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**Influence of Emotional Intelligence on  
Residential Student Leaders’  
Enactment of Leadership**

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**Influence of Emotional Intelligence on  
Residential Student Leaders'  
Enactment of Leadership**

by

**Fran'Cee Louise Brown-McClure, B.S.; M.S.W.**

**Dissertation**

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## **Dedications**

I would not be alive today if it had not been for the grace of God. All that I am and every gift and talent that I possess is because of God. I am thankful that he has allowed me the opportunity to be in this place at this time.

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter McKenzie Ida McClure. I remember being pregnant with you during coursework and wondering how I was going to make it through with a young child. You are my inspiration and motivation for everything that I do. Your support of me is priceless and to you I am just mommy, and that is the most important title I will ever be blessed with.

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If I missed anyone charge it to my head and not my heart. We finished!

**Influence of Emotional Intelligence on  
Residential Student Leaders'  
Enactment of Leadership**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Richard Reddick

College is an opportunity for students to engage in meaningful leadership opportunities. Being a Resident Assistant presents one opportunity for students to engage in leadership. Resident Assistants (RAs) are an essential component of the undergraduate housing experience. Resident Assistants work with students during their best and most challenging collegiate moments. The college student population changes every year, but Resident Assistants are not being trained to meet the needs of a changing population.

This qualitative, phenomenological study was designed to explore what influence, if any, a course grounded in emotional intelligence has on an RA's enactment of leadership. This study was conducted at a highly selective, highly residential higher education institution in the Western United States. The site was chosen because of its highly residential nature and its offering of a course grounded in emotional intelligence offered to first year RAs.

Review of literature on emotional intelligence emphasizes the important nature of the construct as well as its importance and promise for utilization by leaders (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Lam & O’Higgins, 2012; Nelson & Low, 2003) . While there is some literature surrounding emotional intelligence and its use and application for RAs, it primarily explores the subject via a quantitative methodology (Jaegar & Caison, 2006; Liptak, 2005; . Through this research, I addressed this gap, utilizing a qualitative methodology, to provide accounts of the lived experiences of participants. This study also expanded the literature by providing an analysis of a course based in emotional intelligence as a possible way of incorporating emotional intelligence skills into RAs’ leadership experiences.

Three findings emerged from this study. Those finding are as follows. First, that there is a perceived difference in RAs’ leadership as a result of knowledge gained in an emotional intelligence course. Second, RAs are able to apply emotional intelligence constructs into their role after reflecting and adjusting their personal leadership styles. Finally, RAs perceive certain emotional intelligence constructs as essential to their role.



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## **Chapter One: Introduction to the Study**

College can be one of the most transformative experiences of a young adults' life. Kuh, Croup, Shuce, Kinzie, and Gonyea(2008) noted long-term cognitive, social, and economic benefits to individuals. These benefits come through student engagement in the classroom as well out of the classroom. Student engagement is the combination of effort that the students give to purposeful educational activities and the effort that institutions give to providing and utilizing those purposeful educational activities (Kuh, 2001). Higher education institutions have an opportunity to impact students through a wide variety of activities such as clubs, fraternities and sororities, athletic groups, and residential living.

Students living in residence have an opportunity to engage with their peers on an academic, social, and emotional level in a way that non-residential students do not. Resident assistants (RAs), who are students themselves, act as the conduits of these opportunities for other students. RAs are often upperclassmen that have been selected by professional student affairs staff to be role models, mentors, resources, and friends to other students living in residence. The role is large and complex and can have a great impact on the RAs themselves as well as the community and students with which they work.

Schroeder, Mable, and Associates (1994) state, "All efforts to reform higher education have overlooked the educational potential of residence halls" (p. 4). The residence halls are a space of engagement, community, and opportunity on most university campuses. Pascarella, Teranzini, and Blimling (1994) discuss the

importance of residential living in regards to student retention and integration:

“Residential living during college is consistently one of the most important determinants of a college student’s level of involvement or integration into the various cultural, social, and extracurricular systems of the institution” (pp. 25-26).

The conduits of the residential experience are the Resident Assistants (RAs). The RAs help to bring a large number of students from various backgrounds together in a common space. RAs primarily achieve this by “establishing a personal relationship with students through daily contact with them” (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990, p. 24). In order to establish these personal relationships, RAs must be properly trained, provided with leadership development opportunities, and consistent support and guidance. This chapter introduces the current study that explores how Resident Assistants’ perception of how a course on emotional intelligence impacts their enactment of leadership. Emotional Intelligence is defined as the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p.5).

The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) evaluated college student learning in their report *Learning Reconsidered* (2004). The purpose of the report was to “... re-examine some widely accepted ideas about conventional teaching and learning, and to question whether current organizational patterns in higher education support student learning in today’s environment” (ACPA & NASPA, 2002, p. 1). This

report was a response to the work convened by a panel from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Greater Expectations National Panel, 2002). *Greater Expectations*, released in 2002, called for “improvements in the quality of student learning and challenged higher education to provide a practical liberal education that would prepare students for life, work, and civic participation in an increasingly complex world” (ACPA & NASPA, 2002).

This re-examination of learning gives higher education institutions and administrators an opportunity to revamp the co-curricular experience as well as the curricular experience (ACPA & NASPA, 2006). Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling (1999) state that “the most powerful source of influence on student learning appears to be student’s interpersonal interactions, whether with peers or faculty” (p. 619).

One area for increased attention in regards to combining curricular and co-curricular learning is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence has emerged primarily in the business field and leadership studies, but it is spreading to other disciplines. As previously stated Mayer and Salovey (1997) define emotional intelligence (EI) as “the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others ” (p.5). Goleman (1998) notes that “effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: they all have a high degree of emotional intelligence” (p.94).

The concept of emotional intelligence can be applied broadly across the collegiate spectrum. It applies not only to an academic discipline, but also to a set of

practical life skills that can assist all students long after they matriculate through college. Research related to the characteristics that are sought by recruiters and prospective employers in graduating college students suggests that emotional intelligence skills are as important as, if not more important than, job-related skills (Liptak, 2005). Emotional intelligence has primarily been found in literature surrounding leadership and management studies (Brown, Bryant, & Reilly, 2006; Butler & Chinowsky, 2006; Gardner & Stough, 2002; Lam & O'Higgins, 2012) as well as K-12 studies (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2003; Morales, 2008; Obiakor, 2001; Shelton, 2003). Research on Emotional Intelligence and college students is a growing area of interest in the literature.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to some researchers, the roles and responsibilities of RAs are increasing with the changing landscape of the student population, but the ways that institutions train and select students are not (Jaegar & Caison, 2006). On the other hand, previous research has found a number of factors contributing to the success and failure of RAs (Bierman & Carpenter, 1994; Bowman & Bowman, 1995; Denzine & Anderson, 1999; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Jaegar & Caison, 2006;). These studies have also concluded that more research and emphasis should be placed on training and developing RAs in and outside of their role.

Similarly, Burchard (2001) described the primary role of an RA as fostering an atmosphere for academic, social, cultural, and emotional growth in their residence hall. The RAs are essential leaders of residential communities. "The

education and development of students as leaders has long served as a central purpose for institutions of higher education as evidenced in mission statements and the increased presence of both curricular and co-curricular leadership development programs” (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Emotional Intelligence training provides a combination of both curricular and co-curricular training. Jaegar and Caison (2006) examine the role of emotional intelligence in selecting RAs. The selection process is the very beginning of an RA’s tenure. Others have focused on utilizing emotional intelligence among other characteristics as a predictor of performance (Wu & Stemler, 2008). While previous research has focused on predictors of performance, and utilizing emotional intelligence quotients in the selection process few have addressed how emotional intelligence training through a course may impact RA’s leadership performance. Thus inquiry related to the enactment of leadership after such training is needed.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore what influence, if any, a course grounded in Emotional Intelligence has on an RA’s perception of his/her enactment of leadership. RAs are an increasingly significant part of the overall student support system. As previous researchers noted, the “resident assistant serves the most comprehensive role in the student affairs division” (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990,p. 24). These students receive training and support, but it is necessary to understand how a course intervention can affect their leadership.



## **Research Questions**

As higher education institutions have begun promoting leadership development for all students, emotional intelligence has become an essential component of that development. This study will address the following questions:

1. What differences do RAs at a private, elite university in the Western U.S. perceive in their leadership during and after formal exposure to emotional intelligence?
2. How do RAs discuss how they apply emotional intelligence concepts into their leadership role?
3. What emotional intelligence constructs do RAs perceive to be most essential to their leadership?

## **Brief Overview of the Methodology**

This study will utilize a method of qualitative research known as phenomenology. Phenomenology as a research approach has been used to dig deep into complex issues that need to be explored beyond the surface (Goulding, 2004). Current research on emotional intelligence is primarily quantitative using emotional intelligence tests to derive results (Bar-On, 1997; Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2012; Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Lyons & Schneider, 2005; Parker et al., 2006). This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of participants in a way that is best captured through qualitative research.

This study will be conducted at a higher education institution in the Western geographic region of the U.S. The institution is situated in suburban area with close

proximity to major cities. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.) classifies the institution as a private, not for profit university, that is more selective, large, 4 year, and highly residential. This institution was chosen because it is highly residential and guarantees on campus housing to its students for four years. The institution has recently implemented a course grounded in emotional intelligence as a requirement for all first year RAs. This study utilizes Seidman's (2012) interview format with a slight adaption. The interviews will be comprised of two individual interviews with nine participants. The participants will be selected using purposive homogenous sampling (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms that will be used are defined below.

*All Frosh* refers to a type of house that only houses first year students.

*Bar-On EQ-I* is a 133 item self-report measure of performance with a five-point response scale, e.g. 1 'very seldom true or not true of me' to 5 'very often true or true of me', the measure produces an Emotional Quotient (EQ-i) total score composed of five subscales: intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood (Bar-On, 1997).

