A Comparison of Perceptions Among Resident Assistants
and Professional Residence Life Staff
Regarding Conflict Mediation

By

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(ABSTRACT)

There is a great deal of literature written on conflict mediation and Resident Assistant (RA) training. This literature not only helps to define what each area is, but it provides readers with the knowledge necessary to become skilled in mediation or to effectively design training programs to educate students employed to work in residence halls. However, there is little literature regarding how RAs are trained in conflict mediation. This study attempts to address this gap.

The purpose of this study was to determine how RAs and professional staff at three public institutions perceive conflict mediation training provided to RAs.

To answer the research questions posed in this study the researcher used a self-designed questionnaire. The design of this questionnaire specifically asked questions focusing on the conflict mediation training RAs receive, how often these skills are used, and how important these skills are as perceived by professional and student employees as well as by gender.

One hundred seventy-nine responses representing a 31 percent response rate were used in this study. Twenty percent of the participants were professional residence life staff members. The other 80 percent were RAs. In addition, 34 percent of the participants were male and 67 percent of the participants were female.

This study's findings illustrated five significant differences in perception among professionals and RAs as well as differences among male and female RAs. Professionals responsible for training RAs may wish to consider these differences as they design future training workshops.

However, the study's findings also illustrated that there is an overwhelming, positive consensus in perception regarding RA training in conflict mediation. Not only are RAs trained in conflict mediation but they use and value these skills as well. In addition, these findings indicate that paraprofessional staffing models are successful.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family and friends who have showed me nothing but support and love throughout this process.

Thank You!

"If we did the things we are capable of, we would astound ourselves."
~Thomas Edison

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education are not without conflict (Ostar, 1995). History suggests that some of the United States' most famous colleges were founded as results of conflict (Holton, 1995). Reasons for these conflicts vary and are often unique to those involved in the situation as well as society. For example, a governing board of Harvard University alumni did not like the liberal education being promoted at the university. In response to Harvard's education program, this alumni board founded Yale University (Holton, 1995). Another example was the founding of the University of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania. This institution was founded, in part, when Benjamin Franklin and others took control over George Whitefield's Charity School. The institution Franklin originally controlled was not known as the University of Philadelphia. However, through years of conflict, Franklin's College and Academy in Philadelphia underwent many changes and became what it is known today as, the University of Philadelphia (Holton, 1995).

A more recent example of conflict occurred when colleges and universities first admitted women into their educational programs. In some instances, it was not until the 1960s when institutions admitted women into specific programs such as business. Today, women still experience conflict in forms of sexual harassment and gender discrimination (Holton, 1995). Although women, faculty, and staff face these conflicts, they are not the only population to experience conflict. One specific population known to encounter conflict regularly is students (Gibson, 1995; Holton, 1995; Warters, 1995).

Student conflicts can focus on specific student communities, such as homosexual, bisexual, and transgender populations, certain racial or ethnic backgrounds as well as individual members of these groups (Holton, 1995). Similar to earlier conflicts, student conflicts are unique to the situation and vary among the individuals involved.

Adjusting to college life may be difficult for students. For some it may be the first time away from home or for others it may be the academic demand placed upon them (Gibson, 1995). No matter the reason, conflict among students is expected and is known to occur. One specific place students encounter conflict is in the residence hall (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990; Shipton & Schuh, 1982; Twale & Burrell, 1994).

There are many reasons cited for the conflicts that occur in residence halls. For example, these halls are filled with students living in close proximity to one another. These new living arrangements are often the first time students are expected to share bathrooms as well as bedrooms (Gibson, 1995). Due to these close living quarters and a decrease in privacy, students are forced to interact with others (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990). This forced interaction can lead to disagreements. In addition, students come from various cultural, economical, racial, and educational backgrounds (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990). Differences in these backgrounds also lead to conflict among residents.

To help students in general as well as with conflicts, some institutions have hired various types of professionals. These professionals assist members of the campus community resolve differences through various forms of alternative dispute resolution such as negotiation, arbitration or, mediation (Gibson, 1995). However, in other instances, institutions may rely on other students to mediate conflict especially in residence halls (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990).

Residential colleges and universities provide on-campus housing to students required or wanting to live on campus. To assist these students as they live on campus, institutions employ paraprofessional students, often called resident assistants (RAs), to live in the residence halls (Bowman & Bowman, 1995a; Palmer, 1996; Posner & Brodsky, 1993). RAs are students selected by college administrators to serve as representatives of the university and to provide support and assistance to those students living on campus (Posner & Brodsky, 1993). The scope of their position is broad as they are responsible for completing administrative tasks, enforcing institutional policies, counseling their peers, and programming for students (Blimling, 1999; Bowman & Bowman, 1998; Posner & Brodsky, 1993).

Due to their leadership position, residents often come to RAs for assistance (Twale & Burrell, 1994; Twale & Burrell, 1995). For these students to fulfill their job-related responsibilities and to fully benefit students, RAs receive training in various areas (Schuh, Shipton & Edman, 1988; Twale & Burrell, 1995). One of these areas is conflict mediation (Murray, Snider & Midkiff, 1999). Since conflict can be extremely destructive if not addressed properly (Holton, 1995), it is important that RAs receive training in how to successfully mediate conflict.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine how RAs and professional staff at three public institutions perceive conflict mediation training provided to RAs.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

1. Are RAs being trained in mediation skills?

2. Is there a difference between the degree to which RAs report being trained in mediation and the degree to which residence life professionals report RAs are trained in mediation?

3. How frequently do RAs use mediation training?

4. Is there a difference between the degree to which RAs report they use mediation training and the degree to which residence life professionals report RA use of this training?

5. Is there a difference between the degree to which male RAs use mediation training and the degree to which female RAs use this training?

6. Do RAs value mediation training?

7. Is there a difference between the degree to which RAs report they value mediation training and the degree to which residence life professionals report RAs value this training?

8. Is there a difference between the degree to which male RAs value mediation training and the degree to which female RAs value this training?

Significance of the Study

The present study had significance for future practice, research, and policy. The results of this study provided student affairs professionals with an idea as to how residence life staff and RAs perceive the training received in conflict mediation. Residence life professionals could use the results of this study to make any necessary adjustments to RA training and supervision. This might help ensure that RAs receive adequate training in the future.

In addition to benefiting residence life professionals, this study also benefited RAs. The results of this study provided RAs with information regarding how their colleagues perceived their training in mediation and the value of these skills. RAs could use this information to evaluate the training they receive in mediation as well as how valuable they perceive these skills.

Again, this information could be used to address any shortcomings in RA training and conflict mediation. RAs could also use the results to evaluate their role in mediation and its effectiveness.

Student affairs professionals in general will benefit from the results of this study. This research provided professionals with information regarding perceptions among RAs and residence life professionals considering training in conflict mediation skills and how valuable RAs find these skills. Student affairs professionals could use the information provided to offer multiple workshops to student leaders allowing them to develop and strengthen skills necessary to effectively mediate conflict.

Finally, departments in higher education that employ paraprofessional students also benefit from the results of this study. The current study researched how RAs perceived the training they received in conflict mediation. These departments, which employ paraprofessionals such as orientation leaders, health educators, and peer counselors, can use this information to critically evaluate the training and supervision they provide their student staff.

Additionally, the present study had significance for future research. As a result of this research, future studies could be conducted researching other aspects of RA training. This study researched how RAs perceived they were trained in mediation, how residence life professionals perceived they trained RAs in mediation and differences in perception between the two surveyed groups. Furthermore, this study researched how valuable RAs found these skills and any differences in perception among male and female RAs. One could use this research method to study other skill areas of RA training. Researching other areas of training could result in significant changes made to training procedures.

Also, a future study might research any difference in perception regarding the value of mediation skills between experienced RAs and new RAs. The present study researched how valuable mediation skills were to RAs. The perceptions of male and female RAs were studied; however, the perceptions of new and returning RAs were not studied. This future study could discover which type of RA is more apt to use mediation skills when involved in conflict. The results of this study could result in training RAs differently according to their experience.

A study involving residents and conflict mediation could also be conducted. This study could research how effective RAs are at mediating conflicts in residence halls. The current study researched how RAs and professional staff members perceived the mediation training RAs received and how valuable these skills were to RAs. This study did not research the effectiveness

of RAs when implementing conflict mediation skills. Results from this particular research would indicate to those responsible for RA training how well RAs understand and implement the skills necessary to mediate conflict. Again, the results of this specific study could produce changes made to training and future workshops.

Finally, a study researching the effect conflict mediation has on peer relationships could be conducted. A study researching the change in relationships would provide residence life professionals with data that can contribute to the mediation training RAs receive.

The current study sought to determine how RAs perceived the training they received in mediation, how professionals perceived the mediation training they provided RAs, and whether RAs found these skills useful. The results of this study may influence residence life policies on how RAs are trained to mediate conflict.

The present study provided results concerning how RAs and residence life professionals perceived the conflict mediation training provided to RAs. Policy makers may use these results when considering policies about the types of conflicts RAs should be expected to mediate versus those that should be referred to professionals.

Finally, the information provided in this research project can affect offices outside the realms of residence life. The results in this study may help other institutional offices as they implement conflict mediation policies. These policies may set standards for handling inter- and intra-office grievances.

Delimitations

To provide a complete overview of this research project, it is necessary to report on any preliminary delimitations encountered by the researcher. One delimitation relates to the population from which the information was gathered. The combined total number of RAs and professional staff members used in this study is small. The sample population delimits the study by limiting the number of responses. Therefore, the responses are not generalizable beyond the schools studied.

It is also important to point out that this study focused only on the perceptions RAs and residence life professionals have regarding RA training in conflict mediation, the use and value of these skills. The study did not explore the number or types of conflicts RAs mediate. The results of this study do not indicate whether RAs have actually used mediation effectively.

Despite these delimitations, the present study was useful in that it contributes to the knowledge base on RA training and conflict mediation.

Organization of the Study

This research paper is arranged in five chapters. Chapter One introduced the issue to be explored in this study. The purpose of the study and research questions were provided as well as the significance of the study and its delimitations. Chapter Two provides the reader with a review of the literature concerning mediation, conflicts in residence halls, paraprofessional students, RA training, and gender differences. Chapter Three provides a description of the sample selection techniques, the methods used to collect information, and the techniques used to analyze the data. The results of the study are reported in Chapter Four while Chapter Five provides a discussion of the results and recommendations for future practice and research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

To gain a greater understanding of the conflict mediation training resident assistants (RAs) receive and the perceptions of those involved in RA training, it was necessary to examine the bodies of literature regarding mediation, conflicts in residence halls, RAs as paraprofessional students, RA training, and differences among male and female RAs. This chapter is organized around these five main sections. First, literature regarding conflict mediation is reviewed. This review of mediation includes an overview of mediation, descriptions of different mediation processes, and skills essential for mediators to possess. Second, literature concerning the occurrence of conflict in residence halls is explored. Next, the benefits and challenges of hiring RAs to serve as paraprofessional students is reviewed. Fourth, literature regarding RA training is reviewed in three different aspects. The first aspect consists of basic RA training while the second aspect discusses the effects of RA training. Finally, the third aspect discusses RA training in conflict mediation. Fifth, literature regarding differences among male and female RAs is reviewed.

Mediation

Mediation is a growing form of alternative dispute resolution used on college and university campuses (Warters, 2000). Colleges and universities use mediation to solve problems among administrators, faculty, staff, students, and sometimes off campus constituencies, such as landlords (Warters, 1995). Before a study researching any differences in perception among RAs and professional staff members have regarding mediation training could be conducted, it was necessary to describe mediation and identify skills essential for mediators to possess.

Overview of Mediation

Definition. Like arbitration and negotiation, mediation is a type of alternative dispute resolution used to solve conflict among two or more disputing parties (Moore, 1986). However, mediation is unique because of its various components. Mediation is a voluntary process in which a neutral party facilitates discussion among disputing parties (Folberg & Taylor, 1984; Moore, 1986). During this process, the mediator enables the disputing parties to come to a reasonable agreement to be upheld after mediation is complete (Dunn, 1996; Hayes & Balogh, 1990; Serr &Taber, 1987; Sisson & Todd, 1995; Warters, 2000). Although it is expected that the parties involved in mediation will abide by the agreement, the agreement itself is not legally

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binding (Moore, 1986; Serr & Taber, 1987). It is important to focus on the voluntary aspect of mediation. Parties in dispute usually choose to enter mediation when they realize they are unlikely to solve the problem on their own (Moore, 1986). In addition, a decision made by those in dispute will be more effective than one imposed by someone else (Folberg & Taylor, 1984).

