute to their residents' overall educational experience (Winston & Anchors, 1993). They have the ability to develop positive relationships with their residents and serve as strong role models (Blimling, 1999; Ender & Carranza, 1991; Winston et al., 1984). They are also individuals who have more contact with their residents on a day-to-day basis than other campus officials, including faculty (Jaeger & Caison, 2006).

Today's students possess unique characteristics not seen in prior generations of students (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003; Newton, 2000; Strauss & Howe, 1991). They are more likely to maintain strong relationships with their parents and high school friends while attending college (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003). Their parents have been very active in their lives and students see them as strong role models (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 20003). Today's students are academically focused (Broido, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003; Newton, 2000). They, along with their parents, have high expectations for their success (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003; Wilson, 2004). Their parents have made students feel special and protected growing up (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003). However, Campbell and Twenge (2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2009) believe the increased level of permissiveness allowed by their parents, along with the constant promotion of their self-esteem throughout their childhood, provides some students with a strong sense of entitlement and contributes to some students' naraccistic behavior.

Understanding students' locus of control orientation provides insight into how students may perceive their educational environment and their level of control over their daily lives. Students who are internally oriented seek relevant information that will assist them in accomplishing their academic goals (Crandall & Crandall, 1983; Dollinger, 2000). They are more likely to believe that they can control their own destinies and that their academic achievements depend on their own actions. Given the RA's roles and responsibilities, they may perceive the RA as a credible resource when they have questions. Students who are externally oriented tend to look to other people to provide necessary information and may also blame others for their academic deficiences (Kirkpatrick et al., 2008). In addition, externally oriented students fail to accept responsibility for things that happen to them in their daily lives. They have expectations that others will anticipate their needs and provide appropriate resources when

necessary. These students may expect the RA to provide information prior to the students' needing it. Therefore, if the RA is aware of the locus of control of the residents living on his or her designated floor, he or she could anticipate the students' needs and interact with the students in a more effective manner. Staff should challenge students who are externally oriented to accept responsibility for their own actions and should not reinforce students' behavior to prevent them becoming dependent upon others as they reach adulthood.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between residents' locus of control and their perceptions of the resident assistants' roles. In addition, the study was designed to make a significant contribution to the literature addressing the roles and responsibilities of the RA position while adding the missing voice of residents. Specifically, a major goal of this study was to gather direct information from first-year residential students as to how important the RA responsibilites were to them as they experienced college.

The study involved the distribution of a paper questionnaire to approximately 1,200 first-year students, living in traditional residence halls at a large, four-year public institution located in the Southeastern U.S. The questionnaire incorporated two validated instruments: Conlogue's (1993) *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* and Levenson's (1973a, 1981) *The Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Scales,* measuring the residents' locus of control orientation. The participants were asked provide demographic information (age, ethnicity, sex, level of family annual income, and level of parents' education) and report if they were the first members of their immediate families to have lived in a residence hall on a college campus. In addition, they were asked to provide responses to five open-ended questions. Finally, students indicated if they were interested in becoming resident assistants in the future.

Data collection occurred late in the 2009 fall semester. There were approximately 2,500 first-year residents who met the study's qualifications. There were 1,218 questionnaires collected through predetermined floor meetings, resulting in a 48.72% return rate. After inspecting the completed questionnaires, reporting problems were noted. Missing responses were accounted for in the statistical analysis which left small variations in the number of responses for each item included in the questionnaire. Overall, there were 1,195 questionnaires used to conduct the final statistical analysis. The 848 women (71%) and 347 men (29%) who participated in this study were either 18 (76.2%) or 19 (23.8%) years old and were predominantly White/Caucasian (80.1%).

Participants reported that approximately 86% of their fathers have had at least some college education or had proceeded on to obtain graduate and professional degrees. They reported a similar situation (approximately 87%) for their mothers. Approximately 30% of the participants reported that their families' income was $50,000 to $99,999, while approximately 55% reported their families' income being $100,000 or more. Approximately 62% of the participants are not the first person in their immediate families to have lived in a residence hall.

Data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics and the ranking of the means for the 14 responsibilities identified in *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* (Conlogue, 1993) and the items included in Levenson's (1973a, 1981) *Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Scales*. When comparisons of means were made between two groups, independent samples *t* tests were used. To determine if there was a relationship between the students' locus of control orientation and their perceptions of the responsibilities of the RA, a Pearson correlation was calculated. Data collected from the written responses to the open-ended questions were tallied and reported by categories based on their frequency.

In order to gain greater insight into how residents perceived the roles and responsibilities of the RA, the researcher chose to investigate if there was a relationship between students' perceptions and their locus of control orientations. In order to reach a conclusion, the researcher utilized the following seven research questions as a basis for this study:

1. What is the locus of control orientation among the students who participated in this study?

2. Is there a difference in students' locus of control orientation between men and women?

3. Who (powerful others) do students believe influence them in things that happen in their lives?

4. What perceived RA responsibilities do students report to be important to them as they transition into college?

5. What perceived RA responsibilities do students report not to be important to them as they transition into college?

6. Do first-generation residential students perceive the RA responsibilities differently than students who have had at least one immediate family member live in college housing?

7. Is there a relationship between the students' locus of control orientation and the level of importance they perceive in the different responsibilities assigned to individuals in the Resident Assistant position?