*Emotional Intelligence* is the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

*Empathy* is the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people (Goleman, 2004).

*Frosh* is a first year student.

*Four Class* refers to a type of house that has students from all four classifications in the institution: freshmen-senior.

*Highly Selective University* is one whose test score data for first-year students indicate that these institutions are selective in admissions (Carnegie, 2010)

*House Type* refers to three different types of houses that are available for students to staff in. The house types are all frosh, four class, and upper class. The house types are defined in this section.

*Junior* is a student that has completed 108 academic units. Juniors have typically been in college for three years.

*Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT)* is a performance test that provides an estimate of a person's ability by having them solve problems about emotions, or problems that require the use of emotion (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2001).

*Millenials* are the generation born after 1982 and began coming to college in 2000 (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

*Motivation* is a passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status (Goleman, 2004).

*Quarter* is a ten-week grading period. It was designed to provide accelerated learning for capable students. It is primarily utilized in West Coast institutions.

*Resident Assistant* is an undergraduate student employed by an institution of higher education to serve students who reside in on campus housing.

*Self-Awareness* is the ability to recognize and understand one's moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others (Goleman, 2004).

*Self-Regulation* is the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods (Goleman, 2004).

*Social Skill* is proficiency in managing relationships and building networks (Goleman, 2004).

### **Limitations**

A qualitative research study allows for a thick rich description of the experiences of participants being studied (Seidman, 2012). This study will be conducted at an institution that has a unique institutional culture and residential model. The study is based on students' self reported experiences, understanding , and application of concepts. The researcher cannot account for situations and experiences in the participants' lives while participating in the EI course that might have contributed to any change in their understanding and application of emotional intelligence. Thus wide generalizations will not be possible. Finally, there were different sections of the intervention being taught by different instructors, which could yield a different result or experience from the participants based on instructor performance.

## **Delimitations**

This study will only focus on incoming RAs who participated in the classroom version of the course on emotional intelligence. The study will not examine second year or returning RAs. This study will not take into account anyone other than the participants' self report of their experience with the intervention. While this study will make note of demographic information, factors such as gender and race will not be considered in the sampling or analysis of the study. It should also be noted that the RA's performance in the course is not a consideration in the study.

## **Assumptions**

This study assumes that all participants will respond truthfully and thoughtfully to the best of their recollection. Based on my professional work and life experiences, I believe that understanding and teaching about emotional intelligence is beneficial to students as well as administrators. I also believe that a strong understanding and application of emotional intelligence has a positive impact on leadership and leadership development.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study seeks to explore how a course grounded in Emotional Intelligence influences RAs enactment of leadership. Goleman's (1998) theory of emotional intelligence discusses five competencies. These are self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, and motivation. These are skills that might benefit both the RAs and the populations that they serve.

The setting for this study is highly residential, requiring all first year students to live on campus in addition to having 98% of the student population living in residence. RAs have an opportunity to frequently interact with virtually all of the undergraduate student population. These interactions, such as programming, advising, relationship building, networking, and crisis intervention, could have a positive influence on students' connection to the university community (Terenzini et al., 1996).

Understanding the RAs enactment of leadership after the course could lead to ideas and strategies around the improvement of training for RAs. This study has the potential to impact the way that student affairs administrators think of leadership development with a diverse range of student leaders across campuses. There is also an opportunity to expand to teaching emotional intelligence to professional staff and faculty members.

### **Summary**

Higher education institutions have been challenged to re-conceptualize the way that they think about and assist with student learning. This challenge has provided an opportunity for student affairs administrators to think creatively about how to prepare students for life after college, while simultaneously enhancing their collegiate experience. As future leaders, knowledge of and a strong practical application of emotional intelligence is an increasingly essential component. Many studies regarding emotional intelligence are quantitative in nature. This study

utilizes qualitative research to gain a deeper more meaningful understanding of each participant's experience.

This chapter introduced the topic of this study including the broad areas of learning, resident assistants, and emotional intelligence. The statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions, and methodology were also discussed. The chapter provided an introduction to key components of the study that will be further discussed in future chapters.

The following chapter will provide an in depth look at the research surrounding the major areas of focus of this study. I will review literature on student learning, emotional intelligence, resident assistants, and shape the theoretical framework for the study. The chapter will help to provide an understanding of how this work builds on previous work, as well as adds to the current body of knowledge.

## **Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this study is to explore how a course grounded in Emotional Intelligence influences resident assistants (RAs) enactment of leadership. There are quantitative studies that examine the effectiveness and applicability of emotional intelligence in resident assistants (Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Wu & Stemler, 2008), but a dearth of qualitative research on this topic. This area of focus is related to higher education, student affairs, and emotional intelligence. Discussion of these related topics situates this area of focus in a larger context and body of knowledge.

In this chapter I will review research related to the history of higher education as it relates to changes and shifts in the population and learning. Next, I will examine current perspectives on student learning. Student affairs and residence life will be examined with specific emphasis placed on the Resident Assistant role. Emotional Intelligence as a concept will be reviewed in depth. This will be followed by an analysis of emotional intelligence theory and the social change model of leadership as a theoretical framework for this study. Finally, the literature will be discussed as a whole in relation to emotional intelligence and resident assistants. I will also discuss the gaps in the existing research.

### **Select History of Higher Education**

In an era where intellectual capacity is increasingly prized, both for individuals and for the nation, postsecondary education has never been more important. "From the earliest history of our nation, there has been a recognition- albeit slowly and imperfectly acted upon that higher education must be an 'engine'



of both our economy and our democracy” (Hunt, 2006, p. 3). Whether America’s colleges and universities are measured by their sheer number and variety, by their crucial role in advancing the frontiers of knowledge through research discoveries, or by the new forms of teaching and learning that they have pioneered to meet students’ changing needs, these postsecondary institutions have accomplished much of which they and the nation can be proud (Spellings, 2006). American higher education began 378 years ago on the campus of Harvard University (Harvard University, 2014). Understanding the historical evolution of higher education can help to understand the current status of higher education.

American institutions of higher education were initially founded to educate civic leaders and prepare the clergy. When the College of Rhode Island (now Brown University) was chartered in 1764, its founders stressed the point:

[I]nstitutions for liberal education are highly beneficial to society by forming the rising generation to virtue, knowledge, and useful literature and thus preserving in the community a successions of men duly qualified for discharging the offices of life with usefulness and reputation (Thelin, 1982).

“A practical consequence of religious tolerance within and among collegiate institutions throughout the eighteenth century was a certain blurring between their ‘public’ and ‘private’ status” (Lucas, 2006, p.107).

This blurring was made very clear with the *Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (1819) Supreme Court case. The New Hampshire legislature wanted to make Dartmouth a state institution and the Trustees of the institution were not in favor of

the precedent because it was against their original charter. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Dartmouth, finding that the New Hampshire legislature had violated the contract implied by its founding charter (Olivas, 1997). The state was prohibited from exercising direct control over whatever academic institutions it authorized, except in cases where it was expressly stated that the institution in question was a public entity supported by funds from the state's treasury (Lucas, 2006). Some historians of American higher education believe that this case delineated the distinction between public and private colleges and encouraged the development of private institutions by protecting them from state encroachment (Lucas, 2006).

The Dartmouth case is particularly important in the context of this study because it helped to solidify the difference between public and private institutions. In 2013, all of the top-ten ranked national universities, according to *US News and World Report* (2013), were private institutions. A public institution does not enter the ranking until the twenty-first position. This could lead one to believe that the quality and caliber of education at a private institution is different and somewhat better than that of their public counterparts. In some instances, this is indeed the case, but in others, it is simply a matter of mission and autonomy. Private institutions were founded to educate a specific part of the population around a multitude of subjects. Public institutions, on the other hand, were founded to educate the broader population on specific trade-based subjects (Lucas, 2006). The differences in these early missions and foci are still present today.

A college is an institution that exists to provide instruction. As the student population changed the college system had to adapt to meet the needs of the students. The student population will change on a consistent basis and it is up to individual colleges and universities to properly adapt their methods of instruction and redefine learning in a way that makes sense to the current population and meets their needs. As recognized earlier, “Subtly but profoundly they are shifting to a new paradigm: A college is an institution that exists to produce learning” (Barr and Tagg 1995, pg.13).

### **Student Learning**

Changes in the world around us have significantly increased the scope and level of learning students need from a college education. Fry and Kolb (1979) argue that:

Typically, we view education as a problem of helping learners to acquire or specialize their learning styles and to attain performance-level competencies. Yet equally important is the role of educational programs in fostering the lifelong learning and the integration of disparate learning modes to foster individual growth and development. (p .91)

Ewell (1997) posits seven insights about learning to help achieve learning success in higher education:

1. The learner is not a “receptacle of knowledge,” but rather creates his or her learning actively and uniquely.

2. Learning is about making meaning for each individual learner by establishing and reworking patterns, relationships, and connections.
3. Every student learns all the time, both with us and despite us.
4. Direct experience decisively shapes individual understanding.
5. Learning occurs best in the context of a compelling “presenting problem.”
6. Beyond stimulation, learning requires reflection.
7. Learning occurs best in a cultural context that provides both enjoyable interaction and substantial personal support. (p. 4)

In order for these approaches to work there must be collaboration across all areas and levels of institutions.

The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) (2004) in their work, *Learning Reconsidered* provided a template for the way that student affairs can have an effect on student outcomes. Keeling (2004) defines learning as a comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development (p.2). Learning as defined by Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996) is “any of a variety of academic or cognitive gains. It refers to grade performance or various forms of academic, intellectual, or cognitive development, and changes in learning related attitudes or values” (p. 150). The authors note the significant impact of living in a residence hall where the various dimensions of students’ academic and nonacademic lives are purposefully integrated. The most

powerful source of influence on student learning appears to be students' interpersonal interactions whether with peers or faculty.