Skill Development. Professionals who have researched the use of mediation on college and university campuses often note how those involved in mediation benefit from the process. Students involved in mediation have the opportunity to develop and strengthen skills that will help them throughout their college career as well as after graduation. For example, mediation encourages students to accept responsibility for themselves and their actions (Beeler, 1986; Dunn, 1996; Hayes & Balogh, 1990; Sisson & Todd, 1995). They also learn how their behaviors affect others (Sisson & Todd, 1995). Through the mediation process, students learn how to think critically and analyze their thoughts as well as intentions (Sisson & Todd, 1995) and the problem itself (Beeler, 1986).

Mediation also encourages students to work collaboratively to solve the problem (Dunn, 1996; Hayes & Balogh, 1990; Serr & Taber, 1987) Through this collaborative effort, students learn to manage their emotions (Dunn, 1996), listen to others involved in the dispute (Hayes & Balogh, 1990), and increase communication (Dunn, 1996).

Being able to resolve a conflict effectively is a valuable skill. Skills such as those discussed are beneficial for all to possess because conflict is a common occurrence (Serr & Taber, 1987; Warters, 2000).

Student Development. Mediation not only helps students develop skills beneficial for solving problems and working with others, but it also encourages development within students. This of course, is one of higher education's and student affairs professionals' main priorities. For example, instead of always taking the easiest solution to solve a problem, time is taken to search for and implement a solution that will both challenge and support those involved as well as others close to the situation. This not only challenges the students, but it also supports an environment for acceptability and one that encourages student development (Creamer, 1993).

Mediation Processes. Professionals studying mediation have identified multiple steps characteristic to mediation sessions. These guidelines help mediators by guiding them through the process to ensure that every aspect is addressed and thoroughly discussed. Although there are many different mediation models, the researcher identified four to discuss for purposes of this

paper. This allowed the researcher to identify any overlapping similarities and steps unique to individual models. Examples of these mediation models are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Christopher Moore (1986) is a highly regarded practitioner who has written many books on conflict resolution (*Building Social Change Communities*, 1978; *Natural Resources Conflict Management* 1982;). In addition, he is a partner in Denver's Center for Dispute Resolution and serves as a mediator and arbitrator for the American Arbitration Association. In his book, *The Mediation Process* (1986), Moore outlines a 12-stage model for mediators to follow. The 12 stages are:

1. Initial Contacts with the Disputing Parties
2. Selecting a Strategy to Guide Mediation
3. Collecting and Analyzing Background Information
4. Designing a Detailed Plan for Mediation
5. Building Trust and Cooperation
6. Beginning the Mediation Session
7. Defining Issues and Setting an Agenda
8. Uncovering Hidden Interests of the Disputing Parties
9. Generating Options for Settlement
10. Assessing Options for Settlement
11. Final Bargaining
12. Achieving Formal Settlement. (Moore, 1986, p. 32-33)

The steps of Moore's model clearly outline what mediators are to do and when. For example, in Stage One, Initial Contacts with Disputing Parties, the mediator is to begin communication by introducing him or herself to the parties, informing them about the mediation process, and answering any questions. During this stage, mediators build credibility that will help those in dispute believe that mediation will help them solve their problems. Stage Six, Beginning the Mediation Session, consists of many steps that are typical of a first meeting. For example, the mediator should again introduce him or herself and welcome the parties. As a reminder, the role of the mediator and an explanation of the mediation process should be discussed. During this stage, mediators discuss confidentiality and, with the help of the disputing parties, establish ground rules (Moore, 1986).

Another approach to a mediation session is the seven-stage approach developed in 1994 by the Community Mediation Services (Dunn, 1996). This approach outlines the mediation process to assist mediators. The seven stages of the Community Mediation Services' model are:

1. Introduction
2. Telling the Story/Problem Determination
3. Summarizing
4. Issue Identification
5. Generating and Evaluating Alternatives
6. Selection of Appropriate Alternative
7. Closure. (Dunn, 1996, p. 42)

This model is very similar to Moore's mediation model; however, it is condensed. For example, in Stage One, Introduction, all parties and the mediator are introduced, the mediation process is explained and ground rules are established. However, in Moore's model, the mediation process is explained in both Stage One and Stage Six. Both Moore's model and the Community Mediation Services' model suggest the generation of possible solutions followed by the selection and implementation of the most appropriate solution.

Rifkind and Harper (1997) also identified a mediation process. Their model consists of nine steps, which are:

1. Private Consultation with all the Parties
2. Initial Meeting with Parties
3. Outline the Process
4. Mediator Outlines the Issues
5. Disputing Parties Present Viewpoints
6. Mediator Asks each Party what They Want
7. Private Discussions if Necessary
8. Facilitation of Agreement
9. Signing of the Agreement by all parties. (Rifkind & Harper, 1997, p. 9-11)

Similar to Moore's model (1986), Rifkind and Harper (1997) have mediators contacting the individual parties first. Included in this initial contact is an explanation of the mediation process. In addition, similar to Moore's model (1986), the Ninth Stage of this model has the mediating parties and the mediator signing a formal agreement. Moore (1986), on the other hand,

does not insist that this agreement be formal. Instead, one can use formal or informal written or spoken agreements (Moore, 1986).

Finally, the last mediation process the researcher chose to identify is one outlined by Serr and Taber (1987). This model also consists of stages similar to the other three models. The stages of this model are:

1. Introduction and Overview
2. Establishment of the Ground Rules
3. Statement of the Issues
4. Definition of the Issues
5. Developing Appropriate Alternatives
6. Conclusion
7. Follow-Up. (Serr & Taber, 1987, p. 79-80)

In Serr and Taber's Introduction and Overview Stage, the mediator not only explains the process and the responsibilities of the mediator, but also discusses items such as the length of sessions, note taking, confidentiality, and cooperation (Serr & Taber, 1987).

One characteristic unique to Serr and Taber's (1987) model is the idea of a follow-up. A follow-up provides the mediator with the opportunity to confer with the parties and see how things are going after the completion of mediation. This also allows the parties to voice any difficulties or problems they are having. If needed, the mediator can suggest follow-up mediation sessions (Serr & Taber, 1987).

As one can see, there are multiple approaches to conducting a mediation session. However, with all of these different approaches there are many similarities. In the four models summarized, each one included an explanation of the mediation process, the telling of stories, and the generation of possible solutions. Mediation models can be different but similar. Regardless of the model selected, success depends upon the skills of the mediator.

Mediator Skills

A mediator cannot apply a mediation process to a situation and expect to be successful. Instead, mediators must possess certain skills. Proficiency in these skills helps ensure that the mediation process is successful and that it obtains its goals as best as possible. After reviewing multiple approaches and stages to mediation, the researcher identified multiple skills critical for successful mediators to possess. These skills are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Listening. Listening is an extremely important and necessary skill for mediators to possess. Effective listening allows those involved in the dispute to be heard (Moore, 1986; Nolan-Haley, 1992). This is imperative to keep participants involved in the mediation process. In addition, good listeners can accurately rephrase and paraphrase (Nolan-Haley, 1992) to ensure that information is accurately heard (Moore, 1986). Furthermore, good listeners can identify emotions associated with statements (Nolan-Haley, 1992). Mediators must also explain that expressing emotions is okay (Moore, 1986).

Finally, it is important that mediators use non-verbal cues to indicate they are listening (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990). Included in these nonverbal cues are head nodding, hand and facial gestures, and other forms of acknowledgement for example, eye contact (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990). These gestures indicate that the mediator is listening.

Observing. Much communication in a mediation session can take place without speaking. Non-verbal communication such as body posture, gestures, and facial movements can help communicate to others what a person is thinking or feeling (Moore, 1986). Therefore, it is essential that mediators be skilled in observation and nonverbal communication (Moore, 1986; Nolan-Haley, 1992). Mediators skilled in this are adept in interpreting what others may be thinking or feeling and use it to help set the tone for the session (Moore, 1986). For example, a mediator who is aware of nonverbal communication can interrupt and ask someone to stop what he or she is doing if necessary. An example of this would be a mediator asking a party to stop tapping his or her nails on a table while the other party is speaking.

The awareness of nonverbal communication is complicated by cultural differences. Mediators must acknowledge that not all behaviors mean the same thing in different cultures (Moore, 1986; Nolan-Haley, 1992). For example, a lack of eye contact may mean guilt in one culture and respect in another (Nolan-Haley, 1992). Being aware of these possible differences will help mediators as they interpret and understand nonverbal communication.

Empathy. Empathy is important for mediators to possess for two reasons. First, it is necessary to show empathy to the individual parties in dispute. While it is important to show concern for others, mediators must be careful to remain free of any biases. Second, as a mediator, it is helpful to have each of the disputing parties show empathy towards one another. Mediators effective at showing empathy can model the behavior for the disputing parties (Blimling & Miltenberg, 1990).

Impartiality. Impartiality refers to a mediator's ability to prevent any personal biases or opinions from entering anytime during the mediation process (Moore, 1986). This does not mean that a mediator cannot have any biases at all. In fact, it is natural for one to hold certain opinions or make judgments (Weinstein, 2001). However, mediators need to be aware of their biases and prevent these opinions from becoming visible to the disputing parties (Moore, 1986). It is important that mediators make known their impartial status during the first meeting. This will allow the participant to stop the session if uncomfortable with the mediator's position (Moore, 1986).

Neutrality. Neutrality refers to the behaviors of the mediator and the relationship the mediator has with those in dispute (Moore, 1986). Mediators should disclose all relationships they have or have had with the parties in dispute, or with others that may make the parties uncomfortable. This allows the disputing parties to ask for a different mediator if they disagree with any past or future relationships the mediator may have with other parties (Moore, 1986).

It is not necessary for a mediator to be 100 percent neutral. Mediators who are not perfectly neutral will interject when necessary and assist in the problem solving process (Weinstein, 2001). Mediators who are 100 percent neutral may not intervene appropriately which, in turn, slows down the mediation process (Weinstein, 2001).

Confidentiality. Mediators must be able to maintain confidentiality. For a mediation process to be successful, it is important that mediators guarantee confidentiality to the extent possible. Knowing that confidentiality is guaranteed encourages those in dispute to provide more information (Moore, 1986). The idea of confidentiality provides those in mediation with the reassurance that their problem will not become public knowledge (Weinstein, 2001).

There are times however, when confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. For example, some states do not protect party-mediator confidentiality and reserve the right to request information or records (Moore, 1986). Mediators cannot guarantee confidentiality when criminal activity is involved or if the mediator learns of a policy violation (Rifkind & Harper, 1997; Weinstein, 2001). It is important that mediators express that they will attempt to guarantee confidentiality, but also make known that there are some times when it cannot be maintained (Weinstein, 2001).

Facilitating. There are multiple approaches mediators can take when working with disputing parties (Dunn, 1996; Moore, 1986; Rifkind & Harper, 1997; Serr & Taber, 1987). However, before mediators attempt any single approach, they must first be familiar with how to

facilitate one of these processes. As a facilitator, mediators must keep everyone on task and ask the appropriate questions (Weinstein, 2001). Facilitators are capable of using their skills to help ensure that the mediation process is as successful as possible.

Questioning. An extremely important skill for mediators to possess and one closely related to facilitating is questioning. Questioning allows the mediator to elicit more information that may be of importance during sessions. Questioning also shows those involved in the sessions that the mediator is listening (Weinstein, 2001), another skill essential for mediators possess.

There are five main types of questions mediators can ask. The five types of questions are open-ended (Folberg & Taylor, 1984), closed-ended (Folberg & Taylor, 1984), reflection (Nolan-Haley, 1992), clarification (Nolan-Haley, 1992), and probing (Weinstein, 2001). Open-ended questions allow the responder to provide any response (Folberg & Taylor, 1984) and more information (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990; Nolan-Haley, 1992). These questions are extremely helpful for mediators trying to follow-up on some previous information (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990). For example, a mediator could ask, "Could you elaborate more on the events that took place?" Closed-ended questions, on the other hand, limit the amount of information provided. This in turn can reduce the possibility of extraneous conversation (Folberg & Taylor, 1984). Mediators may choose to ask closed-ended questions when they are looking for specific information (Weinstein, 2001). For example, to determine one's feelings a mediator could ask, "Are you angry with your suitemates?"