Additional Limitation of the Study

Initially, four limitations for this study were outlined in Chapter 3 however, one additional limitation emerged after the demographic data were collected and analyzed. There was an imbalance in participation by men and women. Due to the criteria used to select the participants, many men were not eligible to participate since they lived in a large residence hall where multiple learning communities were located. In addition, the campus' largest residence hall, which houses only women, was included in this study. The statistical analyses were completed in a conservative manner considering this imbalance. Equal variances of means were not assumed between the groups being analyzed. Future researchers may be able to find additional statistically significant results if they ensure that the gender of the participants is more balanced.

Discussion of Significant Findings

Men and women did statistically differ on their responses to the items contained in all three scales that make up Levenson's instrument. However, overall statistical significance was found only in the *Powerful Others* and the *Chance Scales*. In prior research (Levenson, 1973b, 1981) significant gender differences had only been reported in the *Powerful Others Scale*, where men typically scored higher than women. Although the women in this study generally scored higher on the items pertaining to the *Internality Scale*, their overall mean score was not statistically significant over the men's mean score.

Like previous studies involving locus of control orientation and college-aged students, participants in this study scored higher on Levenson's (1973a, 1981) *Internality Scale* than the other two locus of control orientation scales, the *Powerful Others* and *Chance Scales*. Levenson and others (Garcia & Levenson, 1975; Lee, 1976; Levenson, 1973b; Molinari, 1979; Prociuk &

Breen, 1974) have identified in previous studies that college students typically are internally motivated. When comparing the means and standard deviations from this study with those previously mentioned, the results were similar and not vastly higher or lower. However, item 23 on Levenson's instrument, "My life is determined by my own actions," had the highest mean score of all items within all three scales. For this particular item though, the women did score statistically higher than the men. Though, interpreting the overall 4.81 score (out of a possible 6.0), it appears that most participants did not fully agree with this statement.

Given the characteristics of today's college students as described in the literature in Chapter 2, higher mean scores were expected. Today's students have grown up constantly rewarded for their behaviors and being encouraged to excel so that they may benefit from future opportunities (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003). According to Fass and Tubman (2002), students who have a moderate to strong attachment to their parents and peers have a higher self-esteem, possess an internal locus of control, and are generally more optimistic than those with low attachment to their parents.

Therefore, it would seem that the students involved in this study would possess a high sense of empowerment and control for their own lives, which would have influenced their answers and caused them to report higher mean scores on Levenson's (1973a, 1981) *Internality Scale*. One possible explanation for the lack of higher mean scores may be that students have been constantly externally rewarded for their behaviors while growing up; therefore, this praise has tempered their internal motivation and how much control they actually perceive themselves possessing in managing the events that occur in their lives. Another explanation may be simply that the sample in this study is not comparable to the students in previous studies that addressed generational characteristics of today's students. If that is the case, then the generalizations made

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by Howe and Strauss (2000, 2003) may be considered overgeneralizations as some researchers have suggested (Hoover, 2009; Reid, 2005) and not actually reflective of the characteristics of the students involved in this study.

The findings in this study also supported Levenson's (1981) earlier research that women and men tended to score differently on the *Powerful Others Scale*. The men in this study did score slightly higher as compared to the women. In her previous research, Levenson (1981) attributed the difference the *Powerful Others Scale* to the fact that men and women may have different expectancies of control by self, others, and chance which appear in social mores. However, she reported no overall statistically significant difference between men and women on the *Internality* and *Chance Scales*.

The findings in this study reported there was an overall statistically significant difference as to how the men and women scored on the *Chance Scale* as well. Five of the eight items contained within this scale were significantly different. Upon review of these items, it appears that men tend to believe that chance or fate may be a controlling factor in their lives as they scored statistically significantly higher than women did, whereas the women are more likely to believe that they possess some responsibility for their own fate and must work hard to be who they want. Gilligan (1982) attributed these behaviors in women to their overall ethic of responsibility.

Although this generation of students has been rewarded throughout their lives, it appears that the women who participated in this study readily accept responsibility for their own destinies and believe less in chance or fate or being in the right place at the right time to achieve their goals. Thus, men and women may perceive their surrounding environment offering reinforcement for their efforts very differently. Specifically, the women in this particular study

may have been significantly influenced as to how they perceive chance or fate by the level of their parents' education level, especially that of their mothers. Women, in general, have been greatly influenced in their overall perceptions of their opportunities in the work world by the positive contributions that the women's movement and its powerful influences made in the past, which has resulted in better employment opportunities for women (Sax, 2003). These factors, in conjunction with the increased number of working mothers in professional positions, may have served as strong reinforcements for their daughters and provided strong role models for college women (Sax, 2003). However, given the educational level that most of the participants' parents have obtained, it would reason that both the men and women involved in this study would attribute their future success less on chance or fate and more on their individual abilities.

Another contributing factor as to why the men tended agree with more with the items associated with the *Chance Scale* (Levenson, 1973b, 1981) may be their perceptions of their position within the campus environment. With more and more women entering college with strong career goals, this may be affecting, or undermining to some degree, men's ability to compete. With women outnumbering men on many college campuses, men may be finding it challenging to be as academically successful as women and feeling for the first time that they are not able to accomplish their goals just by merely knowing the right individuals or being awarded positions based on some underlying gender superiority. This may be one reason why a statistical difference between men and women on the *Chance Scale* was found. Will (2010) suggested that some men have been intimidated by these events and are now somewhat reluctant to grow up. He asserted that this is why college administrators throughout the U.S. are now witnessing men entering college with higher odds of dropping out than women. Recognizing that fate has a role

in their lives, it appears that men may be more likely to perceive that they are not in control of their lives when faced with difficulty and less likely to continue to work hard and persist.