Learning takes place in various forums as well as in formal and informal ways. Learning occurs in the classroom as well as outside of the classroom through the interaction of students with other students. As fellow students and agents of the university, RAs are in a unique position to influence students' academic and social learning. Therefore, RAs need to be prepared to better guide their interaction with students and to enhance students' learning. This preparation will allow RAs to better fulfill their higher education responsibility.

The field of student affairs has an opportunity to play a critical role in the future of student learning. Residence halls are an area of campus where multiple dimensions of learning can exist and come together for the benefit of the student community. The following section will discuss student affairs and residence life.

### **Student Affairs and Residence Life**

The field of student affairs has been around nearly as long as the idea of American higher education. Student affairs is a thriving, adaptive field that is highly influenced by the social and political climate of each campus, but also the world at large. Nuss (2003) notes two distinctive concepts of student affairs:

1. The profession's consistent and persistent emphasis on and commitment to the development of the whole person.

2. Student affairs was originally founded to support the academic mission of the institution, and each of these institutions has a different academic mission. (p.65)

These two concepts help to shape an understanding of the type of work and goals that should come from the field of student affairs.

One of the oldest areas of student affairs is housing. Dormitories were a critical component of early colonial collegiate life (Nuss, 2003). The early colonial colleges fashioned themselves after the successful English college models of Oxford and Cambridge (Nuss, 2003; Thelin, 2003). During that time, the English institutions were well known for combining residential and learning environments (Edwards & Sweeton, 2000). Students had to have a place to live and someone to watch over them while they were away from their homes at school (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984). University presidents and faculty were the first live in professionals in housing. The faculty took on the role of *in loco parentis* where they would act on behalf of the parents to guide and supervise a student's conduct and moral development (Thelin, 2003).

With the passing of the second Morrill Act in 1890, colleges saw an increase in women attending universities, universities at the time that were primarily residential. In many people's views women required more supervision and guidance (Winston & Fitch, 1993). This role would eventually shift away from faculty members and senior level administrators as the demand for housing and a need for more adult presence increased. The philosophy changed in the 1930s and 1940s to

a more student personnel point of view. The period between the 1940s and the 1970s saw another shift in collegiate life. Colleges began to examine their role in the total development of the student (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984). Residence hall programs began to expand and it was during this time that resident assistants (RAs) were first used as they are today.

College and university administrators observed a shift in students' interests in living environments, resulting in the development and increase of housing and dining facilities on campuses across the U.S. (Winston & Fitch, 1993). This increased demand resulted in a decrease in administrative desire to be involved in residence life and an increased need for specialized staff to work with the students living on campus. The importance of resident assistants, educational programming, special interest housing units, and professionally trained full-time staff was soon recognized (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984).

The University of Chicago was a flagship model of residence life programs (Wetzel, 1990). The President of the University of Chicago, William Rainey Harper, a former Yale professor had a desire for students to develop and reconnect with faculty outside of the classroom (Jencks & Reisman, 1968). He established a House system founded on residence halls, which were to have their own heads, counselors, and house committees (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). The creation of this program created a domino effect at other institutions, and would serve as a foundation for other schools to model after for the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Wetzel, 1990).

Blimling (1998), and Kohlberg and Hersh (1977), all suggest that the growth and development of undergraduate students in colleges and universities is positively correlated with a competent residence life staff. When staffs utilize a student development approach when working with students the outcome could be seen as more successful. This student development approach is characterized by the following:

1. An acceptance of developmental philosophy characterized by the belief that the individual growth toward maturation is sequential, increasing in complexity, universal and quantitatively different.
2. An acceptance of student as determiners of their own destinies.
3. A belief that the role of residence life staff as educators with definable skills is to assist students in accomplishing goals that they have identified for themselves.
4. The belief that students are able to determine what is best for them.
5. Recognition that a student is a total living organism and that the university must deal with both his cognitive and his affective development. (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984, p.24-26)

**Resident Assistants.** A key constituent of achieving the goal of a residential experience is the Resident Assistant (RA). Jaeger and Caison (2006) noted that RAs interact with more students on a daily basis than do professional student affairs educators. RAs are described as being active promoters of student learning (Barefoot et al, 2005; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010; Schaller & Wagner, 2007).



Blimling and Miltenberger (1990) noted four general roles of the resident assistant (role model, counselor, teacher, and student).

RAs are tasked with bringing together groups of students from various backgrounds to create community.

The college or university residence hall, which blends together persons of many races, religions, lifestyles, and value systems, may represent the most culturally diverse environment in which many of today's college students will ever live. When large numbers of persons reside together in concentrated proximity, it is inevitable that interpersonal tensions, misunderstandings, incivilities, and disharmonies will arise, at times reaching serious proportions. (Amada 1994, p.39)

All of the work that goes into creating community is not always "fun" and some involves very critical situations involving student safety and well-being.

Research indicates that in order to prepare for these roles staff should be trained in student development, human behavior concepts, crisis management skills, leadership skills, and administrative roles (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Perkins & Atkinson, 1973). The most common way of achieving this preparation is through RA training. RA training looks different at every institution and often includes the recommended items stated above. Jaegar and Caison (2006) note that the roles and responsibilities of RAs are increasing with the changing landscape of the college population but the way institutions train and select students are not.

A lack of training and confidence to handle the variety of situations that RAs are asked to respond to has been shown to contribute to RA burnout (Paladino, Murray, Newgent & Gohn, 2005). Deluga and Winters (1990) also found a positive relationship between role ambiguity and increased levels of stress. Paladino et al. (2005) encourage housing staff members to create an environment of continuous training programs and allow RAs space to relate their experiences and develop solutions. Bowman and Bowman (1995) emphasized that stress management should be emphasized in training as well.

RA training generally takes place 2 to 3 weeks before students begin their roles. As noted above, there is an opportunity to conduct training in a different way to accommodate for the changing dynamic of students and needs of RAs. One area that is receiving increased attention is emotional intelligence. The following section will discuss emotional intelligence and how it has been observed in the literature thus far.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Thorndike (1920) defined social intelligence as “ the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls-to act wisely in human relations” (p 228). Over sixty years later, Gardner (1983) introduced the concept of intrapersonal intelligence:

[T]he core capacity at work here is access to one’s own feelings life- one’s range of affects or emotions; the capacity instantly to effect discriminations among these feelings and, eventually, to label them, to enmesh them in

symbolic codes, to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guides one behavior (p. 239).

Salovey and Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence (EI) as the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this thinking to guide ones thinking and actions (p.189). This definition of emotional intelligence is the most widely used and accepted definition in the field.

Emotional intelligence includes the ability to accurately perceive emotion, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Mayer and Salovey's (1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) model of emotional intelligence has undergone the most development and refinement, gained the greatest acceptance among researchers, and served as the basis for the most measures (Spector & Johnson, 2006). Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso (2004) expanded the Mayer and Salovey (1997) model by dividing the skills and abilities of EI into four areas: the ability to (a) perceive emotion, (b) use emotion to facilitate thought, (c) understand emotions, and (d) manage emotions.

Emotional intelligence is a concept that has been widely studied. The primary fields that utilize the concept are leadership studies, business, and organizational behavior and management. These studies primarily focus on emotional intelligence in managerial and business settings; however, there has been a recent surge in literature around

emotional intelligence within areas of education. George (2000) conducted an analysis of leadership literature and emotional intelligence theories. She found that emotional intelligence has the potential to contribute to the field of leadership studies and practice. It is further noted that “Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies hold promise for exploring the ways in which emotional intelligence may contribute to leadership effectiveness” (George, 2000).

Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, and Boyle (2005) conducted a study that investigated the relationship between managerial emotional intelligence levels and a rating of leadership effectiveness from their subordinates. The authors administered the Mayer Salovey Caruso emotional intelligence test (MSCEIT) to supervisors, and compared that to an attitude survey given to their subordinates. The results demonstrated that an individual’s emotional intelligence might be a key factor in effective leadership. The findings “endorse the validity of incorporating EI interventions alongside the recruitment and selection process of managerial personnel” (Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, Boyle, 2005). The authors suggest that more studies concerning leadership, students, and emotional intelligence should be conducted.

Brackett, Mayer, and Warner (2003) examined emotional intelligence and its relationship to everyday behavior. This study was conducted using the MSCEIT, a measure of personality traits, and a life space scale that examined everyday behaviors. The authors found a significant difference between the scores of men and women. Men with lower EI demonstrated significantly more involvement than females in harmful behaviors and low social interactions. The authors note that it is

very likely that emotional knowledge can be improved through education. They suggest examining the effect of training on men in particular to improve their emotional intelligence.

Jaeger (2003) conducted a study that explored whether the theory of emotional intelligence affects graduate students' learning processes. The study found two key findings: 1) emotional intelligence can be improved through instruction in a classroom setting and 2) emotional intelligence is positively correlated with academic performance.

Fletcher, Leadbetter, Curran, & O'Sullivan (2009) conducted a study to investigate whether emotional intelligence workshop trainings lead to an increase in emotional intelligence as measured by the Bar-On emotional quotient in third year medical students. The researchers conducted a pre and post-test with the control and intervention group. The study found that there was a significant effect in regards to EI development training on the medical students in the intervention group as compared to the control group. The authors suggest that pursuing these types of interventions with medical students could be a promising venture in the future.

Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Hansenne (2009) investigated if emotional intelligence could be increased among young adults. The study was conducted by providing a series of brief group training sessions to the training group. The results were assessed through examination of a measure of trait EI. The trait level refers to emotion-related dispositions, namely, the propensity to behave in a certain way in emotional situations (Nelis et.al, 2009). The authors found that the training group

scored significantly higher than the control group on trait emotional intelligence. The results of the training were also examined six months later and the training group continued to have a significantly higher score than the control group. The study showed that emotional traits and habits could be improved through training.