Aside from the previous two types of questions already discussed, mediators can also ask reflection or clarification questions (Nolan-Haley, 1992). Reflection questions show that the mediator understood what was said (Nolan-Haley, 1992). A mediator trying to reflect might ask a question like, "It is understandable for someone whose roommate just took one's clothes to be angry. Are you angry?" Clarification questions provide mediators with the opportunity to make information understandable (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990; Nolan-Haley, 1992) and provide direction to those in dispute (Nolan-Haley, 1992). An example of a clarification question would be, "What did you mean when you said she was too controlling?"

The last type of question available for mediators to pose is the probing question. Probing questions are similar to clarification questions in that they can provide directions for those involved in the dispute. Probing questions are the least neutral as they allow mediators to suggest

possible solutions (Weinstein, 2001). An example of a probing question would be, "Have you thought about designing a roommate contract?"

Generating Solutions. Once the discussion of issues has come to a conclusion, it is necessary for those involved in mediation to generate possible solutions. Kraybill, Evans, and Evans (2001) note that the number of solutions is often representative of the number of parties in dispute. For example, if there are three parties involved in mediation there are most likely going to be three solutions, one from each party (Kraybill et al., 2001). Although it is the responsibility of those in conflict to formulate possible solutions (Dunn, 1996), a mediator's assistance is needed during the process. This includes keeping conversations neutral to avoid individuals from attacking ideas and assisting the parties as they evaluate the pros and cons of each solution (Kraybill et al., 2001). This is essential, as it will be necessary for all involved in the mediation process to agree on one solution

In addition, mediators must keep from pushing the parties to select a solution. Pressure from a mediator can encourage parties to settle on an option that may not necessarily benefit anyone and fail in the future (Kraybill et al., 2001).

Developing Consensus. Reaching consensus is an important part of the mediation process. It can be a difficult step, but one that is necessary if a solution is to be agreed upon. This is important because a decision made by the parties in dispute is most likely to be successful. Mediators should understand that reaching a consensus is not and should not always be a short process. It may take time and discussion before either party is in agreement with a solution (Beebe & Masterson, 1997).

For the process to be successful and for all parties to obtain something, mediators must be able to interrupt and direct the conversation at times. This ensures that the rights and needs of those involved are addressed, and that the agreement is fair. While a group is reaching consensus, a mediator must ask the parties in dispute to avoid making negative statements and instead use inclusive words such as "we" and "us" (Beebe & Masterson, 1997).

<center>Conflict in the Residence Halls</center>

Conflict in the residence halls is a frequent occurrence that has changed very little over time (Schuh, Shipton & Edmand, 1988). Factors such as differing beliefs, values, social backgrounds, and relationships often differ among students (Gibson, 1995). Due to the large

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diversity found in close proximity, tension, discomfort, and strain as well as conflict are inevitable (Palmer, 1996).

The types of counseling issues cited in residence halls during a 15-year period remained virtually the same. Although the researchers defined these issues as "counseling problems," many of the problems are conflicts of some kind. These conflicts included roommate conflicts, violation of quiet hours, and physical confrontations between students (Schuh et al., 1988). Roommate conflicts occurred the most. Over this 15-year period 79% of the female RAs included in the study encountered at least one roommate conflict while 70% of the male RAs handled roommate conflicts as well (Schuh et al., 1988). These statistics rose and seven years later, 87.7% of female RAs and 74.6% of male RAs cited having handled roommate conflicts (Bowman & Bowman, 1995b).

The issue of roommate conflicts continues to be a problem RAs encounter. However, it is not the only conflict in residence halls (Palmer, 1996; Schuh et al., 1988; Twale & Burrell, 1994). Some of the conflicts RAs encounter involve some form of sexual abuse. A study conducted in 1986 showed that 14% of the female RAs studied encountered conflicts of a more serious nature such as sexual assault and rape (Schuh et al., 1988).

In addition, sometimes RAs mitigate conflicts that involve a weapon. One study researched the types of violent acts cited in residence halls by RAs. Three hundred seventy-four RAs documented 5,472 incidents of violence. Two hundred eighty-seven of these incidents were categorized as most serious and 20 of them involved a weapon (Palmer, 1996).

Although the results of one study revealed little change in the types of conflicts that occur in residence halls, it is not safe to assume that conflicts are of the same nature no matter the educational institution. Conflict can and does vary accordingly by institution due to certain campus dynamics. However, these campus dynamics cannot be classified by type of institution. For instance, a historically black college does not always experience conflicts different from a predominantly white institution (Twale & Burrell, 1994).

What can differ among institutions are the factors that impact how RAs handle these conflicts. For example, characteristics such as age, class status, number of years as an RA, and training influence the types of conflicts an RA encounters (Twale & Burrell, 1994: Twale & Burrell, 1995). These factors impact the RAs' self-rating of how prepared they feel to handle certain conflicts (Twale & Burrell, 1994).

RAs as Paraprofessionals

The idea of employing paraprofessional students throughout student affairs is not a new concept. These students have been used to assist with orientation (Ender & Stumpf, 1984), academic advising (Habley, 1984), student activities and counseling centers (Ender, 1984). Although paraprofessionals are found throughout various aspects of higher education, residence life was most likely the first to employ such students (Winston, Ullom & Werring, 1984). Over the years the RA's role in the residence hall has evolved from solely disciplinarian and communicator to include counselor, advisor, and programmer (Winston et al., 1984). This scope in job responsibilities proves to be beneficial for all involved: the students, the RAs, as well as the institution and residence life department.

Peer professionals such as RAs provide students who live in the residence halls with a role model. This can be especially beneficial in freshmen dominated halls (Greenleaf, 1974). Residents have the opportunity to work with RAs who receive specific training to help address and meet the needs of students. With this training, RAs play an important part in the growth and development of students living in residence halls (Pullar, 1974).

Students desire to become RAs for multiple reasons. For example, free or discounted room, board, or even tuition motivates some students to apply for the RA position. However, others may apply for the opportunity to work with others, their peers, and trained professionals. On the other hand, some students see the RA position as career preparation for life after college (Greenwood & Lembcke, 1974). Whatever the reason, students who become RAs have the opportunity to develop and strengthen life-long skills such as interpersonal skills, the ability to work with others, and the opportunity to gain a deeper sense of responsibility (Greenleaf, 1974).

Furthermore, colleges and universities employ paraprofessionals like RAs for multiple reasons. First, employing RAs instead of full-time professionals saves institutions and residence life programs a large amount of money (Greenleaf, 1974; Greenwood & Lembcke, 1974). These students can enforce institutional policies, advise, counsel, and program for students at a cost less expensive then it would be to higher and train a professional.

Another reason institutions employ RAs is because they can relate to and challenge students in ways professionals cannot (Greenleaf, 1974). Also, due to being a peer and living in the residence halls, RAs have more opportunities to connect with students and to build

meaningful relationships with them, relationships that professionals cannot forge (Greenwood & Lembcke, 1974).

Finally, RAs are in a position to serve as a liaison between the residence life department, and the students (Greenleaf & Lembcke, 1974). This communication helps the residence life department meet its established goals (Pullar, 1974).

Like other paraprofessional staff positions, there are disadvantages to employing students to work in residence halls. One disadvantage has to do with supervising such employees. Deciding who is responsible for supervising RAs is an important decision. There are multiple supervisory approaches one could take. However, it can be difficult learning which style is most appropriate (Winston et al., 1984).

Professionals must also be aware of the law. RAs must be carefully trained on appropriate behaviors for addressing sensitive issues and areas. In addition, RAs must be informed of the importance of documenting and notifying others about possible hazards occurring in residence halls. Lack of fulfilling this responsibility can lead to injury and possible charges of negligence filed by individual residents (Winston et al., 1984).

Finally RAs must be trained as to when confidentiality is appropriate and when it is not. Even though it may be a private conversation, RAs must learn they have limits. Once these limits are reached, RAs are responsible for involving others when information about illegal behavior is shared, or when individuals are in danger (Winston et al., 1984).

It is important to note that while there are advantages and disadvantages to hiring RAs, the residence life idea of hiring paraprofessionals has become everyday practice in multiple areas throughout higher education. Many of the same benefits and areas of concern are evident no matter where paraprofessionals are employed. However, for these students and programs to continue being successful, it is important that paraprofessionals receive appropriate and thorough training specific to their responsibilities.

RA Training

Given the research provided, one can see that student conflicts do occur in residence halls (Bowman & Bowman, 1995-b: Palmer, 1996; Schuh, et al., 1988; Twale & Burrell, 1995). The chance of an RA encountering a conflict is high. However, before a study researching how RAs perceive their mediation training and how professional staff members perceive the training of

RAs in mediation, it was first necessary to review literature on RA training. This literature can be grouped into three topics: basic RA training, the effects of RA training, and RA training in conflict mediation. All three topics provide information relevant to this study.

Basic RA Training

According to Upcraft and Pilato (1982), there is little consensus among professionals as to how staff should train RAs. All professionals agree that RAs need training, but there is often disagreement regarding the method, the timing, and the information to be covered (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Winston & Buckner, 1984). Therefore, due to various student and campus climates, residence life staff members train these paraprofessional staff members as they feel necessary. Although methods used to train RAs vary by institution (Bowman & Bowman, 1995-a), some of the most popular methods used are workshops, seminars, academic credit courses (Twale & Burrell, 1994; Winston & Buckner, 1984) as well as retreats and in-service meetings (Bowman & Bowman, 1998). These techniques provide an effective way to prepare and inform RAs about the skills and knowledge essential for one to be successful.

Residence life professionals train RAs to educate them about university policies, department protocol, campus resources, and student issues (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). In addition, training helps prepare students for their new role in residence halls. Effective training provides RAs with skills and resources that influence the way they perform on the job and how they handle daily responsibilities (Murray et al., 1999; Twale & Burrell, 1994).

RA training may be extremely basic sometimes as it covers rules and regulations. It is during this time that RAs are educated about many important topics such as university policies and protocol, job responsibilities and student development (Bowman & Bowman, 1995a). In addition, to effectively assist students, RAs are educated in other areas such as substance abuse, security, medical emergencies, and health issues (Twale & Burrell, 1994). RA training also focuses on the development of professional referral (Bowman & Bowman, 1995a; Wesolowski, Bowman & Adams, 1997), and human relation skills (Bowman & Bowman, 1995a). These skills are extremely important for RAs to possess as they work with others on a daily basis. However, residence life professionals responsible for training RAs realize the many demands placed on these students and offer other helpful training sessions. These sessions focus on various areas such as time management and leadership skills (Bowman & Bowman, 1995a).

Knowing and understanding this information is imperative for an RA to be successful. Informational training on specific topics increases the knowledge base and capabilities that RAs have. However, how residence life professionals choose to train RAs in these areas can affect how RAs approach their job.

Effects of RA Training

With all these differences in RA training, it comes as no surprise that training has various effects. Realizing this, professionals have studied the apparent effects RA training has on these paraprofessional students as they perform their job related responsibilities (Murray et al., 1999; Twale & Burrell, 1994). For example, the results of a study conducted by Murray et al. (1999) revealed that RAs who participated in any type of training, no matter its length, experienced favorable changes regarding behavior.

A similar study revealed that RAs who participated in training had reduced stress levels in certain areas. For example, the time at which a training program is administered effects the amount of stress RAs feel as they perform their job responsibilities. This study focused on the effects of a pre-employment training course that provided RAs with the opportunity to practice skills learned in class before working in the residence halls. RAs trained in this class experienced less stress on three different stress scales than RAs who concurrently participated in the course while employed, and RAs who never participated in the course but who had been employed longer than the other two groups. The three areas in which RAs trained before employment faced a decrease in stress levels were emotional resiliency, counseling skills, and confrontive skills (Winston & Buckner, 1984).