Residents find their parents to be very influential in their lives. Approximately 62% of them listed their parents as the most influential persons in their lives. Residents also believe their college peers are influential people. However, in this study, 44 individuals indicated that they were the most influential person in their own lives.

The findings indeed support that today's college students maintain a close relationship with their parents (Howe and Strauss, 2000, 2003). Approximately 96% of the participants noted parents as "powerful others" in their lives. Of those who did so, approximately 62% indicated that their parents were the most influential above all others and that students see them as strong role models. Students remain in close contact with their families, consulting with them about decisions they face while attending college on a day-to-day basis. They also reported other family members (e.g., siblings, aunts, uncles) as being influential in the things that occur in their lives. These types of relationships provide the students with stability and have been created over long periods. Like their parents, these individuals may have provided support to them during their childhoods and are individuals whom the students believe have their best interests at heart.

The students who participated in this study also see their peers as influential people in their lives. Approximately 83% of the students ranked this constituency second or third in their overall listing of powerful others. This is not surprising given the fact that today's students have been characterized as team players who like to work in groups, and it supports the earlier work of Howe and Strauss (2000, 2003). In addition, peers can also serve as strong agents of socialization for students as they enter college and begin to establish a new identity (Winston & Ender, 1988).

Although 35 % of the students listed the RA as a "powerful other," the position was ranked near the bottom of the list in regards to the strength of influence. Given this relatively small number and its overall ranking, residents do not appear to recognize the individuals in the RA position has having any significant influence on what happens to them while attending college. However, this was somewhat of a surprise as some researchers (e.g., Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003; Wilson, 2004) have reported that today's students have high expectations of those in authority. In addition, several students indicated in their written comments that they look to their RAs as a replacement or a fill-in for parents while they are at college.

Perhaps the residents see the RAs as more of a peer than an authority figure, which may prevent more of them from naming these individuals as "powerful others" in their lives. As Winston and Fitch (1993) indicated, the various roles assigned to the RA often contradict each other. While RAs are to be good role models and initiate informal contacts with their residents, they also must maintain a distance so that they are able to enforce residence hall policies and confront inappropriate behavior. Therefore, how students interpret these roles may also contribute to their confusion as to how to perceive the individual assigned to these positions. In addition, given the short length of time that they had been on campus prior to the initiation of this study, the residents may not have been able to establish a close enough relationship with their designated RA that would place the RA in higher regard. However, the perceptions reported in this study also raise the issue that students may not see the individuals in the RA positions as influential as has been noted in past literature (Blimling, 1993; Winston & Fitch, 1993; Winston et al., 1984).

This is also a time in their lives when students are attempting to develop autonomy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). As they explore and begin to develop their own identities and

exert more control in their lives, residents may see the RA as a valuable resource and someone able to offer assistance. However, due to their internal orientations, students may want to maintain responsibility for their own development and not rely on or expect the RA to be instrumental in this process.

One of the most interesting findings in this study supported Campbell and Twenge's (2010) assertion that today's students are experiencing narcissistic tendencies. Forty-two students who provided a response to the question, "Who are powerful others in your life?" indicated themselves as the most influential. Two additional participants indicated that they themselves were powerful others, but, not as influential to their lives as their parents. This may be a result of the parenting behaviors that have been exerted during their lifetimes.

Responses of the participants of this study to the items contained in *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* (Conlogue, 1993) were similar to most responses reported in Conlogue's initial research. In both studies, the participants indicated that the RA's responsibility for "responding to crisis/emergency situations" was the most important task. "Referring students with questions/ problems to appropriate university resources" was the second most important task to the participants. During childhood, their parents have taken great efforts to take care of their children (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2003). It appears that students desire to know that someone is looking out for their best interests and will assist them if an emergency occurs in the residence hall. This also speaks to their basic needs as Maslow (1943) described: for individuals to be able to function in their environment they must have a sense of safety and shelter.

Today's college students want information when they need or want it, and they have access to it using various technological means (Newton, 2000; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). The

fact that the participants reported "providing information" as an important responsibility of the

RA indicates that they believe the RA to be a good resource person. Given this and the fact they

have more contact with the RA than any other campus official, they can obtain quick answers

from a reliable source living just down the hall.

As Howe and Strauss (2000, 2003) indicated, today's students like structure and like to

know the rules. From their responses, it appears that they rely on the RAs to maintain a sense of

order and want the RAs to enforce housing policies and procedures. Today's students follow

rules and they want the rules to be enforced fairly without favoritism and bias. However, given

the fact that the participants in this study ranked this responsibility seventh, just as the

participants in Conlogue's original study, may indicate that students have not changed in their

perspective. Therefore, this may suggest that this response may be more developmental and not

as much related to generational characteristics as Howe and Strauss (2000, 2003) has noted.

It should also be pointed out that one responsibility seemed to fall several levels lower on

the ranked list by this study's participants than those in 1993. "Act as a role model" dropped

from being ranked as fifth in 1993 to eighth in this study. One rationale for this is to remember

that RAs were the participants in the 1993 study. In Conlogue's final analysis, the RAs reported

that this was one of the responsibilities that provided them with some satisfaction being in the

position. Therefore, they may have elevated this responsibility by their bias. Another rationale

for the drop in rank may once again be attributed to the fact that many of the participants in this

study do not see the RAs as "Powerful Others."