Dacre Pool & Qualter (2012) expanded the study conducted by Nelis et.al (2009). They conducted a study that utilized a course intervention, but conducted the intervention over an 11-week period. Positive changes were seen in students who received the intervention. Students who did not receive the intervention also had a positive increase in EI, however the intervention group received significantly higher scores.

While a significant number of studies have examined emotional intelligence in college-aged populations, very few studies examine emotional intelligence in Resident Assistants. Jaeger and Caison (2006) conducted a study to explore the degree to which aspects of emotional intelligence are related to outstanding performance as an RA. They found that emotional intelligence is significant in predicting outstanding RAs. The authors suggest that multiple sites should be identified and additional information regarding how emotional intelligence and performance are related should be collected.

Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) revisited their idea of emotional intelligence to discuss how the theory had developed, some notable findings in the field, and some implications for further research. One area of note for further study was to “determine whether teaching emotional knowledge has a desirable effect on

behavioral outcomes and might change EI itself” (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004).

While the studies discussed above have shown that emotional intelligence does have a positive effect on a number of different groups. These studies do not reflect the impact that emotional intelligence has on the participants themselves. There is a gap in the literature with regards to qualitative studies of emotional intelligence and participants’ experiences with the concept.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Social Change Model of Leadership Development.** The Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCMLD) (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996) “approaches leadership as a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that results in positive social change” (p.xii). The Social Change Model has two primary goals. The first is to enhance student learning and development. The second is to facilitate positive social change in the institution or community. Komives and Wagner (2012) discuss the seven values that “synergistically become leadership for social change” (p. xiii). These values are:

1. Citizenship occurs when one becomes responsibly connected to the community/society in which one resides by actively working toward change and to benefit other through care, service, social responsibility, and community involvement.
2. Common purpose necessitates and contributes to a high level of group trust involving all participants in shared responsibility towards collective aims, values, and vision.

3. Collaboration multiplies a groups' efforts through collective contributions, capitalizing on the diversity and strengths of the relationships and interconnections of individuals involved in the change process.
4. Controversy with civility refers to the differing viewpoints that will emerge in a group. In order for a group to work toward positive social change, open, critical, and civil discourse can lead to new, creative solutions and is an integral component of the leadership process.
5. Consciousness of self requires an awareness of personal beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions. Self-awareness, conscious mindfulness, introspection, and continual personal reflection are foundational elements of the leadership process.
6. Congruence requires that one has identified personal values, belief, attitudes, and emotions and acts consistently with those values, beliefs attitudes, and emotions.
7. Commitment requires an intrinsic passion, energy, and purposeful investment toward action. (p. 54)



These values are grouped into three clusters shown in Figure 2.1: community, group, and individual.

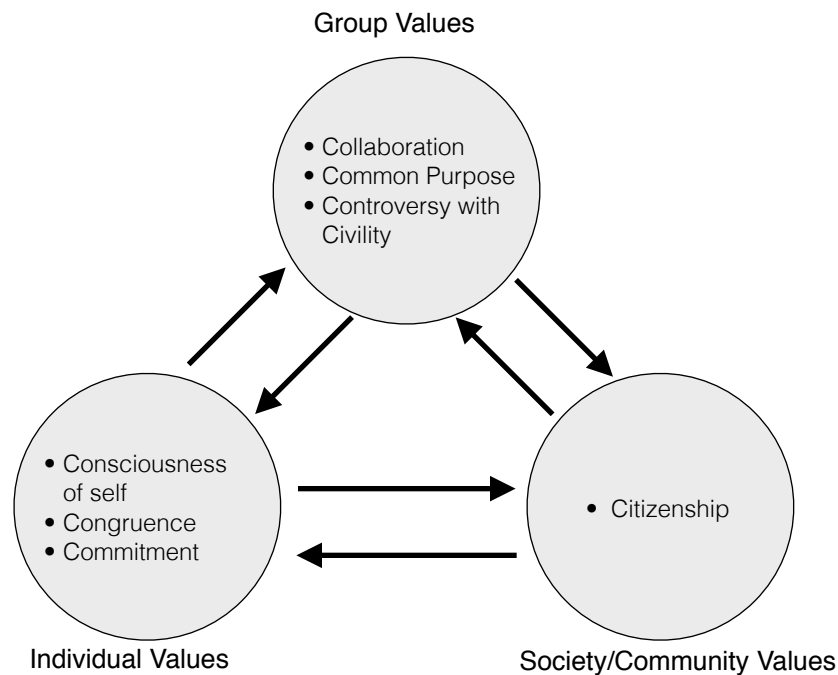


Figure 2.1: Diagram of the Social Change Model (HERI, 1996)

This approach supports that leadership can be learned and that the capacity to engage in leadership with others can be developed (Dugan & Komives, 2007).

Leadership can be seen as a one-sided relationship. It is often characterized as the person leading, being in a position of authority (Komives & Wagner, 2012). The SCMLD approaches leadership not in terms of positional authority but in terms of potential for leadership opportunity. This is particularly applicable to this study because although the students being studied are in a “position,” their “position” does not give them power or endow them as a leader among their peers. The model

supports the belief that leadership can be learned and that the capacity to engage in leadership with others can be developed (Dugan & Komives, 2007).

Dugan (2006) conducted a study of collegiate men and women. She found that college students may relate more readily to the post-industrial leadership values associated with the social change model than the industrial models focused more on management and control. The findings of the study suggest a need to purposefully shape how we engage in and structure the leadership development experience of students.

Haber and Komives (2009) examined the specific values associated with the SCMLD. The study found that short, moderate, and long-term training and education did not emerge as significant to leadership development. The authors note that this finding was inconsistent with previous studies in the literature. The authors focused on the individual values in the study, and suggest that trainings that focus on the group and community values of the model could be productive and valuable.

### **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed literature on the history of higher education, student learning, student affairs and residence life, emotional intelligence, and the social change model of leadership development. While there is existing literature on the topic of emotional intelligence and RAs, there is a gap in regards to qualitative research on the topics, as well as the experience of emotional intelligence interventions on the participants. Furthermore, the existing research on emotional intelligence and RA training has called for further studies to be conducted in

different university settings. The social change model of leadership development is “regarded as the most widely used model of leadership development in higher education” (Haber & Komives, 2009, p. 138). The values associated with this model align with values of the course intervention, and this model has the ability to be an effective framework for analyzing the data in this study. The following chapter will discuss the methodology for conducting this study.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research paradigm and methodology that was utilized for this study. I will explain why I chose this particular methodology as well as explain similar studies that have utilized this methodology. This chapter will also describe how this research inquiry was conducted. This study sought to explore how a course grounded in Emotional Intelligence influences RAs' enactment of leadership.

### **Research Questions**

1. What differences do RAs at a private, elite university in the Western U.S. perceive in their leadership before and after formal exposure to Emotional Intelligence?
2. How do RAs discuss how they apply emotional intelligence concepts into their leadership role?
3. What Emotional Intelligence constructs do RAs perceive to be most essential to their leadership?

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted using qualitative methods. A qualitative method was chosen for this study as this study seeks to “view social phenomena holistically” (Creswell, 2003, p. 181) and uses a research design that is emergent rather than tightly preconfigured. Qualitative research seeks to explore a phenomenon in context and develop a narrative of understanding. The specific

approach is a phenomenological investigation. Understanding the “lived experiences” marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is not primarily concerned with explaining the causes of things but attempts instead, to describe how things of the everyday world are experienced first hand by those involved (Denscombe, 2004). This study looked at Resident Assistants (RAs) in the context of their institution and role. It was critical for this research to be contextually rooted to explore the described phenomenon.

### **Description of Population and Sample**

**Site Selection.** This study was conducted at an institute of higher education in the Western geographic region of the U.S. The institution is situated in a suburban area with close proximity to major cities. It is classified (via Carnegie) as a 4 year and above private not for profit, university. The undergraduate instructional profile is an arts and science focus with a high graduate coexistence. Undergraduates are primarily full-time four-year students, more selective, and there is a low rate of student transfer. The institution is classified as large and highly residential. The undergraduate student population is approximately 7,500.

This site was purposefully chosen because of the private status of the school, the undergraduate profile, the highly residential campus, and the recently implemented course based on emotional intelligence for all first year RAs. The institution’s private status allows it to create curriculum and tailor their holistic

efforts in a very different way than their public peers. The private status of the school allows for more freedom in course creation and evaluation. The undergraduate profile is aligned with the researcher's interest in the study of this phenomenon at a highly selective institution. Finally, a highly residential campus is essential to understanding the importance of the RA role. RAs at this particular site are an integral component of the residential experience. The ideal composition is one RA for every 35-40 students. The role of the RA at this site is not to be an administrator or an enforcer of policy. They are tasked with being an advisor, advocate, and community builder.

***Intervention.*** The intervention examined in this study is a ten-week course grounded in emotional intelligence theory. Staff members at the research site created the course in Fall 2011 and the course has been offered for three years to incoming first year RAs at the site. The course is a mandatory component of becoming an RA. In addition to taking the course in the Spring RAs receive two weeks of intensive training before they start their role in the Fall. This training is grounded in emotional intelligence and reinforces themes from the course that the RAs participated in during the Spring.

Professional staff members in the department which is responsible for oversight of the RAs facilitate the course. For the purpose of this study that department will be known as Housing and Learning. The staff of Housing and Learning that facilitate the course receive facilitator training the quarter prior to teaching the course. The purpose of this training is to make sure that the facilitators

of the course are familiar with the content and have had an opportunity to experience what the students in the class will experience. They are required to attend three 3-hour facilitator sessions. They are also required to attend a weekly facilitator meeting during the quarter that the course is being taught. The purpose of this facilitator meeting is to allow the course facilitators to share and reflect on what happened in their course that week, as well as collectively prepare for the next weeks class. This is important because the department has a goal of creating a unified shared experience for the RAs that is not contingent on which facilitator a student has.