For the most part, RAs who participated in some type of training experienced different changes than those who did not. There are some differences in performance depending upon the training. For example, RAs who participated in a cognitive modality rated lower their capabilities to confront another colleague or use disciplinary actions than RAs who participated in a vicarious modality or an experiential modality (Wesolowski, et al., 1997).

Information such as that discussed allows residence life professionals to evaluate their RA training programs. For example, programs that mainly lecture (cognitive modality) RAs about counseling skills and confrontive skills may need to be redesigned to provide RAs with time to practice (experiential modality) these skills. In addition, professionals may also use this

information to provide RAs with programming that will benefit them personally throughout the year.

RA Training and Conflict Mediation

With the number of conflicts cited in the residence halls, it is apparent that conflict of some sort will occur. For RAs to effectively handle various conflicts, they should be thoroughly trained in mediation. According to RAs, proper training in conflict mediation is an area that requires attention (Murray et al. 1999). In a study conducted by Hayes and Balogh (1990), professional staff mediators are usually not involved in the training of college and university mediators. This finding poses a dilemma. Residence life professionals such as area coordinators and resident directors are often responsible for training the paraprofessional student staff. This does not mean that RAs do not receive training in conflict mediation. However, it does mean that RAs may not receive the training necessary to make them effective and competent mediators.

Academic courses such as an RA class may be used to teach RAs about the importance of conflict resolution. However, recent study results revealed that conflict mediation is rarely addressed during class. Out of 124 institutions offering academic classes to train RAs, only eight reported covering conflict resolution as part of the curriculum (Bowman & Bowman, 1995a). Not only do few RA classes offer sessions in conflict resolution, but the chance that they are being taught about conflict mediation by non-certified professionals is rather high.

Differences Among Male and Female RAs

Various researchers have conducted studies researching differences among male and female RAs (Clark, Williams, Wachs & Ghose, 2000; Hetherington, Oliver & Phelps, 1989; Komives, 1992). The results of these studies revealed similarities and differences in the way RAs perceived and experienced their paraprofessional role. To answer all of the research questions, it was necessary to review literature regarding gender and RAs.

One study sought to research how male and female RAs accomplished their goals according to predetermined patterns (achieving styles), and to determine differences among the motivation these RAs had regarding the desire to express any extra job effort as well as job satisfaction. To determine this, the researcher administered and analyzed the results of the L-BLA Achieving Styles Inventory Form as well as a revised version of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. A total of 270 male RAs and 338 female RAs participated in this study. The achieving styles used in this study consisted of three domains as defined by the Lipman-

Bluemen, Handley-Ilaksen and Leavitt model. They are Direct Domain, Instrumental Domain, and Relational Domain. Each domain consisted of three styles of which individuals associate themselves. For example, the three styles included under the Direct Domain are intrinsic, power, and competitive. The three characteristics included in the Instrumental Domain are social, reliant and personal instrumentals. Finally, the characteristics included in the Relational Domain are vicarious relational, contributory relational, and collaborative relational. It is characteristic for participants to clearly identify with some styles and perhaps not identify with others (Komives, 1992).

The results of this study revealed that there were some differences and similarities among male and female RAs. For example, both male and female RAs preferred the achieving styles associated with the Direct Domain and Relational Domain. When job satisfaction results were analyzed, the information showed that female RAs rated job satisfaction by their ability to complete tasks independently while male RAs rated job satisfaction by their ability to persuade others to do what was asked (Komivies, 1992).

Research studying the burnout effects of RAs by gender was conducted in 1989 (Hetherington et al., 1989). The researchers used the Maslach Burnout Inventory to collect the data. This study revealed that female RAs were more likely than their male coworkers to experience emotional exhaustion. According to the researchers, this is a result of female RAs focusing on the needs of other individuals before addressing their own. When compared to regular students, the study found that RAs experienced a greater sense of personal accomplishment. This is a result of the RA position's responsibilities and rewards (Hetherington et al., 1989).

In addition, years of socialization have affected how men and women approach certain aspects of the RA position. For example, women are more willing to divulge personal feelings and establish closer, peer relationships that are more complex than those formed by men. This difference in relationships causes women to be more considerate and less aggressive when addressing conflict as opposed to men (Blimling, 1998).

This literature review provided information regarding the various aspects of mediation as well as the multiple areas surrounding residence hall living and RAs. Included in this review is a small portion of information regarding RA training and conflict mediation. It is apparent that

there is very little information on this topic. This gap in the literature is addressed in the present study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to determine how RAs and professional staff at three public institutions perceived conflict mediation training provided to RAs.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

1. Are RAs being trained in mediation skills?

2. Is there a difference between the degree to which RAs report being trained in mediation and the degree to which residence life professionals report RAs are trained in mediation?

3. How frequently do RAs use mediation training?

4. Is there a difference between the degree to which RAs use mediation training and the degree to which residence life professionals report RAs use of this training?

5. Is there a difference between the degree to which male RAs use mediation training and the degree to which female RAs use this training?

6. Do RAs value mediation training?

7. Is there a difference between the degree to which RAs value mediation training and the degree to which residence life professionals report RAs value this training?

8. Is there a difference between the degree to which male RAs value mediation training and the degree to which female RAs value this training?

Sample

The sample used in this study consisted of a possible 823 RAs and professional staff members at four public institutions. Only RAs and fulltime, professional staff members who met the criteria established by the researcher were used in this study. The researcher picked the institutions used in this study because of their geographic proximity to her home institution, allowing the researcher to conduct on-campus visits if required.

Participants considered in this study met the criteria established by the researcher specific for the two groups surveyed. One criterion used by the researcher regarding the selection of RAs was the amount of time spent as an RA. Participants had to be an RA for at least three months. This ensured that all RAs had interacted with the residents in their building.

The other criterion established by the researcher was participation in a fall training workshop of some type. Residence life professionals at the selected institutions were responsible for providing this training to RAs. Finding participants who met this particular criterion was not difficult, as most institutions require RAs to attend fall training in preparation for the opening of the residence halls. The data collection procedure took place mid-spring semester. Therefore, with the exception of midyear hires, all RAs should have completed a fall training workshop.

The researcher established two criteria for the professional staff. The first criterion required that the professional staff be employed fulltime. This criterion was established to prevent Head RAs and Graduate Hall Directors from being included in the professional staff sample.

The other criterion established by the researcher was that all professional staff members participating in this study had to be involved in RA training. The researcher established this criterion to ensure that all professional participants were involved in the same training the sample RAs experienced. This criterion was especially important in that many of the research questions focused on the perceptions of the RAs and professional staff. Therefore, it was essential that the two sample groups referred to the same fall training when responding to the questions.

<div align="center">Instrumentation</div>

To answer the research questions guiding this study, the researcher used a self-designed, fixed-choice questionnaire. Using a questionnaire made the data collection and analysis an efficient process. The researcher chose to use a self-designed questionnaire for several reasons. First, designing the survey allowed the researcher to ask the questions she thought would best answer the research questions. Second, questionnaires often allow participants to complete the survey on their own time and in their setting of choice (Philliber, Schwab & Sloss, 1980). These qualities appealed to the researcher. Finally, questionnaires are cost-effective (Singleton & Straits, 1999).

The researcher used a computer software program to design an online questionnaire (see Appendix A). This method allowed the researcher to eliminate the need for paper copies as well as the costs associated with mailing and photocopying. In addition, after discussion with a residence life professional, it was decided that an online survey would be more desirable for a director of residence education to administer as opposed to a paper survey, which could have potentially decreased the return rate.

<div align="center">25</div>

The questionnaire began by asking the participants to answer general demographic questions. Examples of the demographic information requested included employment status, gender, whether participants participated in fall training, and the number of months RAs had been employed. The demographic information was used to identify responses that met the criteria established by the researcher. The questionnaire did not ask for any identifying information. Therefore, the researcher maintained participant anonymity.

The questionnaire requested participants to respond to the questions by identifying the responses that most resembled their perceptions. The responses were listed as a Likert scale and varied accordingly by question. Participants could select only one response. This survey asked three leading questions. They were: "Did RAs at your institution receive training in the following areas? " How often do RAs use the following skills?" and "How important are these skills to RAs?" Each question asked the participants to refer to the same list of mediator skills identified by the researcher through an exhaustive review of the literature. Included on that list of skills were: (a) listening, (b) observing non-verbal communication, (c) being empathetic, (d) remaining impartial, (e) remaining neutral, (f) maintaining confidentiality, (g) participating as a facilitator, (h) asking questions, (i) generating solutions, and (j) developing consensus. The questionnaire did not provide space for additional comments. The first leading question required participants to select one response (yes, no, don't remember) to indicate whether RAs received training in conflict mediation. The second leading question required participants to select one response (not at all, occasionally, often or very often) to indicate how often RAs used the skills associated with conflict mediation. Finally, the third leading question required participants to select one response (not important, somewhat unimportant, important, or very important) to indicate how important RAs found the mediation skills.

Validity

Validity is defined as the ability to measure that which is intended (Philliber et al., 1980; Singleton & Straits, 1999). The researcher took multiple steps to ensure that the survey used in this study was valid.

Expert Review. First, with the help of experts, the researcher carefully reviewed the questions and responses included on the survey. Any items that could have been misinterpreted or confusing were either revised or eliminated.

The researcher chose to work with this panel of experts when designing the questionnaire for multiple reasons. Two of the panel members were faculty members at a large, land-grant university. Both had served in student affairs positions throughout their careers in higher education and had completed numerous research projects. The third panel member had also been active in higher education, primarily in residence education. In addition, the third panel member was very involved in RA training and helped facilitate a residence education course for new RAs. All three, panel members had doctorates in student affairs. The final questionnaire reflected all corrections, revisions, and suggestions made by the panel. Expert reviews such as the one listed above, are one way to enhance the content validity of quantitative studies (Borg & Gall, 1989).

Pilot Study. Another method used by the researcher to test for validity was the pilot study. Before the questionnaire was sent to any participants, the researcher used a pilot group of RAs and professional staff members, who met the established criteria, to test the questionnaire. The researcher asked those who participated in the pilot study for feedback regarding the questionnaire. This was done by adding additional questions specific to the instrument's clarity and organization to the end of the questionnaire.

The researcher chose to conduct a pilot study because this method ensured that the questions asked elicited information that would answer the research questions (Philliber et al., 1980). After reviewing the responses provided by the pilot group, it was decided that no changes needed to be made to the questionnaire. The feedback provided by this group was favorable and commented on the questionnaire's simplicity. The use of pilot studies is another way researchers can enhance the validity of a study (Creswell, 1994).

Reliability

Reliability is defined as the consistency and stability of the research instrument (Philliber et al., 1980; Singleton & Straits, 1999). To guarantee the reliability of these questionnaires, the researcher calculated one reliability coefficient using the Chronbach Alpha Model. This coefficient helped the researcher determine how free of variance the questionnaire was (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 259). The results of the reliability coefficient are reported in Chapter Four.

Data Collection

To collect the data necessary to answer the research questions asked in this study, the researcher first obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board on Research Using

Human Subjects (IRB). Once approved, the researcher identified the directors of residence education at four public institutions located in Virginia. Once the researcher formed a list of directors, she then contacted them via email (see Appendix B). This email introduced the researcher as well as the purpose of the study. The email asked for assistance in the way of participants and informed the schools that if they participated they would receive an electronic copy of the completed research study as well as results specific to their institution. The ability to provide the directors with this information was found to be appealing and a good incentive for the institutions' participation. The email also requested the participation of the director to serve as the point of contact for his school. The researcher chose to notify the directors of the study by email to allow time to consider their staff's participation in the study.

Four institutions agreed to participate in the study via email. Through email and telephone conversations, the researcher was able to answer any questions the Directors of Residence Education had as well as learn about possible hindrances that may have affected the return rate, such as the various spring break schedules. The researcher used this information to adjust the timeline as necessary. These conversations also allowed the researcher to determine how many RAs and professional staff members were invited to participate in the study. A total of 605 RAs and 89 professional staff members were asked to participate by their individual institutions as well as by the researcher. The date as to when participants were asked to complete the survey varied according to each institution. This was done to ensure that institutional breaks such as spring break were accounted for in order to provide each institution two weeks to complete the questionnaire.