The other item that appeared to move within the list was "Complete administrative

paperwork." In the 1993 findings, the RA participants ranked this responsibility as being 12th in

importance to the residents. Conlogue noted that this responsibility was also was listed by the

RAs as the one that provided them with the least satisfaction in the job. However, in this study, participants ranked this item as fourth. Overall, this could indicate that students may see the RA position as an administrative assistant within the housing program, rather than as a peer mentor or authority figure.

It was interesting to find that participants who were the first of their families to live in a residence hall had a statistically higher expectation for RAs to create a social environment versus the students who were from families with prior residential experience. Perhaps the information that students are obtaining prior to their arrival does influence how the students see the roles of the RA and their expectations of the position.

An additional finding from this study was the responses that the participants provided when offered the opportunity to indicate what roles contained in *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* (Conlogue, 1993) were not important to them. When asked what responsibilities should no longer be required of the RAs, the participants who responded most frequently indicated "provide educational programs," followed closely by "provide social programs." These items were also lowly ranked responsibilities noted by participants involved in the original administration of *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* (Conlogue, 1993).

In 1993, the RA participants may have responded to this question after experiencing difficulty encouraging students to attend programs they had worked hard to organize and implement. This has been one complaint from individuals in the RA position over the course of many years. This is also one expectation that campus housing administrators tend to spend a great deal of time on during fall training, promoting the benefits of programming within the residence halls. In addition, RAs' performance evaluations are often based on satisfactorily

completing the programming guidelines adopted by the housing department. However, after all of their training, the RAs still felt as if programming was the least important to their residents.

From the responses provided by the participants in this study, it still appears that educational programs are of little interest to first-year students living in the residences halls. One reason that this may be true for today's students may be a negative reaction to having their parents orchestrate their heavily scheduled childhood. In addition, students may feel if they need information that may be crucial to their academic responsibilities, they have quick access to university resources utilizing technology. Therefore, they do not have to wait for the RA to plan a program. They also may be so involved in their coursework that they do not believe they have the time to devote to RA programs given their intense academic focus. However, if the RAs can make it relevant to the student, there is a greater chance of the student attending a program given their internal locus of control orientation and taking away some information that they may find helpful in the future given that that they tend to store away trivial facts as discussed earlier in Chapter 2.

Another reason students may have indicated that programming was not important to them could be related to their opinions as to how successful their individual RAs had been in their programming efforts prior to the administration of the study. Some negativity to programming may have developed as a result of their prior attendance at a poorly planned educational activity or the lack of such programs promoted by their RA. Therefore, staff performance may have contributed to how some of the participants responded.

Participants of this study also indicated that they didn't think the RAs should have to provide social programs. Given the fact that they are able to maintain close friendships with high school friends through social networking and other technological advances, they do not find

themselves in a situation, as previous students did, of having to establish new relationships when entering college and finding it difficult not having many friends with whom to do things. They also appear to have replaced their needs for one-to-one socialization with social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.

For the participants in this study, there are also many other competing social opportunities that may have influenced their responses. The institution utilized in this study is located adjacent to the major downtown area in the city where it is situated. This area offers students a wide variety of entertainment events, along with a number of local restaurants/bars catering directly to the college-age population.

In addition, there is a significant Greek population present on the campus. The recruitment process for first-year women who are interested in joining a sorority begins immediately as they move into the residence halls. These women quickly find themselves immersed in the associated activities. Men who are interested in joining a fraternity are faced with different challenges as the informal recruitment period begins often prior to their arrival on campus. Therefore, this group of students may find it hard to develop real connections with other members of their floors or their RAs until much later in the semester, if ever.

Many of the items contained within Levenson's (1973a, 1981) *Internality*, *Powerful Others*, **and** *Chance Scales* **were found to be statistically significant with the RA responsibilities listed in Conlogue's (1993)** *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire*. However, the significance was so small that the researcher concluded that the residents' locus of control orientation has no practical influence on their perceptions of the RA responsibilities.

The findings in this study do indicate a slight impact (approximately 10%) of residents' level of internality on their perceptions of the RA responsibilities. This impact is consistent

across 11 of the 14 responsibilities. Upon closer review of these 11 items, it appears that although the residents may not see RAs as "Powerful Others" as earlier discussed, they do see them as being able to help students take responsibility for their own actions, which is characteristic of students who possess an internal orientation. Once again, this may be the result of the students' attempts to become more autonomous (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The three responsibilities that were not statistically significant were associated with providing the resident with either academic assistance or social programs. Given the fact that the residents indicated that the RA was not as influential in their lives as others, they may look to other individuals, such as academic advisors or their faculty members or their parents, as credible sources for academic assistance. In addition, given the social networks that are available today, along with their ability to stay connected to close friends, they may not perceive the RAs as needing to assist them with the social aspect of their collegiate experience.

It was interesting to note that the RA responsibility, "provide assistance with personal issues," was statistically significant on all three scales of locus of control orientation. In addition, the RA responsibility "provide educational programs" was statistically significant on the *Powerful Others* and *Chance Scales*. This appeared to contradict the residents' responses regarding the RA responsibilities when asked to identify what RA responsibilities were not important to them from the list contained in *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* (Conlogue, 1993).