The course is broken down into three components. Those components are learning about self, learning about others, and learning to engage community. Each week builds on the previous week. There is a mid-term, and a final paper that students are asked to complete as a requirement of the course. The course is experiential and combines scholarly articles, opinion based articles, TED Talks, and activities to relay the material to the students. A copy of the syllabus can be found in Appendix A.

**Participant Selection.** The participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) “the sample units are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study.” Purposive sampling has two primary aims. “The first is to ensure that all the key constituencies of relevance to the subject matter are

covered. The second is to ensure that, there is some diversity included in each criteria so the impact can be fully explored” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Patton (2002) describes an approach to purposive sampling known as homogenous sampling. Homogenous sampling can be used to understand a specific group of subculture in depth. Homogenous sampling was used to select the participants of this study.

**Student Population Background.** There are approximately 7,000 undergraduate students enrolled at the site. Thirty-seven percent of the students are from California with fifty-four percent being from the rest of the United States. Foreign students comprise nine percent. The gender balance is almost even with men comprising fifty-three percent and women comprising forty-seven percent. Minority students collectively make up the majority in terms of race and ethnicity at fifty-five percent of the population. White students make up forty-three percent of students and the remaining two percent are documented as unknown.

Most students at the site do not declare their major until they are nearing the end of their sophomore year or the beginning of their junior year. Forty-eight percent of students are undeclared, thirty-one percent are in the school of humanities and sciences, twenty percent are in the school of engineering, and one percent is in the school of earth sciences. It is important to note the composition of the student body in order to understand the type of students that attend the institution and the type of students that were selected for the study.

**Selection Criteria.** There are 186 RA positions at the site of this study. Out of the 186 roughly between 5-10% will be returning RAs, meaning that they have



already served in the position for at least one year at the site. The remaining RAs are classified as first-year RAs. These first-year RAs are required to take an emotional intelligence course. There are thirteen sections of the emotional intelligence course that are offered to all incoming RAs. Twelve of the thirteen sections are in person sections. I facilitated two of the twelve in person sections. Students that participated in one of my two sections were not eligible to participate in the study.

An online version of the class is offered to students who are abroad during the quarter during which the course is taught. I also facilitated the online section. Students who participated in this section were also not eligible to participate in the study. The online version of the course is significantly different from the in person version. First, there is little to no interaction with the facilitator. Everything is done electronic and solely focuses on the student doing readings and reflecting in written form about those readings. Participants of this course do not experience the same kind of learning. Thus the experience of students who take the online course varies systemically when compared to that of students on campus.

Participants for the study were selected from the remaining ten sections of the course. I asked class facilitators for student recommendations. From those recommendations, I selected one participant from each of the ten sections to ensure that each section was represented in the sample. I aimed for a gender balance, house type representation, and racial diversity in order to represent the myriad of diversity that is found in the Resident Assistant cohort.

Sample sizes in qualitative research are relatively small in size. Qualitative studies yield thick and rich data, therefore, it can be difficult to conduct and analyze a large number of interviews (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The sample goal of this study is ten students. These students all had at least junior level academic classification. They were all first year As, and had taken the emotional intelligence course the spring quarter before the study was conducted. As stated previously, there needed to be a minimum of ten participants to ensure that each of the ten eligible class sections were represented. This was necessary to ensure that findings could be traced to the course content and not solely to the facilitator of the course.

### **Data Collection and Instruments**

**Data Collection.** The data collection protocol for this study was individual interviews. Interviews were chosen as the primary source of data for this study as they “provide an opportunity for detailed investigation of each person’s personal perspective, for in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomena is located” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 58). Interviews serve as “guided conversations rather than structured queries” (Yin, 2003, p. 89) in which the interviewee is able to make meaning through their unique lens of the world. Seidman (2012) discusses how at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.

This study utilized a type of interviewing known as in-depth, phenomenological interviewing. The method utilizes two formats of interviewing:

life history and in-depth interviewing informed by assumptions drawn from the phenomena (Seidman, 2012). Seidman (2012) sets up his in-depth interview in three series:

The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience.

The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experiences holds for them. (p. 20)

This study modified Seidman's structure by combining interview two and three. This brought the total interviews with each participant to two.

I created a new set of interview protocols for the two interviews and piloted these protocols with second year Resident Assistants to ensure validity and reliability. Reliability and validity are addressed later in this chapter. The purpose of piloting the instrument was to make sure that the questions made sense to the participants, to clarify or change any questions, and to get a better understanding for the potential flow of the interview. Second year Resident Assistants are thought to be appropriate respondents to pilot the instrument because they have taken the course before and have been in the RA role for at least one year. They are similar to the population being studied and were able to provide the researcher with an opportunity to accurately test the instrument to ensure for reliability and validity.

The structure of the questions of the interview was based on a semi-structured format and included open-ended questions and structured questions.

The questions were framed by the primary research questions of the study. The structured questions of the interview are based on the participant's demographics. The open-ended questions focused on the participants' prior experiences, experience with the course, and current experiences after the course.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

**Required Approvals.** All research studies are required to have approval from the Institutional Review Board or IRB. The researcher completed IRB training. The researcher defended her proposal, then submitted a proposal to IRB and obtained permission to conduct the study. These documents included the IRB application, an informed consent form, and copies of the interview protocol. The researcher obtained permission from the IRB office of the site being studied to ensure that the institution approved their students being used as participants in a study.

**Interview Process.** I conducted all of the interviews in a secure meeting room in a central location at the site. This location was accessible to all participants and allowed for an increased level of privacy and confidentiality. At the start of the interview, the participants were informed of the background and purposes of the study, the time commitment required for the interview, and of how the data would be protected. The informed consent form was read, discussed, and signed. An unsigned copy of the informed consent form was given to the participants.

The first interview was designed to explore the participant's experiences prior to coming to college and prior to taking the course. The first interview protocol

can be found in Appendix B. At the conclusion of the interview the researcher scheduled the second interview, that interview was held between a week to two weeks after the first interview. Before the second interview the researcher submitted a transcript of the interview to the participant to ensure accuracy of reporting .The second interview was designed to explore the participant's experiences during and after the course. The second interview protocol can be found in Appendix C. As stated earlier, the interview protocols were tested with non-participant second year Resident Assistants before the study was conducted to ensure that the questions were understandable and to solicit responses that were on target.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data analysis process began with accurate transcription. A professional transcriptionist, who is not the researcher, transcribed all interviews. The researcher must come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text (Seidman, 2012). Seidman (2012) discusses two methods of presenting interview data.

The first is to develop profiles of individual participants and group them in categories that make sense. The second is to mark individual passages, grouped in these categories, and then study the categories for thematic connections within and among them. (p. 121)

In order to achieve Seidman's method of presenting interview data, coding was utilized. Coding is the process of organizing the materials into "chunks" (Creswell, 2003). This analysis utilized a coding approach that is found in the grounded theory work of Corbin and Strauss (1990). This method utilizes three basic types of coding: open, axial, and selective. Corbin and Strauss (1990) explain these three codes in the following way:

The purpose of open coding is to help the analyst gain new insights into the data by breaking through standard ways of thinking about phenomena reflected in the data. In open coding, event/action/ interaction, and so forth, are compared against others for similarities and differences; they are also conceptually labeled. Axial coding consists of identifying relationships among the open codes. Finally selective coding is the process by which all categories

are unified around a central core category and categories that need further explication are filled in with descriptive detail. (p. 423)

The researcher coded the data twice. In addition, a second coder was utilized to ensure that the coding was accurate and to reduce researcher bias. The codes were then examined in the context of the research questions and a final summary was presented.

**Reliability and Validity.** Often, the reliability of a study is examined based on whether, or not, the findings in the study can be replicated. But “human behavior is never static” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205) so a phenomenological study and the findings therein could not be easily replicated. Merriam (1998) describes a more accurate measure of reliability when it comes to qualitative research. Plainly, she asserts that when looking at the data collected, the researcher should ask themselves if the results make logical sense. Ritchie and Lewis (2012) state that there are two levels that researchers can focus on to ensure that qualitative research is reliable. The first is to ensure that the research is as rich and full as it can possible be by carrying out internal checks. The second is to ensure the reader about the research by providing the process. To meet these standards of reliably, this study utilized member checks and fully detailed the research process in this chapter.

Internal validity looks to confirm that the study’s findings match reality (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research, “reality” and the subjects are dynamic and ever changing (Merriam, 1998). This being the case, there are two major areas in which this study sought to ensure that the study’s findings are an accurate

representation of reality. The study consisted of two separate interviews with each participant. It also used member checks of the interviews and analysis to ensure that the findings accurately represented the information given by the participants. Because of the close role that the researcher played with the data collection and analysis, the researcher sought to explain her bias, current role and her expected propositions of the study.

The extent to which the findings can be generalized to other settings determines the external validity of a study (Merriam, 1998). This study was being conducted at a single site. It will be up to other researchers and institutions to determine if the characteristics of this site are similar enough to utilize the findings. This study sought to use rich, thick descriptions that will allow the reader to determine the appropriate generalizability.

**Role of the Researcher.** In qualitative research the researcher's role is central to information gathering and analysis of the data of the study (Merriam, 1998). I am the Assistant Dean of Housing and Learning at the site being studied. Housing and Learning is in the Division of Student Affairs. I have worked professionally in varying capacities in residential programs and student support programs at three universities for eight years. I am a departmental leader and lead the curriculum development and facilitation of the course being used in this study. I have significant experience working with undergraduate students and facilitating sessions around sensitive topics.