Once the institutions participating in the study were identified, the researcher sent an email message to the directors and to the participants (Appendix C). Included in this email was the link to the online questionnaire. Also included in this email were directions on how to complete the questionnaire and submit the results as well as the date on which the questionnaire was to be completed. The researcher also included her contact information for the benefit of the directors. The directors of residence education were responsible for distributing this email as well as a reminder email composed by the researcher to their staff.

Six days after the initial email was distributed to the participants, the researcher sent the follow-up email to the directors (Appendix D). This email reminded the directors and the

participants about the research and the timeline guiding the study. The email asked those who had not already completed the questionnaire to do so.

Data Analysis

Once the researcher disabled the link to the online survey she converted the results into an Excel worksheet. This allowed the results to then be opened into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) spreadsheet. This is the software the researcher used to analyze the data.

First, the researcher reviewed the demographic responses and eliminated those that did not meet the pre-established criteria. Second, to answer the eight research questions guiding the study, the researcher ran various statistical analyses on the remaining results. Because only comparisons between two groups were made and because the data were categorical in nature, the researcher ran crosstabs and chi square tests. The researcher made comparisons among male and female RAs as well as RAs and professional staff members. These comparisons allowed the researcher to answer the eight research questions.

In conclusion, the researcher collected the data in the manner listed above to render the desired results. The outlined data collection procedures allowed the researcher to effectively obtain and analyze the appropriate information necessary to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Chapter Four reports the results of the data collection and is organized into three sections. The first section describes changes to the original data collection procedures. The second section describes demographic characteristics of the sample. The third and final section of the chapter describes the results of the study. These results are reported in order of the research questions.

Changes in Data Collection

Two changes were made to data collection procedures. First, the original study design included the participation of four institutions. Mid-way through the data collection process one institution withdrew its participation to avoid taxing the RAs with additional responsibilities. The researcher decided to continue with the study and did not search for a replacement institution. This reduced the total sample size to a possible 613 participants.

Second, the original study design reported that the researcher would send one email reminding participants about the study. To increase the response rate, the researcher sent a second reminder email two weeks into the study (Appendix E).

Description of the Sample

A total of 211 respondents (34%) out of a possible 613 staff members responded to the questionnaire. After the criteria of the study were applied, 32 responses were eliminated. This group of 179 participants represented 31% percent of those known to be eligible for the study. The demographic characteristics of the sample used are described and summarized in Table 1.

Twenty percent (N=36) of the participants were professional residence life staff members. The other 80 percent of participants (N=143) were Resident Advisors (RAs). One hundred and seventy-nine of the participants reported their gender. Thirty-four percent of the participants (N=60) were male, while 66 percent of the participants (N=118) reported they were female.

All 179 respondents participated in fall training and had been in their position three months or longer. Two percent (N=3) of the participants had been employed in residence life for three to five months. Forty-five percent (N=80) of the participants had been employed for six to eight months and 54 percent (N=96) of the participants had been employed in residence life for nine or more months. All but one percent (N=2) of the participants indicated the institution at which they were employed. Due to rounding, some of these percentages may not equal 100.

Table 1

Characteristics of the sample (N=179)

Characteristics	n	%
Status		
Professional	36	20
RA	143	80
Gender		
Male	60	34
Female	118	67
Participation in Fall Training		
Yes	179	100
No	0	0
Months of Employment in Residence Life		
3-5 months	3	2
6-8 months	80	45
9 plus months	96	54
Institution of Employment		
One	64	36
Two	32	18
Three	81	45

Missing data may result in some totals being less than 179 or 100 percent

Once the researcher collected all useable responses (N=179), she calculated a reliability coefficient on the data. This coefficient had a value of .82 using the Chronbach Alpha Model. The reliability coefficient was sufficiently high to allow the researcher to make comparisons between groups.

<div align="center">Results Reported by Research Question</div>

Once the data analyses were complete, the researcher used the results to answer the study's eight research questions. In the case of the chi-square analyses, response categories were collapsed if the frequency to any one category was less than five. Responses are provided in the following paragraphs.

Research Question Number One

The first research question asked if RAs were trained in mediation skills. To answer this question, the researcher analyzed the participants' responses provided to questions six through 15 on the research instrument. The majority of the responses was of a positive connotation and indicated that RAs were trained in mediation skills. The weakest positive response provided by participants was a 59 percent agreement that RAs were trained in listening. The other responses received higher percentages indicating that RAs received training in the rest of the mediation skills. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Research Question Number Two

The second research question asked if there was a difference in perception as to whether or not RAs were trained in mediation. Recollections between RAs and professional staff were compared. Again, to answer this question, the researcher conducted chi-square analyses on the skills listed in questions six through 15 of the research instrument. No significant difference was found at the .05 level. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Research Question Number Three

To answer the third research question, which asked how often RAs used mediation training, the researcher analyzed the responses from the next set of skills provided on the survey instrument. After analyzing the data it was determined that RAs do use mediation skills. For example, item 25, which asked how often RAs helped to develop a consensus, resulted in a 62 percent agreement that RAs used this skill often or very often. Sixty-two percent represented the lowest affirmative response for this specific research question. The rest of the responses were

Table 2

Chi-Square Results on Received Training in the Following Areas by Employee Status

Item	Yes	No	Don't Know	χ^2	df	p
Listening						
Professional	23(64%)	10(28%)	3(8%)	.58	2	.749
RA	82(57%)	49(34%)	12(8%)			
Total	105(59%)	59(33%)	15(8%)			
Observing/Identifying Non-Verbal Communication						
Professional	32(89%)	2(6%)	2(6%)	2.66	2	.265
RA	118(83%)	21(15%)	4(3%)			
Total	150(84%)	23(13%)	6(3%)			
Being Empathetic						
Professional	33(94%)	1(3%)	1(3%)	5.06	2	.080
RA	111(78%)	18(13%)	14(10%)			
Total	144(81%)	19(11%)	15(8%)			
Remaining Impartial						
Professional	31(86%)	3(8%)	2(6%)	2.28	2	.320
RA	129(90%)	12(8%)	2(1%)			
Total	160(89%)	15(8%)	4(2%)			
Remaining Neutral						
Professional	29(81%)	4(11%)	3(8%)	5.04	2	.080
RA	124(88%)	15(11%)	2(1%)			
Total	153(86%)	19(11%)	5(3%)			
Maintaining Confidentiality						
Professional	35(97%)	0(0%)	1(3%)	3.70	2	.157
RA	132(92%)	10(7%)	1(1%)			
Total	167(93%)	10(6%)	2(1%)			

Table 2 (Continued)

Chi-Square Results on Received Training in the Following Areas by Employee Status

Item	Yes	No	Don't Know	χ^2	df	p
Facilitating						
Professional	31(86%)	4(11%)	1(3%)	2.95	2	.228
RA	134(94%)	6(4%)	2(1%)			
Total	165(93%)	10(6%)	3(2%)			
Questioning						
Professional	31(89%)	3(9%)	1(3%)	2.13	2	.345
RA	111(78%)	22(15%)	10(7%)			
Total	142(80%)	25(14%)	11(6%)			
Generating Solutions						
Professional	31(86%)	3(8%)	2(6%)	1.78	2	.410
RA	133(93%)	6(4%)	4(3%)			
Total	164(92%)	9(5%)	6(3%)			
Developing Consensus						
Professional	27(77%)	4(11%)	4(11%)	.11	2	.948
RA	108(76%)	19(13%)	15(11%)			
Total	135(76%)	23(13%)	19(11%)			

Due to rounding, total percentages may not equal 100%higher percentage indicating that

The rest of the responses were a higher percentage indicating the RAs surveyed agreed they used the mediation skills often or very often. Results are summarized in Table 3.

Research Question Number Four

The next research question focused on any difference in degree to which RAs indicated they used mediation training and the degree to which residence life professionals indicated RAs used this training. To answer this question, the researcher conducted chi-square analyses on the skills listed in questions 16 through 25 of the research instrument. One significant difference was found at the .05 level. Results are summarized in Table 3.

When responding to how often RAs remained neutral, again RAs reported a significantly higher response. Seventy-six (76%) of the RAs remained neutral often or very often. Forty-two percent (42%) of the professionals indicated that RAs remained neutral and kept from forming rash judgments (Chi-Square = 4.63, df = 1, p = .031).

Research Question Number Five

The fifth research question asked if there was a difference in perception between how often male RAs reported using mediation training and how often female RAs reported using this training. To answer this question, the researcher conducted chi-square analyses on the responses provided by RAs and sorted by gender. Three significant differences were found at the .05 level. Results are included in Table 4.

One question included on the research instrument asked how often RAs showed empathy. This question was significant at the .05 level. Seventy percent (70%) of the male RAs indicated that they showed empathy often or very often. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the female RAs indicated that they showed empathy often or very often (Chi-Square = 6.51, df = 2, p = .039).

The second significant difference indicated that female RAs participated as a facilitator without taking sides more frequently than the male RAs indicated. Eighty-eight female RAs (75%) reported using this skill often or very often while 33 (55%) of the male RAs indicated using this skill often or very often (Chi-Square = 7.00, df = 1, p = .008).

When asked how often RAs asked questions to encourage others to talk about what was bothering them, female RAs indicated using this skill more than the male RAs indicated. Eighty-six (73%) of the female RAs indicated using this skill often or very often. Thirty-two (53%) of the male RAs indicated using this skill often or very often (Chi-Square = 7.05, df = 2, p = .029).

Table 3

Chi-Square Results on How Often RAs Use the Following Skills by Employee Status

Item	Not At All or Occasionally	Often or Very Often	χ^2	df	p
Listening					
Professional	9(25%)	27(75%)	2.98	2	.226
RA	20(14%)	121(85%)			
Total	29(16%)	148(83%)			
Observing/Identifying Non-Verbal Communication					
Professional	9(25%)	27(75%)	.52	1	.473
RA	28(20%)	115(80%)			
Total	37(20%)	142(79%)			
Being Empathetic					
Professional	5(14%)	31(86%)	1.21	2	.546
RA	30(21%)	112(78%)			
Total	35(20%)	143(80%)			
Remaining Impartial					
Professional	12(33%)	24(67%)	1.38	1	.241
RA	34(24%)	109(76%)			
Total	43(26%)	133(74%)			
Remaining Neutral					
Professional	15(42%)	15(42%)	4.63	1	.031
RA	34(24%)	109(76%)			
Total	49(27%)	130(73%)			
Maintaining Confidentiality					
Professional	4(11%)	32(89%)	.86	1	.354
RA	25(18%)	118(83%)			
Total	29(16%)	150(84%)			

Table 3 (Continued)

Chi-Square Results on How Often RAs Use the Following Skills by Employee Status

Item	Not At All or Occasionally	Often or Very Often	χ²	df	p
Facilitating					
Professional	15(42%)	21(58%)	2.00	1	.157
RA	42(29%)	101(71%)			
Total	57(32%)	122(68%)			
Questioning					
Professional	10(28%)	25(69%)	.620	2	.733
RA	47(33%)	94(66%)			
Total	57(32%)	119(67%)			
Generating Solutions					
Professional	12(33%)	24(67%)	.618	2	.734
RA	43(30%)	98(69%)			
Total	55(31%)	122(68%)			
Developing Consensus					
Professional	16(44%)	20(56%)	.430	1	.512
RA	55(39%)	88(62%)			
Total	71(40%)	108(60%)			

Due to rounding or missing data, total percentages may not equal 100%

Table 4

Chi-Square Results on How Often RAs Use the Following Skills by RA Gender

Item	Not At All or Occasionally	Often or Very Often	χ^2	df	p
Listening					
Male	14(23%)	45(75%)	3.62	2	.163
Female	15(13%)	102(86%)			
Total	29(16%)	147(83%)			
Observing/Identifying Non-Verbal Communication					
Male	17(28%)	43(72%)	3.13	1	.077
Female	20(17%)	98(83%)			
Total	37(21%)	141(79%)			
Being Empathetic					
Male	18(30%)	42(70%)	6.51	2	.039
Female	17(14%)	100(85%)			
Total	35(20%)	142(80%)			
Remaining Impartial					
Male	19(32%)	41(68%)	1.60	1	.206
Female	27(23%)	91(77%)			
Total	46(26%)	132(74%)			
Remaining Neutral					
Male	22(37%)	38(63%)	3.79	1	.052
Female	27(23%)	91(77%)			
Total	49(28%)	129(73%)			
Maintaining Confidentiality					
Male	11(18%)	49(82%)	.277	1	.599
Female	18(15%)	100(85%)			
Total	29(16%)	149(84%)			

Table 4 (Continued)

Chi-Square Results on How Often RAs Use the Following Skills by RA Gender

Item	Not At All or Occasionally	Often or Very Often	χ^2	df	p
Facilitating					
Male	27(45%)	33(55%)	7.00	1	.008
Female	30(25%)	88(75%)			
Total	57(32%)	121(68%)			
Questioning					
Male	27(45%)	32(53%)	7.05	2	.029
Female	30(25%)	86(73%)			
Total	57(32%)	118(66%)			
Generating Solutions					
Male	23(38%)	37(62%)	3.17	2	.205
Female	32(27%)	84(71%)			
Total	55(31%)	121(68%)			
Developing Consensus					
Male	27(45%)	33(55%)	0.99	1	.321
Female	44(37%)	74(63%)			
Total	71(40%)	107(60%)			

Due to rounding or missing data, total percentages may not equal 100%

Research Question Number Six

Research question number six asked if RAs valued mediation training. To determine the answer, the researcher analyzed the responses provided to questions 26 through 35 on the research instrument. After analysis, it was determined that RAs valued mediation training. There was unanimous agreement that RAs valued these mediation skills. For example, items 34 and 35 on the research instrument, which asked how important assisting others to generate solutions to solve conflict and helping to develop consensus among parties in conflict were to RAs, both received a 90 percent agreement that these skills were important or very important to RAs. The ninety percent agreement resulted in the lowest percent of positive responses. Therefore, RAs felt that these mediation skills are important or very important. Results are recorded in Table 5.