The role of the Resident Assistant remains an attractive position within the residence halls for some students. Approximately 20% of the participants indicated they were interested in becoming an RA. Participants who responded to this question reasoned that the job was an opportunity to obtain strong leadership experience and the position would look good on

their résumés. In addition, they also cited the financial benefits of the position assisting them and their families in offsetting costs while attending college. Students also responded that the position appeared to be fun, while enabling them to help others.

This positivity towards the position is somewhat encouraging, given the recent literature addressing the growing concern among housing administrators that the RA position may be too much for undergraduate students to manage (Crandall, 2004; Dodge, 1999; Minor, 1999; Stange, 2002). Taking into consideration that the campus housing program identified for this study employs approximately 150 RAs each year, this 20% represents approximately 239 potential applications for the position next year. In addition, this does not include many of the first-year students who were residing in other residence halls not included in this study. Therefore, it appears that the RA position remains attractive to some first-year students at this institution.

However, approximately 78% of the participants were not interested in the RA position. Most of the participants who supplied a rationale for their answers to the open-ended question simply stated that they did not want to continue living in the residence halls. In addition, they indicated that the position appeared to be too time consuming, citing their academic responsibilities as too heavy to take on the additional RA expectations.

However, approximately 21% of the participants replied that the job was too much responsibility for them, despite most of the students believing that all the responsibilities of the role were important and should be kept in the RA position. They also indicated that they did not want to be responsible for someone else when they felt they were not yet mature enough to be relied upon by others, or they just did not want to deal with other students' issues. Given the developmental stage many of these students may be experiencing, this may be an accurate

assessment. Many college students are not mature enough to manage their new academic responsibilities along with those associated with the RA position.

To summarize, the responses by the individuals who participated in this study lead the researcher to conclude that residents see RAs as individuals who are assigned many responsibilities that may impact their lives within the residence halls, but they do not believe them to be as influential in their daily decisions as some of the other individuals they listed. Students who are internally oriented do see the roles and responsibilities assigned to the RA as being significantly important. For these students, the roles and responsibilities serve a purpose. Given that internally motivated students often seek out information, RA roles and responsibilities that are associated with providing information or directing students to appropriate resources when they have questions is supported. What may also be at play here is that prior to entering college, students have had their parents performing various roles similar to that of the RAs for the students.

Although there was statistical significance found between the items contained within Conlogue's (1993) *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* and Levenson's (1973a, 1981) *The Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance Scales*, the correlations do not have any practical influence. Therefore, the researcher concludes that how the residents perceive the responsibilities of the RA needs future investigation.

Implications for the Profession

There are several implications for current practice in student affairs as a result of this study. First and foremost, as this study has indicated, parents are very important people in the lives of their college-age children. Parents remain in close communication with their college-age children, sometimes speaking with them many times throughout the day.

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Students desire this type of connectivity as they are the initiators of many of the emails, phones calls, or text messages. It is important for student affairs professionals to continue to develop ways to partner with parents and other powerful others in the students' lives so that we may approach the students' educational experience in a coordinated manner. This may mean that many of the policies and procedures protecting the students' privacy may need to be reviewed so that if students wish to provide their parents access to information, they can easily do so. It also means that campus housing administrators may find increasing numbers of parents interceding for their children when an issue arises. How to manage parental involvement while still attempting to promote students' growth in autonomy and independence may prove to be a daunting task, but as educators it is important that we continue to look for ways to find that balance.

In addition, we need to understand that today's students have well-educated parents who have lived on campus, so when they make contact with housing administrators, they are typically speaking with some knowledge of life in the residence halls. Parents' prior experiences may be the basis on which some students form their own opinion before having entered college or the residence halls. Even though many of the participants' parents possessed some level of college education, there were still students who were from families where parents had little education past high school. Therefore, campus housing administrators should develop strong and effective mechanisms to educate and inform parents about the current realities of students' lives in the residence halls so they can be of assistance to their students when they seek advice and suggestions when dealing with problems and issues. Presentations at new student orientations and frequent newsletters (either electronically sent or mailed) are small attempts to keep families and friends informed about college life.

Given the overall comments regarding the importance of educational and social program within the residence halls from participants of this study as well as from those who were involved in Conlogue's (1993) initial research, housing administrators should conduct a full review of the overall programming expectations of the RAs. In both studies, programming in the residence halls has not appeared to be important to the residents for various reasons. The findings in this study suggest that campus housing administrators should review the RA expectations and responsibilities associated with providing educational, social, and academic programming with the residence halls.

A great deal of time is spent by housing administrators conducting RA training sessions promoting the community building benefits associated with planning and implementing educational programs in the residence halls. Endless hours are spent outlining specific details regarding the completion of forms and steps that must be addressed for RAs to organize and implement programs. In addition, RAs' performance evaluations usually are reflective of how successful they have been in completing the department's expectations and how satisfied the residents are with the RAs' programs.

Given the number of participants in this study, it appears that the residents place little value on the efforts that RAs make in this area of their jobs. Therefore, how effective is programming within the residence halls? If campus housing administrators continue to believe that programming is an important aspect of the overall educational environment created for the students, then they must be able to determine how these activities affect student learning and develop learning objectives so that meaningful interactions between the RAs and students are worth their time and efforts. However, it may be time to rethink the expectations that are placed on the RAs or find other programming models that do not require these staff members to spend

so much of their time trying to make programs meaningful for their residents. As with expectations, it may also be time to re-conceptualize what constitutes a program. For example, many of the RAs spend a great deal of time each week organizing information and staying connected with their residents via Facebook pages and other social networking technologies (Sargent, 2007). This could be seen as a new way to build a more inclusive community atmosphere and a mechanism that residents may perceive as keeping in touch with their RA. Exploration into non-traditional programming approaches should be considered and campus housing administrators should involved the RAs' direct input for suggestions as to what methods they believe would be effective with their residents.