I have taken three courses on qualitative research and have done extensive readings on qualitative research and the specific methodology being utilized in this study. I am entering the study with eight years of experience working with students around social skills and communication. This experience is not free of bias about how students approach and handle situations with which they are faced in college especially around interpersonal communication. I am passionate about educating students about “transferable and soft” skills. Over the years, I have observed students who are academically talented have trouble with communicating and thriving outside of the classroom. The current increase in social media as well as technology, and decrease in face-to-face interactions has created a social deficit, primarily for the millennial generation. I believe that direct knowledge and understanding of emotional intelligence topics can enhance a student’s collegiate experience as well as their experience after college. To counter these biases I used a journal to document the researcher’s process. The journal was kept as a four-level notebook (Haslam, 1987). The journal contained an account of week-to-week observations, an expansion of those observations after finishing the interviews, a log of my views, questions and feelings, and a final section dedicated to connections and interpretations as I reflected on the data. I also recorded all interviews to help ensure the accuracy of data and performed member checks to ensure that the data was being used in a manner consistent with what members reported.

## **Summary**

The study utilized a qualitative methodology to analyze the data. The qualitative method of phenomenology was used to make meaning of and understand the participants' experiences. In-depth interviews were used to carry out the study. The study was conducted at a large research-intensive highly residential campus in the Western geographic region of the United States. Potential participants were selected using homogenous purposive sampling. The design, and methods were derived from the work of Seidman (2012). Data collection was conducted in the fall of 2014 with data analysis conducted late Fall 2014 and early Spring 2015. The following chapter will discuss the results of the study.

## **Chapter Four: The Creation of a Leader**

### **Introduction**

As RAs have become an important resource to facilitate college students experiences and may play key roles, Buchard (2001) described the primary role of an RA as fostering an atmosphere for academic, social, cultural, and emotional growth in their residence hall. Members of the community of the site of this study view the Resident Assistant (RA) role as a critical and vital leadership role. This chapter will present participant profiles of the students selected for this study. These profiles will provide a glimpse into the personal story of each of the participants to provide context for the findings that will be discussed in chapter five.

### **Participant Overview**

This study focuses on ten students who currently serve as Resident Assistants (RAs), and who took a course based in emotional intelligence during the spring of 2014. The Housing and Learning Department employs professional staff members to facilitate the course. These professional staff members work intimately with the student staff members during the academic year that they are in the RA role. The Housing and Learning Department encourages students to sign up for a class section that is facilitated by a staff member with whom they will be working during the next year.

There are thirteen sections of the emotional intelligence course that are offered to incoming RAs. Twelve of those sections are offered in person with the final section offered online for students who are studying abroad during the quarter

in which the course is offered. Of the twelve on campus sections during the spring of 2014, I facilitated two of them. One participant from each of the remaining ten sections was selected for this study based on facilitator recommendation and following purposive sampling guidelines. A purposive sample was desired to see if experiences were similar across sections. Facilitators were asked to recommend students that they believed were active participants in their section of the class, and who might be interested in participating in a dissertation study. The participants participated in two individual interviews. Demographic data was collected during the first interview and is presented below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

<i>Self Reported Demographic Data of Participants</i>					
RA Name	House Type	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Classification	Familiarity with Emotional Intelligence prior to the class
Paul	Frosh and	Male	African-American	Senior	No
Tessa	All frosh	Female	White	Junior	No
Melissa	All frosh	Female	White, Hispanic	Senior	No
Scorpio	Upper-class*	Male	Native American, White	Junior	No
Lacey	Four Class	Female	African American	Junior	No
Brian	All frosh	Male	White	Junior	No
Lilo	All frosh	Female	Asian American	Senior	Yes
Frank	All Frosh	Male	African American	Senior	No
Maria	Upper-class	Female	Hispanic	Senior	No
Tony	Four-Class	Male	Middle Eastern	Junior	No

\*Upper-class Houses do not have first year students.

In addition to the demographics presented in Table 4.1, the participants represent a variety of majors and are involved in a number of student organizations in addition to being an RA. Further, the names used throughout the following chapters are pseudonyms chosen by the participants and are used to further protect the participants' anonymity. The following section details participant profiles, making reference to participant demographics where germane to an understanding of each participant's leadership development.

### **Participant Profiles**

The following profiles focus on the life experiences of the participants. Each story provides background information about the participant. The profiles briefly outline relevant demographic information about the type of house the participant currently staffs in, their classification and major, their family, the educational attainment of their parents, and their high school and college activities.

Importantly, each profile also contains a section with information about (a) experiences that have shaped participants in their leadership, (b) the participants' exposure to emotional intelligence while growing up, and (c) details related to each participant's motivation(s) to become an RA. These profiles demonstrate the variety of experiences that have brought the participants to their role and help to shape an understanding of their individual stories. It is important to acknowledge the risk these students took in sharing their very personal experiences. A careful reader may want to consult Table 4.1 as a quick reference point for key demographic factors related to the participants.

## **Participant Overview**

### **Paul.**

***Relevant demographics.*** Paul is a senior, African-American male, majoring in African and African American Studies, staffing in a two-class house (a house with freshmen and sophomores) and is involved in several student organizations that focus on the African-American community. He is also a member of a club sports team on the campus. His family consists of both of his parents and his older brother. His parents both have advanced degrees and work in the legal/civil service field. He grew up in a large urban city in New York. He attended different types of schools throughout his primary and secondary education, starting with private and finishing with public. The schools that Paul attended were not very diverse, with the schools prior to high school being primarily white. The only reason he attended the high school he did was because of a decision made by his parents. Paul explained “my parents made a decision to send me to the all-black high school because it had a small section of the International Baccalaureate program, so it just seemed like it made more sense.” This high school experience was a drastic racial shift for Paul but it allowed him the opportunity to become more comfortable and confident in his racial identity, while embracing his intellectual prowess.

***Leadership experiences.*** Paul attended various camps throughout his childhood. As he got older he recalled the camps morphing from places that were fun and whimsical to “leadership training programs.” There was an experience of being a camper and then transitioning into a leader for the new campers. He

attributes his understanding of leadership to those leadership training program experiences. He defined leadership as

Real leaders don't appoint themselves; they distinguish themselves through character. It's like people will fear a General right? So people will fear a king, but they'll respect a nobleman who rolls up his sleeves to participate with them... I think leadership is what you do when you're able to see that everybody else around you has leadership potential.

Paul's approach to leadership is exemplified in this quote. He makes conscious decisions not to lead from the front, but to lead from within a group. He is always cognizant of who he is around and aware that leadership can come from any place or position in a group.

During high school Paul was a member of the first robotics team, the golf team, ski club, and band. Paul attributes a significant amount of his leadership development to his time on the robotics team. That experience helped to shape his views of working with a team, and working in high-pressure situations while having to maintain a level of calmness and composure.

***Emotional intelligence.*** Paul was not formally exposed to the concept of emotional intelligence growing up. He does recall having to "deal with his emotions through treatment." Paul explained, "growing up I was just very socially awkward and sometimes socially outcast... and sometimes I just don't feel comfortable in social situations." His experiences in treatment have provided him with the opportunity for self-reflection as well as the opportunity to understand the impact

that his behavior has on others. Paul still considers himself to be somewhat socially awkward, but he has grown to embrace that, and is more comfortable with himself.

***Decision to become an RA.*** Paul had a difficult time during his first year of college. “I had a lot of issues with my emotions and breaking stuff in the dorm...” said Paul. These particular experiences along with how his RAs responded to him during those experiences shaped his desire to want to become an RA. Paul explained “I think those experiences really pushed me to want to give back and to help people the same way my RAs helped me.” He did not have a desire to be the RA that everyone knows or that is always in the front of the room. When discussing his motivation for the RA role he said

I want people to either think of me as someone who helped contribute to their experience, or just not think of me at all. ‘Cause like the ability to be forgotten, I think especially as an RA is just an important... I think knowing when to step back and work from the shadows and help, not necessarily show people which way to go, but to just set pieces in motion and then watch it happen, is just as important as the ability to be remembered for good things.

This quote further exemplifies Paul’s natural approach to situations through leading from within and making sure that the situation is not about him but about the people he is working with.

**Tessa.**



***Relevant demographics.*** Tessa is a junior, white female majoring in psychology and staffing in an all frosh house. She is highly involved with her sorority and a campus organization that raises money for diseases. Her family consists of both of her parents and her older brother. Both of her parents are college educated. She grew up in moderately sized suburban area of the Pacific Northwest. Tessa attended public school for all of her primary and secondary schooling. Tessa describes her home community as “not super diverse.” She found an interesting dynamic in her high school. She explained, “my high school wasn’t diverse, but it was educationally, people came from very different backgrounds and took very different paths.” She attributes her ability to understand academic struggles as well as her non-judgmental approach to others academic choices to that experience. One of her most significant activities growing up was being a competitive figure skater.

***Leadership experiences.*** Tessa attributes her idea of leadership to the people that she had seen in leadership roles throughout her life. “All of them had very big personalities and they were very extraverted, lots to say, lots to share, and I feel like I have lots to say and share, but I’m not always extraverted,” she said. She discussed feeling apprehensive about applying for the RA role, because “I would have to be extraverted all the time, and be on all the time and I wouldn’t really have my own space to reflect and be quiet.” Her perspective on leadership and what defines a leader has shifted since taking the course, and that will be discussed later in the findings section of chapter five.

***Emotional intelligence.*** Tessa was not formally exposed to the concept of emotional intelligence growing up. She attributes some of her understanding of the concepts to her figure skating career. “It taught me a lot about discipline and working towards a dream with someone” she said. She had a tough transition from high school to college and struggled to find her place in a new environment while understanding how to communicate with other, and work through all of her emotions.

***Decision to become an RA.*** Tessa had a desire to help other students who might be going through what she went through and thought that being an RA would certainly be a way to do that

My RAs in my dorm played such an influential role in helping me through what I was going through freshman year and just sort of sharing their personal experiences and being vulnerable with me and I could see that they were working through them too and they had made it.