Research Question Number Seven

The seventh research question asked if there was a difference in perception between the degree to which RAs indicated they valued mediation training and the degree to which residence life professionals indicated RAs valued this training. The researcher conducted chi-square analyses on the data recorded for questions 26-35 on the research instrument. One significant difference was found at the .05 level. Results are recorded in Table 5.

The twenty-sixth question on the research instrument sought to determine how important RAs and professional staff members indicated listening carefully to others was to RAs. One hundred forty-three (100%) RAs indicated that this skill was either important or very important to them. Thirty-five professional staff members (97%) indicated that RAs found this skill to be important or very important (Chi-Square = 4.00, df = 1, p = .046).

Research Question Number Eight

The final research question asked if there was a difference between the degree to which male RAs indicated RAs valued mediation training and the degree to which female RAs indicated RAs valued this training. One significant difference was found at the .05 level. Results are summarized in Table 6.

The significant difference found among the difference in perceptions between male and female RAs regarded how important it was to assist others as they generated solutions to resolve conflict. Females reported a significantly higher response. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the female RAs found this skill to be important or very important while 83 percent of the male RAs found this skill to be very important (Chi-Square = 6.55, df = 2, p = .038).

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Table 5

Chi-Square Results on How Important These Skills are to RAs by Employee Status

Item	Unimportant or Somewhat Unimportant	Important or Very Important	χ²	df	p
Listening					
Professional	1(3%)	35(97%)	4.00	1	.046
RA	0(0%)	143(100%)			
Total	1(1%)	178(99%)			
Observing/Identifying Non-Verbal Communication					
Professional	1(3%)	35(97%)	.253	2	.881
RA	4(3%)	138(97%)			
Total	5(3%)	173(97%)			
Being Empathetic					
Professional	0(0%)	36(100%)	1.56	1	.211
RA	6(4%)	137(96%)			
Total	6(3%)	173(97%)			
Remaining Impartial					
Professional	1(3%)	35(97%)	.580	2	.748
RA	2(1%)	140(98%)			
Total	3(2%)	175(98%)			
Remaining Neutral					
Professional	3(8%)	32(89%)	5.43	2	.066
RA	2(1%)	138(97%)			
Total	5(3%)	170(96%)			
Maintaining Confidentiality					
Professional	0(0%)	36(100%)	.509	1	.475
RA	0(0%)	141(99%)			
Total	0(0%)	177(99%)			

Table 5 (Continued)

Chi-Square Results on How Important These Skills are to RAs by Employee Status

Item	Unimportant or Somewhat Unimportant	Important or Very Important	χ^2	df	p
Facilitating					
Professional	2(6%)	33(92%)	2.28	2	.320
RA	2(1%)	137(96%)			
Total	4(2%)	170(95%)			
Questioning					
Professional	1(3%)	34(94%)	1.40	2	.496
RA	7(5%)	135(94%)			
Total	8(5%)	169(94%)			
Generating Solutions					
Professional	1(3%)	34(94%)	1.63	2	.442
RA	12(8%)	129(90%)			
Total	13(7%)	163(91%)			
Developing Consensus					
Professional	3(8%)	33(92%)	.07	1	.790
RA	14(10%)	129(90%)			
Total	17(10%)	162(91%)			

Due to rounding or missing data, total percentages may not equal 100%

Table 6

Chi-Square Results on How Important These Skills are to RAs by RA Gender

Item	Unimportant or Somewhat Unimportant	Important or Very Important	χ^2	df	p
Listening					
Male	0(0%)	60(100%)	.511	1	.475
Female	1(1%)	117(99%)			
Total	1(1%)	177(99%)			
Observing/Identifying Non-Verbal Communication					
Male	2(3%)	58(97%)	.597	2	.742
Female	3(3%)	114(97%)			
Total	5(3%)	172(97%)			
Being Empathetic					
Male	3(5%)	57(95%)	.738	1	.390
Female	3(3%)	115(98%)			
Total	6(3%)	172(97%)			
Remaining Impartial					
Male	2(3%)	58(97%)	1.98	2	.372
Female	1(1%)	116(98%)			
Total	3(2%)	174(98%)			
Remaining Neutral					
Male	4(7%)	55(92%)	4.88	2	.087
Female	1(1%)	114(97%)			
Total	5(3%)	169(96%)			
Maintaining Confidentiality					
Male	0(0%)	60(100%)	1.03	1	.311
Female	2(2%)	116(98%)			
Total	2(1%)	176(99%)			

Table 6 (Continued)

Chi-Square Results on How Important These Skills are to RAs by RA Gender

Item	Unimportant or Somewhat Unimportant	Important or Very Important	χ^2	df	p
Facilitating					
Male	2(3%)	55(92%)	2.12	2	.346
Female	2(2%)	114(97%)			
Total	4(2%)	169(95%)			
Questioning					
Male	3(5%)	56(93%)	.30	2	.861
Female	5(4%)	112(95%)			
Total	8(5%)	168(94%)			
Generating Solutions					
Male	8(13%)	50(83%)	6.55	2	.038
Female	5(4%)	112(95%)			
Total	13(7%)	162(91%)			
Developing Consensus					
Male	9(15%)	51(85%)	3.11	1	.078
Female	8(7%)	110(93%)			
Total	17(10%)	161(90%)			

Due to rounding or missing data, total percentages may equal more than 100%

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The results of this study revealed five significant differences in perception among residence life professionals and RAs as well as differences in perception among male and female RAs existed. All results as well as implications for future practice and research are discussed in Chapter Five of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study sought to determine if there were differences in perception regarding RA training, the use of mediation training, and the importance of these skills by employee status and by gender.

This chapter discusses the results of the study in four sections. The first section presents the findings based on the research questions posed in the study. The second section relates findings to previous research. The third section offers implications for future practice and research, while the fourth section discusses limitations of the study.

Discussion

Possible explanations concerning the five significant differences or lack of significant differences indicated by data results are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Research Question Number One

The first research question posed in this study asked if RAs were trained in mediation. Participants were asked to acknowledge whether they had or had not received training in certain areas identified as essential to the mediation process. Both RAs and professional staff members at the institutions studied agreed that RAs received mediation training. One explanation for this agreement is the importance of conflict mediation. Research shows that conflicts do occur in residence halls (Bowman & Bowman, 1995b; Palmer, 1996; Schuh et al., 1988; Twale & Burrell, 1994). To help control and resolve these conflicts, professionals responsible for training RAs ensure that mediation training is emphasized and clearly highlighted. Professionals apparently were also sure to include clear definitions and explanations concerning these skills as well as a discussion clarifying when it is appropriate to use them.

Research Question Number Two

The second research question explored differences in perception among RAs and professional employees regarding RA training in conflict mediation. Results of the chi-square analyses revealed no significant differences in perception. RAs and professionals both agreed that RAs are trained in conflict mediation.

One explanation for the similar perceptions relates to the expectations established for professional and paraprofessional staff members. Although overall job descriptions between the two staff may have numerous differences, there are similarities. One of the similarities is participation in training. Because both RAs and professional staff members attend and actively participate in some type of training workshop, it is understandable as to why some of their perceptions regarding training would be the same.

Research Question Number Three

The third research question asked how frequently RAs used mediation training. The data provided by the participants indicated that RAs and professional staff agreed that RAs used these mediation skills often or very often. For example, both RAs and professionals strongly agreed that RAs were empathetic and that they did maintain appropriate confidentiality. One reason for this agreement is the relationship between RAs and their supervisors. RAs agreed that they used the mediation skills often or very often. RAs who communicate frequently with their supervisors keep them informed as to what is taking place on their hall as well as any issues they are handling. Conversations such as these can influence a supervisor's perception regarding the job an RA is doing or how often an RA uses specific skills. Therefore, supervisors who communicate frequently with their staff would most likely agree with the RAs' perceptions.

Research Question Number Four

The fourth research question sought to compare results provided by RAs and professionals. This question identified one significant difference in perception between the two groups.

RAs indicated that they remained neutral more often than professionals indicated. One possible explanation for this difference is due to RAs' placements in residence halls. These paraprofessionals are the liaison between the residence life department and the students. Due to their position, they are most likely going to encounter issues first. Typically, once professionals receive word about an issue or concern it has already been resolved by the RA. This is not surprising since both professionals and paraprofessionals surveyed agreed that RAs did receive training in conflict mediation.

Another possible explanation for this difference relates to the possibility that RAs overestimated their ability to remain neutral. Student participants included in this survey may believe they are extremely capable of remaining neutral. They may think that because they

received training in this area, they know when it is appropriate to use it and how to do so. Through interaction and conversations with RAs, professionals may feel that RAs are not as neutral as they think when working with residents. Therefore, professionals may not think RAs are as strong in this area and may need extra training to become proficient.

In addition, the professionals may have indicated that RAs did not use this skill because of the RAs' closeness to the subject. RAs live in the residence halls and interact with their residents frequently. Therefore, professionals may feel that RAs are too close to the situation to remain objective and perhaps do not remain as neutral as the RAs think they do.

Research Question Number Five

The fifth research question focused on difference in perception among male and female RAs. The question specifically asked if these two groups had different perceptions regarding how often RAs used mediation training. The results of the chi-square analyses revealed three significant differences in the responses.

The three significant differences identified by the fifth research question indicated that female RAs were empathetic, served as a facilitator, and questioned others more often than the male RAs did. Literature has revealed that differences between male and female RAs exist (Clark, Williams, Wachs & Ghose, 2000; Hetherington, Oliver & Phelps, 1989; Komives, 1992). A possible explanation for these significant differences relates to an ethic of care associated with women. Gilligan's Theory of Women's Moral Development indicates that women do certain things because they are motivated by an ethic of care (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). This theory is supported by a study that also indicated that females focus on the needs of others before focusing on their own (Hetherington et al., 1989). These skills require one to interact with others. Female RAs may find that using these skills not only assists them as they help resolve conflict, but also allows them to build relationships with their residents, a job aspect important to female RAs. Knowing this information helps explain why female RAs indicated using these three skills more often than what male RAs indicated.

Research Question Number Six

The sixth research question asked if RAs valued mediation training. The responses provided by the participants indicated that RAs did value this training. One possible explanation for this finding could relate to previous conflicts RAs have encountered. Due to their length of employment, the RAs surveyed in this study were more than likely to have encountered at least

one conflict. The fact that RAs have encountered conflict and have been the primary person responsible for resolving it may influence why they indicated these skills are important.