A further RA training implication that resulted from this study is the emphasis that participants place on the RA being present and knowing what to do when an emergency occurs in the residence hall. The findings suggest that residents rely on the RAs to be there and take the lead when emergencies occur in the residence halls. Each year, a great deal of time is devoted to covering emergency procedures and staff protocols in RA training. It is also a topic about which some RAs may feel overconfident, leading them not to pay close attention to the information being presented. In addition, most college students tend to believe that they are immune to bad things happening to them, so they may give it little thought. Based on the responses of this study, housing administrators should be able to communicate clearly that the responsibilities associated with crisis management are not only an important responsibility for the overall management of the residence halls, but also that residents believe this to be their RAs' most important responsibility. Students are looking for the RA to know what to do to keep them safe and their environment secure.

This area may also raise some concerns to campus housing administrators, as residents may be more likely to report serious information to their RAs and not communicate the information to any other campus official. Therefore, it is important that RA staff understand what types of situations they may address and what situations they need to inform their supervisors of immediately. In addition, with the rise of more complex mental and physical challenges that today's students are bringing to campus, it may be necessary to review the level of responsiveness to crisis situations at which the RAs should be expected to respond. Housing administrators should also assess to what degree training programs can adequately prepare RAs to be successful in the crisis management role.

Although this study determined that the RA position remains an attractive employment opportunity for students, there may be better ways to market and promote the position, given the way that students perceive the responsibilities through their locus of control orientation. Although there has been much written about the increasing expectations that have been placed on RAs during the last 30 years, this study does find that students are still interested in becoming RAs. However, campus housing administrators should review the overall scope of the position in light of the comments from the students that the job was too time consuming or required too much responsibility. In addition, marketing of the job needs to clearly clarify the expectations of the job, while promoting how students who may or may not feel they have the skills necessary will receive proper training that will enable them to be successful in the position.

Finally, this study does support that it is time for a thorough review of the responsibilities that have traditionally been assigned to individuals in the RA position.

The findings in this study call into question whether or not the roles and responsibilities that housing professionals have assigned to resident assistants are as effective with current students as many campus officials believe them to be. As noted in the lengthy review of the literature pertaining to the evolution of college housing programs, the RA position has evolved to the point that individuals hired for these positions are considered to be responsible for establishing and maintaining a significant component to the overall educational aspects inherent in living on campus.

The participants in this study did identify several responsibilities that they believed to important to the residents. However, given the overall time commitment that the RAs must manage in relation to all their academic commitments, do they still need to be expected to perform the number of responsibilities outlined in their job expectations? How can we use other resources and technology to alleviate some of the administrative tasks? This may provide RAs with more time to develop closer relationships with their residents so that individuals in these positions may be seen by more students as influential or a "powerful other" while they are living within the residence hall.

Suggestions for Future Research

Given the demographics of the participants of this study, it is recommended that this research be replicated at other institutions unlike the one utilized in this study (e.g., different four-year colleges and universities, historically Black institutions, two year schools with residential components). While this population may not be so unusual for a large, four-year public, research extensive institution with competitive admissions criteria, students attending other institutions may not report such high levels of parental education and family income which may affect the way they see the RA role. However, it is just as important for this study to be

replicated at similar institutions. This would provide verification of the results and promote the generalizability of the study's findings.

This study attempted to seek feedback directly from first-year residents regarding their perceptions of roles and responsibilities of the RAs. At the institution identified for this study, first-year students made up the largest portion of the on-campus student population. Therefore, it may be interesting to learn the perceptions of the RA responsibilities from students who have lived in the residence halls for more than one year. How would their perceptions change over time if they were to live in a different building and interact with a different RA? Would some of the responsibilities be more important to upper-class students based on how their needs may have changed since their first year?

It may also be interesting to investigate how the RA perceives his or her responsibilities in conjunction with how the residents assigned to his or floor perceive them. In fulfilling their responsibilities, do RAs emphasize some of their responsibilities more than others depending upon how important they see the roles in relation to their residents? If so, are residents then influenced by their behavior?

Another suggestion for future research is to consider how important the 14 responsibilities contained within *The Resident Assistant Questionnaire* are perceived by students residing in thematic housing or living/learning communities where campus housing officials may have placed a greater emphasis on RAs' involvement in academic advising and educational programming. Will students in these types of communities be more inclined to want the RA to be more involved and play a significant role in their academic goals and activities?

Future research is needed to assess residents' expectations of the RAs prior to their arrival on campus. As was indicated by this study, many of the residents reported that their

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parents have completed college and professional degrees. In addition, residents have indicated that their parents are "Powerful Others" in their lives. Therefore, what information have first-year students been provided by their parents that may influence them as to how they perceive the role of the RA? And what roles previously played by RAs are now played by parents, even when student matriculate?

The researcher suggests that this study should be replicated in the future as a pre-test/ post-test in a similar manner to the research of Kuh and Schuh (1983). The residents who participated in this study had only lived on their designated floor for approximately three months. By administering the questionnaire used in this study at the beginning of the academic year and then at the end of the same year, campus housing administrators may be able to ascertain how residents' perceptions regarding the RA position may have changed throughout the academic year.