Her personal experience with her freshman year RAs had a significant impact on her decision to become an RA, as well as her understanding and impression of the role. She has a focus on the supportive nurturing components of the role. While reflecting on her RA application experience she said “to be able to connect with so many people and touch a little bit of their college lives and hopefully help them come to the realization they deserve to be here a little bit sooner than I came to it compelled me to apply.”

**Melissa.**

***Relevant demographics.*** Melissa currently staffs in an all frosh house.

Melissa is a bi-racial female. “I mainly identify as white, but I am also Latina” she said. She is a senior majoring in human biology. She is an active member of her sorority on campus and holds a leadership role in the organization. She is an only child who was raised by both of her parents. Both of her parents are college educated have had careers in government. She spent the majority of her life living in a large metropolitan city in Southwestern United States. She spent her three middle school aged years living abroad in an Arab country in Southwest Asia. Her abroad experience had a significant impact on her outlook on life and her view of the world. During high school she was heavily involved in community service. Her community service was local in her hometown as well as international. She also played two sports while in high school.

***Leadership experiences.*** The idea of providing service and being in service to others was a frequent topic for Melissa. Her parents’ careers and her own experiences with community service have impacted her view and definition of leadership. “Leadership can be being an obvious leader-like telling people what to do, or you can lead by example and influence other just by what they’re doing.” She reflected on both of her parents’ leadership styles and how they are quite different from each other while pieces of each are needed to come together and contribute to her definition of a successful leader.

***Emotional intelligence.*** Melissa was not formally exposed to the concept of emotional intelligence growing up. She described her only child experience as one of the reasons why she deals with a lot of her own problems or concerns “without getting much outside help.” She often transfers her propensity to internalize her own personal situations onto others. She has a large friend group and considers herself to be close with all of them. She is aware of how the way that she deals with her problems can have an effect on her friends and others. She said, “I think my shortcoming is that sometimes I think other people can just deal with their own things too.” This has been an area of development for Melissa as she is keenly aware of a need to “meet her residents where they are.”

***Decision to become an RA.*** Melissa knew she wanted to be an RA on her campus before she was accepted. She had visited the campus and stayed with a friend’s sister who was an RA. She valued that everyone respected her but still had fun with her. Her freshman year RA had a captivating presence and had a laid back approach to his role that she resonated with, while at the same time she respected his ability to be a role model while demanding respected when needed.

**Scorpio.**

***Relevant demographics.*** Scorpio currently staffs in an upper-class independent living community. He is a biracial man who identifies as being Native American. “I primarily identify as Native and a part of that is my dad leaving the house and being far,” he said. His Native identity is a significant component of his life experiences. He is a junior majoring in mechanical engineering that is highly

involved with the Native community and a religious student groups. His family consists of three older siblings, one younger sibling and his mother. He lived with both of his parents until they separated around his late elementary early middle school years. Both of his parents have college degrees. He grew up in a rural area outside of a reservation in the Southwestern US. All of his schooling was on the Reservation. In high school he participated in national honor society, community service work, and was actively involved in his church group. He also was on the chess and basketball team.

***Leadership experiences.*** Scorpio spoke often about his Native American heritage throughout our time together. That aspect of his life greatly impacted his view of leadership.

I think part of my idea is cultural. I think that's something that I got through my native identity. Especially in the sense that the leader doesn't have to be the loudest or the ones that is making the decision. Real leaders are the ones that are listening and understanding people, and trying to get a sense of what is really going on and what people want and how they as the leader can help people.

His approach to leadership is based on the needs of the people and not having a strong need or desire to be in the front of the crowd or be noticed. He frequently spoke of the idea of being in service to "to be of the most service I can... I felt like that's to me the only life worth living is if I can give back to other people."

***Emotional intelligence.*** Scorpio was not formally exposed to the concept of emotional intelligence growing up. "I went through an emotionally tumultuous time

growing up with my family, and also with being Native so I think I have some understanding through my experiences,” he said when discussing emotional intelligence. His Native identity and his religious identity have had a significant influence on the way he sees the world and his motivation and drive.

***Decision to be an RA.*** He left school after his freshmen year to serve on a mission through his church for two years. During that experience he realized that he wanted more opportunities to have life experiences and “practice being good at talking to people and relating to people.” That experience along with his first year of college exposed him to life situations and people that did not have any exposure to. He attributes that experience and his desire to “be of the most service I can” as reasons why he decided to become an RA.

**Lacey.**

***Relevant demographics.*** Lacey is currently staffing in a four-class house. She is an African-American female in her junior year majoring in computer science. She is highly involved in an arts based student organizations on campus. She is an only child whose biological parents divorced when she was five years old. Her mother raised her for eight years until she remarried and then her stepfather became an active part of her life. Her parents are college educated. She has lived in the major metropolitan cities in the East Coast, South, and Midwest, She attended public school for her primary and secondary education. She spent her junior year in China for a study abroad program. When she returned she skipped her senior year of high

school and started an early college program before transferring to her current campus. She was involved with plays and professional ballet training in high school.

**Leadership experiences.** “To be in leadership you have to be someone who people respect, who people can look out to and who actually care about people. You have to be respected if you’re not respected you can’t be an effective leader.” Lacey has a very nonchalant yet focused and regimented approach to life. She sets goals and achieves those goals. While she will proclaim to be nonchalant she also describes herself as “having a personality trait that made me feel like anything I was doing I had to be the best at it.” This “personality trait” allowed her to study Chinese and excel to the highest level of study at her school and then study in China. As a result of her achievement and experiences with Chinese language and culture she was able to work for a national security language initiative for youth. These experiences shaped her definition of leadership.

**Emotional intelligence.** Lacey was not formally exposed to the concept of emotional intelligence. She has always been the type of person who wanted to bring people together. She never saw a point in disliking anyone especially because of different backgrounds or ways of being. As a Black woman who was often the minority in her social and educational settings she felt like she was always very aware of her presence and the potential effect that can have on others.

**Decision to be an RA.** Lacey returned to China the summer after her freshmen year to work as an Assistant Director for a Summer Program. She described the experiences as “pretty intense RA training.” She is one of the only

participants of the study who viewed the RA role as a job that was made up of very tangible responsibilities that were larger and more administrative than getting to know and support residents. As a transfer student to the campus, she had a different experience than most of the other students. She wanted to make sure that she could provide a community experience for other students. "Getting paid to have my personality would be pretty awesome so I signed up" she said.

**Brian.**

***Relevant demographics.*** Brian is a junior, white male majoring in communication and staffing in an all frosh house. He was heavily involved with major theatre productions on campus, but recently took a break from that to focus on his role as an RA. His family consists of both of his parents and his older sister. Both of his parents are college educated. He spent his early childhood years growing up in Vermont and then moved to a large metropolitan city in New York when he was a teen. He attended public school for his primary and secondary schooling. He attended a Performing Arts High School. During high school Brian participated heavily in all varieties of theatre at his school.

***Leadership experiences.*** Brian is passionate about public affairs and staying informed about the world. During our discussion of leadership his answers were often based in political or governmental leadership. His definitions of leadership were more of a critique of the current government and its leaders rather than an aspirational discussion.



I think people are somewhat in it for themselves to a degree, and some people way more than others. That hinders leadership, because leadership should be for the good of the community, whether that's a small community or an entire country. As soon as your personal goals overpower the goals of the community, I think you fail to be a leader.

He does not feel like he is a "natural born leader", but felt like he could step into leadership roles if needed. He had a somewhat organic approach to thinking about leadership in that leadership comes from the people and "a successful leader allows people to lead themselves to an extent, if they can without chaos." This was seen through our discussion of his desire to create an organic community for his residents, a community where they take lead of their experience.

***Emotional intelligence.*** Brian was not formally exposed to the concept of emotional intelligence prior to the course. He attributes his self-awareness and his ability to talk openly about his life and feelings to his parents and his performing arts school. "My parents have told me to be successful but they're always like emotional health first like take a few days off from school," he said. This approach gave him an implicit permission to prioritize himself, which is not the case for most of the students in his peer group.

***Decision to be an RA.*** Brian had RA's that "weren't terrible but they weren't great." This experience enabled him to see that he could contribute to the RA role in a meaningful way. There was not a standard that he had to meet, which felt accessible and attainable. He had a desire to be in a leadership role, particularly the

RA role. As stated above, Brian's orientation toward leadership comes from a government perspective. The following quote further exemplifies one aspect of his approach to leadership and being in a leadership role. "I think being in the role allows me just psychologically to feel like I have now been socially licensed to be a leader, which allows me to be a leader, hopefully a successful leader." When asked about why he initially wanted to be an RA he said "I don't know maybe it was me sticking out, like trying to put myself in a leadership role to allow myself to grow up in that way."

**Lilo.**

***Relevant demographics.*** Lilo is a senior, Asian American female majoring in symbolic systems and staffing in an all frosh house. She is involved in the co-op community on campus along with several community service related groups. Her family consists of her two younger brothers, her stepsister, mother and stepfather. Both of her parents are college educated. She grew up in a major city in Northern California. She experienced a lot of difficulties with her stepfather growing up. When discussing her home life she explained, "I felt like we were both in a constant power struggle with each other...we were both like the Alpha male." This power struggle affected her self-esteem and outward presentation of who she believed she was. As a result of her home life she made very strategic choices to get involved in activities that would take her out of the home. She attended public school for both her primary and secondary education. She was involved in various leadership positions throughout high school and volunteered out of state as well.