Research Question Number Seven

The seventh research question explored differences in perception regarding how important RAs found mediation training and how important professionals think RAs found mediation training. The results of the chi-square analyses conducted on multiple skills associated with mediation revealed one significant difference between the two perceptions.

One hundred percent (100%) of the RAs indicated that listening to others was important or very important to them. Ninety-seven (97%) of the professional staff indicated that they believed RAs found this skill to be important or very important. An explanation for this could be a result of the interactions RAs have with their residents. For example, RAs are responsible for getting to know their residents and building community on their hall. In order for RAs to accomplish both of these responsibilities they must interact with residents. This includes holding conversations where one learns about the other. RAs can then use this information to assist residents with concerns and implement programs attractive to the community. The best way for RAs to be successful with this responsibility is by listening to their residents. With such high positive responses from both groups, it is important to remember that while this difference was statistically significant, the practical significance of this finding may be limited.

Research Question Number Eight

The eighth and final research question asked if there was a difference in perception among male and female RAs regarding how valuable mediation training is. One significant difference was found.

Female RAs valued assisting others as they generated solutions to resolve conflict more than what the male RAs indicated valuing this skill. A possible explanation for this difference relates to the relationships female RAs have with residents. Literature indicates that females often focus on the needs of others (Hetherington et al., 1989). Female RAs working with others may value generating solutions to resolve conflict more than male RAs because they may feel more responsible to their residents. In order to help resolve the conflict and help maintain interpersonal-relationships, which are important to female RAs, these paraprofessionals may feel it is very important to generate multiple solutions providing those in conflict options to choose from. Multiple options provide those in dispute the ability to select one that not only resolves the

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conflict but also benefits everyone as much as possible. Therefore, a female RA may feel they assist others more by helping to provide them with multiple solutions to resolve the conflict.

The results of this study revealed six significant differences between perceptions among professionals and RAs as well as male and female RAs. Although these differences are important, the lack of significant findings is important as well.

An explanation for this finding relates to the paraprofessional staffing model. Paraprofessional students are selected, hired, and trained to perform a job. In this case, these students are employed to assist peers living in residence halls as well as assist residence life professionals on a college campus. In order for paraprofessional programs of this type to be successful it is critical for RAs to be specifically taught in multiple areas. The lack of differences found in the data confirms that paraprofessional models are working successfully.

<div style="text-align:center">Relationship of the Findings to Prior Research</div>

It is important to consider the findings of this research study in relation to prior research on the topics of RA training and differences among male and female RAs. Previous research studies have addressed the various methods used to train RAs (Bowman & Bowman, 1995; Bowman & Bowman, 1998; Twale & Burrell, 1994; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Winston & Buckner, 1984), the topics covered in RA training (Bowman & Bowman, 1995; Murray et al., 1999; Twale & Burrell, 1994; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Wesolowski, Bowman & Adams, 1997) as well as differences categorized by gender (Clark et al., 2000, Hetherington, Oliver & Phelps, 1989; Komives, 1992). However, few studies were conducted that researched RAs and conflict mediation. That is why the current study is important.

The current study sought to examine the perceptions of professional staff and RAs as well as male and female RAs regarding training in conflict mediation, the utility of these skills, and their importance. The results of this study indicated that there are differences in perception among the surveyed groups. This research is important because it contributes to gap of literature by addressing RAs and conflict mediation. Residence life professionals and student affairs professionals may use the results of this study in numerous ways and this particular research may encourage future studies to be conducted.

Implications for Future Practice and Research

This study has implications for future practice and research. While this study did not examine every aspect of RA training in conflict mediation or all differences among employees categorized by status or gender, it does provide a foundation on which future research can build. The information found in this study may be useful to residence life professionals as well as student affairs professionals.

This study's findings illustrated that differences in perception among fulltime professionals and paraprofessional RAs did exist. Residence life professionals may want to address these differences in RA training. For example, professionals responsible for designing RA training may request that a certified mediator train both the RA and the professional staff. Instead of the professionals designing and providing mediation training, they then become active participants. Again, a modification such as this could change differences in perception.

Professionals responsible for training RAs may also want to conduct similar study that focuses on other training areas such as departmental protocol or peer counseling. A study such as this one would indicate differences between perceptions between professionals and RAs as well as male and females. The results of this study would indicate to professionals if there was consensus among the groups as to whether RAs are being trained in the questioned areas. These results would help professionals identify areas that need attention as well as indicate whether the paraprofessional training model being implemented is successful.

The study's findings also illustrated that differences between male and female RAs existed. Again, this is something that may need to be addressed in future practice.

The results of the study indicated that females reported using certain skills more often or that they found certain skills to be more important than their male coworkers. These differences are important and should be addressed by residence life professionals for several reasons.

First, if male and female RAs do not understand the differences involved with individual use and value of mediation skills it could lead to problems. It is possible that this lack of understanding can cause conflicts of its own especially among coeducational RA staffs. These conflicts can hinder productivity and possibly decrease staff morale.

Second, if professionals take the time to discuss these differences they provide their staff with a valuable learning opportunity. Intentional discussion about these differences can provide RAs the opportunity to learn how the opposite sex uses these mediation skills. While neither

approach is more appropriate than the other, it does provide RAs the opportunity to gain another valuable skill set.

In addition, to address these differences, residence life professionals may also want to collect statistics concerning the number and types of conflicts occurring in co-educational and single-sex residence halls. Using this information, professionals might be able to illustrate how important each mediation skill is no matter the type of hall one is assigned to work. This will also give new RAs an idea as to possible conflicts for which to expect in residence halls.

Finally, residence life professionals may incorporate mediation role-plays into training. Using conflicts that have occurred before, RAs would gain mediation practice by addressing these mock conflicts. This method is good for two reasons. First, it allows RAs to gain experience using mediation skills. Second, it allows both male and female RAs to observe one another as they handle these conflicts. Structured conversations after these role-plays provide male and female RAs the opportunity to discuss how they felt and what they thought was or was not successful. This training method may not change perceptions regarding what mediation skills are used more often or which skills are more important, but it will allow males and females to become familiar with how each other implements these skills into practice.

In addition, this study may appeal to other student affairs professionals who employ paraprofessional students. The results of this study revealed that there were differences in perception between professional and paraprofessional employees who work within residence life. Therefore, it may be of interest for other student affairs professionals to study any differences in perception between student employees and those responsible for training them. To do this these professionals can adapt the research method used in this study so it is applicable to their specific field. Some of these areas may include orientation, counseling, and tutoring services.

The present study also had significance for future research. This study examined differences in perception among professionals and RAs as well as male and female RAs regarding mediation training, the use of these skills, and their importance. An additional study could examine differences in perception among RAs and their direct supervisor. The results of this study may impact various aspects of RA training by limiting supervisors to present on specific topics.

The current study included all RAs at selected institutions. The responses provided by this sample were not categorized by new or returning status. A future study could look at

mediation skills as well as other important RA skills and analyze the results according to employment history. This study could research how often these groups use the skills as well as how valuable RAs perceive these skills. Professionals responsible for RA training could make certain adjustments that address these differences in perception. For example, professionals could implement specific workshops and training sessions to meet the needs of new RAs. A study of this type would contribute to the knowledge on RA training.

A future study may also research differences in mediation training by type of institution. The present study surveyed three public institutions and grouped all responses by employment status or gender. The researcher did not separate responses by institution. Future research could make comparisons according to type of institution. Results from such a study would further expand the information available on mediation training provided to RAs and provide institutions with valuable data representative of their training program.

The current study only analyzed data concerning the conflict mediation training RAs received as well as the utility of these skills and their importance as perceived by selected populations. A future study researching the types of conflicts RAs encounter could also be conducted. The results of this study would provide residence life professionals with statistics that could impact RA training. For example, if results indicate that RAs spend most of their time handling community or floor problems, professionals could adjust training to provide RAs with strategies capable of resolving specific conflicts.

The current study did not research methods used to train RAs, but studied whether RAs received training in conflict mediation. A study researching the various methods employed by residence life professionals to train RAs in mediation may yield results that could impact future training workshops and how they are presented.

Furthermore, the current study did not ask who was responsible for training RAs in conflict mediation. A future study could ask this question and compare results accordingly. For example, results provided by RAs trained by fulltime professionals could be compared to responses provided by RAs trained by certified mediators. The results of this study may or may not impact who will provide future trainings in conflict mediation.

Finally, a study that compares how important RAs thought skills were before training to how important RAs thought skills were after training could also be conducted. The current study researched RA perceptions regarding specific skills after they had already participated in

training. Future research could study the perceptions RAs have before training and compare them to the perceptions they have after training. This information could provide professionals with skills that may require more detailed training.

<div style="text-align: center;">Limitations</div>

As with all research, the present study had limitations. Of the 613 participants invited to participate in the study, only 211 (34%) completed the questionnaire. Due to the criteria established by the researcher only 179 responses (31%) were used when analyzing the data. The limited response rate may have influenced the findings.

Second, only RAs and professional staff members were invited to participate in this study. House managers from on-campus housing and graduate hall directors were not asked to complete the questionnaire. Including responses from these two groups may have altered the results.

The timing of the study may be another limitation. This study was conducted during the spring semester. Participants involved in fall training workshops provided by residence life departments supplied all of the responses used in this study. The results of this study may have been different if data were collected in the fall semester as opposed to the spring semester.

<div style="text-align: center;">Conclusion</div>

Despite these limitations, the current study provided important information regarding RA training in conflict mediation. Prior research has studied multiple aspects of RA training as well as gender differences among these paraprofessional students. However, little research studying the training and perceptions professional staff members as well as RAs have regarding mediation training has been completed.

The results of this study revealed that the majority of respondents reported similar responses regarding mediation training, how often these skills are used, and the importance of these skills. There are however, some areas in which significant differences were found. These differences are important enough in that they cannot be overlooked when designing future RA training or other paraprofessional training programs. Acknowledging these differences may provide paraprofessional students with the extra skills and support necessary to resolve conflict.

However, the lack of significant differences is just as noteworthy. The overwhelming consensus between the perceptions indicated that RAs are being trained in conflict mediation.

This finding illustrates how successful thoroughly planned and implemented paraprofessional staffing models are at reaching their desired goals.

The occurrence of conflict in residence halls is not disappearing. To maintain order in these living quarters and to help students develop and grow as individuals, it is important that residence life professionals as well as RAs remember the utility and benefits associated with conflict mediation.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire for Residence Life Employees

Please take a moment to complete the following survey. The questionnaire requires only a few minutes to complete and will provide valuable information to the researcher. This is an anonymous questionnaire. Your identity will not be determined. If you feel uncomfortable throughout the process, you may stop at any time.

Select one response per question. Once the questionnaire is complete click on the submit button to send your results. Thank you for your participation.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
Please complete the following demographic questions.

1. Status
◉ Fulltime Residence Life Professional
○ RA
○ None of the Above
2. Gender
○ Male
○ Female
3. Did you participate in Fall Training?
○ Yes
○ No
4.How long have you been employed in Residence Life?
○ 0-2 Months
○ 3-5 Months
○ 6-8 Months
○ 9+ Months
5. At which institution do you work?
[   ]

Please respond to the following questions regarding your role in residence life.
Be sure to MARK THE BUBBLE THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THE APPROPRIATE QUESTION.

Do RAs at your institution receive training in the following areas?
6. How to carefully listen to a speaker
○ Yes
○ No
○ Don't Know

7. How to carefully observe and identify non-verbal communication

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Know

8. How to be empathetic

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Know

9. How to remain impartial without displaying any opinions or judgments

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Know

10. How to remain neutral without forming any rash judgments

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Remember

11. How to maintain confidentiality within established limits

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Know

12. How to participate as a facilitator without seeming to take sides

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Remember

13. How to ask questions that encourage someone to discuss what is bothering them

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Remember

14. How to assist others generate possible solutions to solve the conflict

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Know

15. How to develop consensus among parties

○ Yes

○ No

○ Don't Remember

How often do RAs use the following skills:
16. Carefully listening to those speaking

○ Not At All

○ Occasionally

○ Often

○ Very Often

17. Carefully observing and identifying non-verbal communication

○ Not At All

○ Occasionally

○ Often

○ Very Often

18. Showing empathy towards others

○ Not At All

○ Occasionally

○ Often

○ Very Often

19. Remaining impartial without displaying any opinions or judgments

○ Not At All

○ Occasionally

○ Often

○ Very Often

20. Remaining neutral without forming rash judgments

○ Not At All

○ Occasionally

○ Often

○ Very Often

21. Maintaining appropriate confidentiality

○ Not At All

○ Occasionally

○ Often

○ Very Often

22. Participating as a facilitator who does not take sides

○ Not At All

○ Occasionally

○ Often

○ Very Often

23. Asking questions to encourage one to talk about what is bothering them

○ Not At All

○ Occasionally

○ Often

○ Very Often

24. Assisting others as they generate solutions to solve conflict

○ Not At All

○ Occasionally

○ Often

○ Very Often

25. Developing consensus among parties in conflict

○ Not At All

○ Occasionally

○ Often

○ Very Often

How important are these skills to RAs?