Further investigation is needed as to why some of the participants (44 of 97 who responded to the one of the open-ended questions) indicated that they consider themselves as a "Powerful Other" in their own lives. Perhaps a study utilizing a qualitative approach may be able to engage students and learn more of their reasoning for such a response. Such information may inform the profession as to how students perceive their own ability to influence the things that may occur in their lives.

Rotter's (1982) work analyzing college students' locus of control orientation in conjunction to their parents' locus of control orientation was conducted in the early 1980s. Given the parental behaviors exhibited in society today, it may be helpful to duplicate these studies to see if significant changes have occurred in these relationships. In addition, future research should seek to understand the relationship between the level of parental education and family

incomes to students' locus of control orientation. Do these factors serve as influential or extraneous variables to today's students' overall locus of control?

This study reported statistically differences between men's and women's responses to the items on Levenson's (1973a, 1981) *Chance Scale,* which was not found in her previous work. Therefore, a replication of this study would be helpful to verify if this finding was unique only to these student participants or if something has changed in the time since her studies that has caused gender differences.

Further research is needed as to why the RAs are not readily seen as having more influence in students' lives. The housing profession, as well as many other campus officials, have promoted that RAs have been an important peer mentor for students in the past. Has that changed or has their influence somewhat diminished with this new generation of college students? This would most likely require a study using a qualitative approach so a more inquisitive probe of their perspectives can be conducted.

This study determined that there was a slight relationship between students' locus of control and their perceptions of the role and responsibilities of the RA. As a result, the findings of this study do support that internally oriented students do find the RA to be a good resource person for them when they need information. However, are there other factors related to the how the RA and the students interact that would be able to more accurately assess the relationship RAs have with their residents? Therefore, future research is needed to explore further other theoretical constructs that may shed greater light on how students perceive the role of the RA. Perhaps research may explore this issue seeking to identify this insight from an interpersonal relational perspective. Do students see the RA responsibilities differently if they have strong

interpersonal relationships with their RAs versus those students who have little to no contact with their RAs?

Finally, it is suggested that future research studies attempt to collect information directly from resident students whenever possible. As noted in this study, campus housing administrators have attempted to collect feedback from students, but it has been done when primarily assessing their satisfaction with programs and services offered in the residence halls. It appears that feedback is rarely collected that informs the campus administration about how those programs and services actually affect students.

RAs are recognized by their residents as individuals in positions of responsibility. Residents want them present in a crisis or an emergency. They also want the RAs to be there if they have questions about a particular problem. In addition, residents want the RAs to take care of the necessary administrative paperwork required by campus housing officials. They also want RAs to enforce campus policies and procedures without showing favoritism so that conflicts among the residents living in their unit may be avoided. For students, RAs serve as a resource person and are readily contacted by students when they have questions. For these basic reasons, it appears that the RA role continues to play an important role in the overall management of the campus housing programs.

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APPENDIX A

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESIDENTS′ PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESIDENT ASSISTANTS′

(RA) ROLES AND RESIDENTS′ LOCUS OF CONTROL ORIENTATION SURVEY

For each question below, please completely fill in the space "●" of the most appropriate response.

<u>Part One:</u> **Please tell me a little about yourself.**

Gender   ○ Female ○ Male ○ Transgender   **Age**   ○ 18 ○19   ○ 20 ○ 21

Ethnicity   ○ American Indian or Alaska Native ○ Asian American ○ Black or African American

           ○ Hispanic/Latino/Latina   ○ Native American ○ Native Hawaiian or other

                                                      Pacific Islander

           ○ Multiracial   ○ White/Caucasian ○ Other (Specify:_____)

Estimated Family Household Annual Income

○ Less than $20,000   ○ $30,000 - 39,999   ○ $60,000 - 74,999   ○ $150,000 − 199,999

○ $20,000 - 24,999   ○ $40,000 - 49,999   ○ $75,000 - 99,000   ○ $200,000 − 249,999

○ $25,000 - 29,999   ○ $50,000 - 59,999   ○ $100,000 - 149,999 ○ $250,000 or more

What is the highest level of formal education obtained by your parents? (Mark <u>one</u> in each column)

	<u>Father</u>	<u>Mother</u>
Elementary school or less	○	○
Some high school	○	○
High school graduate	○	○
Postsecondary school other than college	○	○
Some college	○	○
College degree	○	○
Some graduate school	○	○
Graduate or professional degree	○	○

Are you the first person within your immediate family (parents and/or siblings)

to live on campus?   ○ Yes ○ No

Part Two: **You & Your RA**

Listed below are several specific responsibilities that RAs are asked typically to perform. Please rate these responsibilities, as you perceive their importance to you as a student living within the residence halls. (Indicate one response for each question using the scale shown below):

A	**B**	**C**		**D**	**E**
Not Applicable	*Not Important*	*Somewhat Important*		*Important*	*Crucial*

	A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**
1. Provide assistance to you with personal issues.	O	O	O	O	O
2. Provide academic assistance to you.	O	O	O	O	O
3. Respond to crisis/emergency situations.	O	O	O	O	O
4. Refer you to appropriate university resources when you have questions/problems.	O	O	O	O	O
5. Provide social programs for you.	O	O	O	O	O
6. Provide educational programs for you.	O	O	O	O	O
7. Distribute and post information for you.	O	O	O	O	O
8. Encourage you to respect and appreciate individual differences.	O	O	O	O	O
9. Complete administrative paperwork required by housing supervisors (i.e., room inventories, check out forms, etc.).	O	O	O	O	O
10. Enforce residence hall policies and procedures.	O	O	O	O	O
11. Mediate conflicts that arise among residents.	O	O	O	O	O
12. Act as a positive role model for you.	O	O	O	O	O
13. Be visible and available to you.	O	O	O	O	O
14. Initiate informal with contacts you.	O	O	O	O	O

* Conlogue, J. (1993). Resident assistant perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Pittsburgh, PA. Reprinted with permission.