26. Listening to others carefully

○ Unimportant

○ Somewhat Unimportant

○ Important

○ Very Important

27. Observing and identifying non-verbal communication

○ Unimportant

○ Somewhat Unimportant

○ Important

○ Very Important

28. Showing empathy towards others

○ Unimportant

○ Somewhat Unimportant

○ Important

○ Very Important

29. Remaining impartial without displaying any opinions or judgments

○ Unimportant

○ Somewhat Unimportant

○ Important

○ Very Important

30. Remaining neutral without forming rash judgments

○ Unimportant

○ Somewhat Unimportant

○ Important

○ Very Important

31. Maintaining appropriate confidentiality

○ Unimportant

○ Somewhat Unimportant

○ Important

○ Very Important

32. Participating as a facilitator without taking sides

○ Unimportant

○ Somewhat Unimportant

○ Important

○ Very Important

33. Asking questions encouraging one to talk about what is bothering them

○ Unimportant

○ Somewhat Unimportant

○ Important

○ Very Important

34. Assisting others as they generate solutions to solve conflict

○ Unimportant

○ Somewhat Unimportant

○ Important

○ Very Important

35. Developing consensus among parties in conflict

○ Unimportant

○ Somewhat Unimportant

○ Important

○ Very Important

Appendix B

Letter to Directors of Residence Education

Hello <insert name>,

My name is Amanda Isaac and I am a graduate student enrolled in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at Virginia Tech. I am currently working on my thesis and I would appreciate your assistance in the way of participants.

After serving as an RA for two and a half years and after researching conflict mediation in higher education, I have learned that conflict is a common occurrence in all aspects, especially housing. Since RAs are trained as paraprofessionals to live and work in residence halls, it is common for them to handle student conflicts.

Considering my own personal knowledge and the literature I have read, I have decided to research the perceptions of male and female RAs and professional staff members regarding mediation training.

I know this is a busy time of year for your department. However, this proves to be a worthwhile study, as it will provide you and your staff with the results of the study and with the results specific to your institution. This information could lead to valuable changes made to RAs training, which, in turn, can help RAs better fulfill their job related responsibilities regarding mediation. A copy of the questionnaire is attached to this email.

With your permission, I would like to survey your RAs and fulltime professional staff members. The instrument to be used is a short self-designed questionnaire that asks questions regarding RA training in conflict mediation, the use of specific mediation skills, and the importance of these skills as perceived by those surveyed.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to serve as the contact person for your institution. This would require you to distribute an email to the Residence Life staff. Included in this email will be a link to my survey, which will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. I will have no contact with your staff, nor will I know who has completed the survey. Therefore, anonymity is guaranteed.

 I will contact you soon by phone to follow-up with this email and to answer any questions you many have.

Thank you for your time,

Amanda Isaac
Graduate Student
Higher Education and Student Affairs
Virginia Tech

Appendix C

First Email to Participants

Dear <insert name>

Enclosed in this email is a note to be sent to your staff introducing them to the research study they will be participating in. The link to the online survey is included at the end of the email note. If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me by phone (540-232-1557) or email (aisaac@vt.edu). Please delete this section before forwarding the email onto your staff.

Thank you,
Amanda Isaac

Greetings Residence Life Staff Members,

My name is Amanda Isaac and I am inviting you to participate in an important study regarding RA training and conflict mediation.

The purpose of this survey is to determine how RAs and residence life staff members view RA training in conflict mediation and the use of these skills. Your assistance is necessary as your results will help contribute to the body of literature written on RA training and mediation. In addition, your institution will be provided with group results that reflect the overall opinions of its employees.

Your input is extremely valuable and will contribute greatly to the results of this research. The survey is available online and will take 10-15 minutes to complete.

Please click on the link below or paste it into your web browser to be directed to the survey. Please select only one response per question. This can be done by clicking your cursor over the response that best represents your opinion. When you have completed the survey, click on the submit button in order to record your results. Responses will be confidential and anonymous.

Please complete the survey by April 1, 2002.
http://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1015618893357

Thank you,
Amanda Isaac

Appendix D

Reminder Email Sent to Participants

Dear <insert name>

Please forward this reminder concerning the research study to your staff. I will be disabling the link that connects one to the questionnaire in four days, April 1, 2002. If you have any questions, feel free to call me (540-232-1557) or email me (aisaac@vt.edu).

Thank you,
Amanda Isaac

Dear Residence Life Staff Member:

You will recall that an email was sent to you asking for your participation in a research study. If you have already completed the survey, I thank you for your assistance.

If you have not already completed the survey, please click on the link below or paste it into your web browser to be directed to the survey. Please select only one response per question. This can be done by clicking your cursor over the response that best represents your opinion. When you have completed the survey, click on the submit button in order to record your results. Responses will be confidential and anonymous.

The link will be disabled in seven days.
http://survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1015618893357

Thank you for your assistance,
Amanda Isaac

Reminder Email Sent to Participants

Dear <insert name>,

This is the last email I will be asking you to send to your staff regarding the research study your institution is participating in. the link will be disabled on Monday, April 8, 2002. If you have any questions, feel free to call me (540-232-1557) or email me (aisaac@vt.edu).

Thank you,
Amanda Isaac

Dear Residence Life Staff Member:

As you will recall, you have been receiving emails asking you to complete a short on-line survey. <insert school name> is one of three institutions selected to participate in this study. Currently your institution has a <insert return rate> return rate. This email serves as a final reminder asking for your participation in this study.

If you have already completed the survey, thank you for your time. If you have not already completed the survey, please click on the link below or paste it into your web browser to be directed to the survey. Please select only one response per question. This can be done by clicking your cursor over the response that best represents your opinion. When you have completed the survey, click on the submit button in order to record your results. Responses will be confidential and anonymous.

The link will be disabled on April 8, 2002.

  http://www2.survey.vt.edu/survey/entry.jsp?id=1015618893357

Thank you for your assistance,
Amanda Isaac

Amanda D.G. Isaac

Current: 209 Main Campbell ♦ Blacksburg, VA 24060 ♦ 540.232.1557 ♦ aisaac@vt.edu
Permanent: 15003 Hanover Road ♦ Upperco, MD 21155 ♦ 410.833.2189

An organized and efficient Campus Life Coordinator with detailed knowledge of
Greek systems and residential student needs in a variety of university environments

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

- Over 5 years' experience implementing Student Affairs and Greek Life activities and programs.
- Possess experience creating campus life workshops, training Resident Advisors, and managing fiscal budgets.
- Skilled at preserving university standards within large campus environments.
- Able to handle multiple projects, with excellent leadership and communication skills.

GREEK LIFE EXPERIENCE

VIRGINIA TECH, Blacksburg, VA   2001 – present
Graduate Assistant for Greek Life
 ➢ Devise and implement Peer Education courses focusing on student leadership and interpersonal communication skills. Also maintain course records, including attendance, reservations, guest speakers, and correspondence.
 ➢ Generate articles, produce, and distribute quarterly campus Greek newsletter.
 ➢ Contribute to development and recruitment of new members to university Greek system.
 ➢ Introduce new leadership workshops, guest speaker programs, appreciation socials, and group retreats.
 ➢ Advise National Pan-Hellenic Council and attend weekly meetings with chapter president.
 ➢ Attend Interfraternity Council, National Pan-Hellenic Council, and Panhellenic Council executive and general body meetings.

WESTERN MARYLAND COLLEGE, Westminster, MD   Summer 2001
Practicum in College Activities, Greek Life
 ➢ Efficiently designed New Member Education workshops to familiarize incoming members with Greek terminology, time management skills, alcohol education, and university hazing policies.
 ➢ Organized fall recruitment schedule and goals for multiple fraternities and sororities, and conducted campus marketing campaign to publicize informal recruitment.
 ➢ Assimilated national standards and principals to existing Greek organizational system.

VIRGINIA TECH, Blacksburg, VA   2001
Practicum in Greek Life
 ➢ Advanced and evaluated formal sorority recruitment gatherings.
 ➢ Collaborated with Events Committee to plan and facilitate campus Greek Week meetings and events.
 ➢ Attended staff meetings; Interfraternity Council, National Pan-Hellenic Council, and Panhellenic Council executive and general body meetings.

RESIDENCE LIFE EXPERIENCE

VIRGINIA TECH, Blacksburg, VA   2001
Graduate Hall Director
 ➢ Supervised daily activities and responsibilities of 12 Resident Advisors.
 ➢ Conducted weekly staff meetings and periodic performance assessments.
 ➢ Approved and supported programs to inform students and advisors about important issues, including a financial aid workshop and a "Pillow Talk" open discussion forum for men and women.
 ➢ Successfully completed internal training and development programs, including Head Staff training.
 ➢ Organized and conducted 3-credit Resident Advisor course to present topics such as roommate conflict, eating disorders, and alcohol abuse.
 ➢ Supported university Hall Council and managed fiscal accounts and budgets.
 ➢ Maintained superior security standards for dormitory of over 320 female residents.
 ➢ Provided on-call campus crisis management coverage for over 8,900 students.

WESTERN MARYLAND COLLEGE, Westminster, MD   Summer 2001
Practicum in Residence Life
> ➢ Trained and supervised summer Resident Assistants in application of university protocol, emergency procedures, daily operations, and special-need student communication.
> ➢ Acted as College Representative for incoming students and their parents.
> ➢ Analyzed preference data and guided housing assignments for over 300 incoming students.

VIRGINIA TECH, Blacksburg, VA   2000
Community Advisor
> ➢ Coordinated publicity and stress management programs for Resident Advisor staff.
> ➢ Guided 3 university Hall Councils and managed fiscal accounts and budgets.
> ➢ Directly advised Hall Presidents about existing issues, upcoming programs, and student well being.
> ➢ Supervised daily tasks and scheduling for Program Resource Room Monitors.

HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY, High Point, NC   1997 – 2000
Resident Advisor
> ➢ Effectively fostered open communication between Resident Advisors and student community.
> ➢ Assisted in daily maintenance of residence hall.
> ➢ Served as a student liaison for university policy application and adaptation.

ELON COLLEGE, Elon, NC   Summer 1999
Student Activities and Residence Life Intern
> ➢ Researched security system vendors and recommended solutions for campus-wide implementation.
> ➢ Evaluated student preference data and guided housing assignments.
> ➢ Assisted with summer camp activities and programs.
> ➢ Planned operational details for university's Organization Fair.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE EXPERIENCE

VIRGINIA TECH, Blacksburg, VA   2001 – present
Project Success Facilitator
> ➢ Conduct weekly sessions with students on academic probation to discuss topics related to scholastic performance, including study skills, time management, reading ability.
> ➢ Coordinate discussion topics and session methodology with Project Success team.
> ➢ Maintain attendance records and session-related documentation.

EDUCATION

Master of Arts, Higher Education and Student Affairs, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Estimated graduation May 2002
Bachelor of Arts, Human Relations and French, High Point University, High Point, NC

HONORS AND LEADERSHIP

Graduate Student Representative, Virginia College Personnel Association
Social Chair, Association for Student Development
Co-Chair, Case Study Competition for Graduate Student Faculty Forum
New Member Educator, Phi Mu Fraternity
Order of the Omega – Greek Honor Society

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American College Personnel Association
Association of Fraternity Advisors
National Association of Student Personnel Administrators
Virginia College Personnel Association