From the previously listed items, what RA responsibilities are most important to you? Why?

Are there responsibilities you believe your RA should not continue to perform? Why?

Are there additional responsibilities you wish your RA did perform? Why?

Are you interested in becoming an RA? O Yes   O No   Why?

Part Three: **Your Opinion Matters!**

Whom do you believe to be influential individuals (powerful others) in matters that relate to your overall

collegiate success? Please completely fill in the space "●" for all that apply. Then rank their importance

with "*1*" being the most influential, etc., in the space provided after each of your selections.

○ Parents	_____	○ Other family members	_____
○ High School Friends	_____	○ College Peers	_____
○ Academic Advisor	_____	○ Faculty member	_____
○ Your RA	_____	○ Other: _____ _____	

Below, you will find a series of attitude statements. Each represents a commonly held opinion. There

are no right or wrong answers. You will probably agree with some of the items and disagree with

others. I am only interested in the extent of which you agree or disagree with such matters of opinion.

First impressions are usually best. Read each statement, decide if you agree or disagree and the

strength of your opinion. Then indicate one response for each question using the scale shown below. If

you find that the categories do not adequately reflect your own opinion, use the one that is *closest* to the

way you feel.

A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1. Whether or not I get to be a leader depends mostly on my ability.	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. To a great extent, my life is controlled by accidental happenings.	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. I feel like what happens in my life is mostly determined by powerful others.	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. Whether or not I get into a car accident depends mostly on how good a driver I am.	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. When I make plans, I am almost certain to make them work.	○	○	○	○	○	○
6. Often there is no chance of protecting my personal interests from bad luck happenings.	○	○	○	○	○	○
7. When I get what I want, it is usually because I am lucky.	○	○	○	○	○	○
8. Although I might have good ability, I will not be given leadership responsibility without appealing to those in positions of power.	○	○	○	○	○	○
9. How many friends I have depends upon how nice a person I am.	○	○	○	○	○	○
10. I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. My life is chiefly controlled by powerful others.	○	○	○	○	○	○
12. Whether or not I get into a car accident is mostly a matter of luck.	○	○	○	○	○	○
13. People like myself have very little chance of protecting our personal interests when they conflict with those of strong pressure groups.	○	○	○	○	○	○

14. It is not always wise for me to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune.	O	O	O	O	O	O
15. Getting what I want requires pleasing those people above me.	O	O	O	O	O	O
16. Whether or not I get to be a leader depends upon whether I am lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time.	O	O	O	O	O	O
17. If important people were to decide they did not like me, I probably would not make many friends.	O	O	O	O	O	O
18. I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life.	O	O	O	O	O	O
19. I am usually able to protect my personal interests.	O	O	O	O	O	O
20. Whether or not I get into a car accident depends mostly on the other driver.	O	O	O	O	O	O
21. When I get what I want, it is usually because I worked hard for it	O	O	O	O	O	O
22. In order to have my plans work, I make sure that they fit in with the desires of people who have power over me.	O	O	O	O	O	O
23. My life is determined by my own actions.	O	O	O	O	O	O
24. It is chiefly a matter of fate whether or not I have a few friends or many friends.	O	O	O	O	O	O

Thank you for your assistance.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY COVER LETTER AND PARTICIPANT CONSENT WAIVER

November 2009

Dear First Year Residential Student:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Merrily S. Dunn, in the Department of Counseling & Human Development Services at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled *The Relationship between the Residents' Perceptions of the Resident Assistants' (RA) Roles and Residents' Locus of Control Orientation* that is being conducted with permission from the Department of University Housing. The purpose of this study is to determine what Resident Assistant roles or job responsibilities are most important to the first year residential students in their transition to the collegiate experience. Specifically, I am seeking to determine if there is a relationship between how a student perceives the world and how much control he or she possesses when negotiating life's challenges and how helpful he or she may perceive the Resident Assistant to be in their first year of college.

To participate in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age and live in one of the following traditional residence halls on campus: Boggs, Brumby, Church, Lipscomb, Mell, Morris or Russell.

Your participation will involve reviewing this cover letter and then completing the attached paper questionnaire that will ask you to supply some information about yourself and your family. You will be then questioned about how you perceive the roles assigned to your Resident Assistant, and how you view your ability to control the things that occur in your life. The questionnaire should only take about 20 - 25 minutes to complete.

Your involvement in the study is strictly voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Steps have been taken to protect your identity. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

The findings from this research may provide information to college housing professionals as to how resident students perceive the roles and responsibilities assigned currently to the resident assistants and suggest any revisions for the future in an attempt to better serve the needs of resident students. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me, S. Regina Sargent, at (404) 345-9815 or send an e-mail to rsargent@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By completing and returning this questionnaire, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project. Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

S. Regina Sargent