**Leadership experiences.** Lilo has always seen herself as a leader. “I always wanted to be the leader, and when I was younger I was the leader,” she said. There was a gap in her leadership experience in childhood that she attributes to “traumatic experiences in my childhood submerging my defining personality traits.” She discussed being very reclusive and withdrawn, and feeling like she wasn’t able to be a leader because she was not charismatic and outgoing. This was not “fair” to her even as a child. This sense of equity and fairness would stick with her, and her leadership ability re-emerged in eighth grade while attending workshops and camps on leadership. She is adamant that leadership is dependent on the group that you are leading “what’s effective for one person may not be very effective for another...in the end a leader needs to have someone to lead and somewhere to lead them.”

**Emotional intelligence.** Lilo was exposed to the concept of emotional intelligence while growing up. “My mother wanted me to be able to interact with people in different walks of life so she would take me to speeches and have me read books on topics and emotional intelligence was one of them.” She describes herself as being cynical by nature. She struggled with others during her first two years on campus because of her direct style of communication and her desire to have truly meaningful interactions with others. She often got along better with students that were older than her. She was often the youngest student on her study abroad trips. “My older peers really encouraged me to think about what kind of person I wanted to be and my emotional experiences,” she said.

***Decision to be an RA.*** When I asked Lilo why she initially wanted to be an RA she explained “part of it was just a very selfish desire to make friends, connect to people, mentor others, and to some extent we make ourselves feel great when we help others.” She recognizes that she is not often the person that people would see as an RA. In the midst of her cynicism she has a strong desire to connect with others and to share of herself. She was highly motivated by the opportunity mentor younger students and to engage in reciprocal learning and engagement with her direct peers.

**Frank.**

***Relevant demographics.*** Frank is a senior, African-American male majoring in international relations and staffing in an all frosh house. He was involved with a club sports team on campus as well as a lead in one of the major theatre productions. He currently holds an office with the student government. His family consists of his older brother, younger sister, and his parents. Both of his parents are college educated. He grew up in a major city in Northern California and then moved to a more suburban area when he was in middle school. He attended public school until middle school and then received a scholarship to attend a prestigious private school. While reflecting on that experience he said

I think everyone faces their own trials and tribulations through those formative years and we both are indebted to the education and the relationships that we received, but in being able to look back now, we both kind of agreed to wipe our hands clean of that experience.

His final two years of high school were spent in Central America at an international school. He was involved in cultural activities during high school.

***Leadership experiences.*** Frank is the one participant in this study that has a very public leadership role on campus outside of his RA role. He is quite humble and would not easily describe himself as a leader, but more as “a man of integrity who strives to do right by himself and by others.” His idea of leadership is shaped in his experiences and reflective learning from the results of those experiences. There is a reciprocal component of leadership that comes through in his definitions and descriptions. “I think the best indication of a leader is someone who is so motivated on actions and experiences that have shaped them but at the same time are willing to sit back and visit and to discuss and to give and receive input,” he said. To Frank, leadership is as much about the collective as it is about the individual in the leadership role.

***Emotional intelligence.*** Frank was not formally exposed to the concept of emotional intelligence while growing up. When asked if he believed he was emotionally intelligent he stated,

There was a time when I would duck at every opportunity to work on myself or put myself in harm’s way, just because I am so afraid of letting someone down or the idea of being a burden. I think, in coming into this community and environment I think I’ve really become more accepting of the idea that I would not be here without all the rubbish.

Self-reflection and motivation were continuous themes that manifested themselves throughout our conversation.

***Decision to be an RA.*** The idea of community resonates in a very strong way with Frank. He has always searched for community and when it is found he is appreciative and strives to enhance that community and give back.

Lodges de noblesse- I probably butchered it, but in French it means nobility lodges. When you're in a position to where you've benefited from experiences to give back you do so-not out of an obligation but because of a privilege. So I've got such a unique opportunity to give back to the community that has meant so much to me by assuming a position on staff.

He specifically wanted to staff in the house that he lived in during his freshmen year. He felt a direct connection to that physical space and the meaning that it had in his life.

**Maria.**

***Relevant demographics.*** Maria is a senior, Latina female majoring in physics and currently staffing in an upper class community. She is involved with an organization that teaches English to campus employees and also holds a leadership role in the Physics club on campus. Her family consists of her older brother, sister and parents. While she was born in the Dominican Republic her family immigrated to an urban city in Florida when she was five. Her parents completed high school. She consistently describes her childhood and family life as "blessed." She attended public school for both her secondary and primary schooling. She was involved in

orchestra and band in high school. She also played volleyball. She left high school after her sophomore year and started at a college in the area where she could get her high school diploma and college credit simultaneously.

***Leadership experiences.*** Maria's family is the cornerstone of her existence. Her approach to life is rooted in her family life and her cultural experiences. Her definition of leadership is comprised of both a sense of pride and humility but at the core is "comunidad." She said, "a real leader surrounds themselves with other leaders by definition, by default, because you're gonna be pulling up the people around you." This idea of leadership has a deep connection to her familial closeness and desire to collectively achieve.

Her primary images of leadership are her parents. She spoke fondly of a family mantra that her parents would have her and her siblings repeat often at various different places, "What did we come to this country for? They would ask, we automatically shouted to triumph." That "empowering mantra" inadvertently showed her what it meant to be a leader.

***Emotional intelligence.*** Maria was not formally exposed to the concept of emotional intelligence growing up. Maria's upbringing and her culture play a significant role in her outlook on life and her interactions with others. She tries to have a positive outlook towards all experiences. She had a difficult start on campus academically. When discussing that she noted "it kind of took me failing classes and not being able to do stuff to kind of come to this point where I get to work one-on-

one with a Nobel prize winning physicist to do exactly what I wanted to do this whole time.”

**Decision to be an RA.** Maria has always sought out leadership roles due to her strong desire to lead and impact change. Being an RA was “a manifestation of who I am...the RA position is a place for leaders and people who will empower others,” she said. She fervently believes in her ability to lead any group of people in any situation.

**Tony.**

**Relevant demographics.** Tony is junior, Middle Eastern male majoring in mechanical engineering and staffing in a four-class house. He is an Iranian male. He was involved with numerous design groups and initiatives on campus but grew tired and frustrated with them. He is actively involved in his fraternity on campus. He is an only child and was raised by both of his parents. His parents are college-educated entrepreneurs. Both of them immigrated to the United States. He grew up in a small town in Northern California. He attended private school for both his primary and secondary education. In high school he was on the swim team, science bowl team, the founder of the current events club, and was a competitive windsurfer.

**Leadership experiences.** “I think great leaders are open to criticism. Being a good leader means that you are able to take that really well and capitalize on that,” he said. Tony is a person that breaks down every situation into parts. He has always been a person that likes to take things apart and see how they can come back together in different ways. He does not always do so audibly, but he is always



breaking down situations and tangible things down into smaller parts to see how they can come back together. He is highly involved in design thinking. Design thinking is about working with others creating something getting feedback “blowing it up” and then starting again. Aspects of design thinking are seen in his definition of leadership.

***Emotional intelligence.*** Tony did not have formal exposure to the concept of emotional intelligence growing up. He has had three significant experiences with loved ones being impacted by cancer. He is just beginning to fully comprehend how those experiences have impacted him. “I’ve realized in the past year that this is a huge part of my life that I’ve actually kind of suppressed. My dad had cancer and that was hard I was eight, my aunt died from cancer and I was really young, but saw what it did to my cousins. Then my girlfriend’s mom dies from cancer when I was in high school. That shit is brutal.” Tony’s recent reflections concerning those experiences has given him an opportunity to pause and explore his feelings regarding a number of different situations in his life as well as how he both outwardly and inwardly deals with those situations.

***Decision to be an RA.*** Tony found his freshmen year to be “splitting”. He realized that while he enjoyed being around people he could not handle what he perceived to be as inauthenticity. While describing this experience and how it shaped his desire to be an RA he noted “its like figuring out how to navigate this whole like existential crisis of like fighting yourself and figuring out the people that you want to hang out with and the people that make you feel good. That kind of just

inspired me to want to not help people but be a good resource for people.” He did not feel like his RAs did a quality job of helping to navigate this experience or even giving him resources about where he could gain assistance with navigation. This served as a catalyst for his desire to be an RA.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the participants of the study. The participants’ personal stories were discussed focusing on their life experiences that were particularly important to their leadership development and coming into the RA role. It is important to illustrate the participants’ leadership journey that began before they started in their current role and even before they began college.

These stories illustrate the diversity of experiences of the participants and their varied paths to this particular point in their leadership journey. The following chapter will discuss the most prevalent findings of the study which include the participants’ (1) perception of their leadership, (2) their application of emotional intelligence into their leadership role, and (3) the most essential concepts of emotional intelligence to their leadership.

## **Chapter Five: Findings**

### **Introduction**

RAs are an increasingly significant part of the overall student support system in universities. The role of an RA is all-inclusive often including everything from academic assistance and being a campus tour guide to being a first responder in times of crisis (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990). This chapter presents the findings for the three research questions that guided this study on RAs at a highly selective university perceptions of their enactment of leadership. The research questions used to inform the study were

1. What differences do RAs at a private, elite university in the Western U.S. perceive in their leadership during and after formal exposure to emotional intelligence?
2. How do RAs discuss how they apply emotional intelligence concepts into their leadership role?
3. What emotional intelligence constructs do RAs perceive to be most essential to their leadership?

Data in this section come from two separate individual interviews that were conducted with the ten RA participants in the study.

### **Research Question 1**

What differences do RAs at a private, elite university in the Western US perceive in their leadership during and after formal exposure to emotional intelligence?

Data revealed specific themes regarding the perceived main differences during and after formal exposure to emotional intelligence through an organized course. These emerging themes were grouped into three major categories: (1) a perceived a willingness to engage in difficult dialogue (2) a deeper understanding of the perspective of others, and (3) a deeper appreciation for individual identity and the identity of others.

**A willingness to engage in difficult dialogue.** RAs are expected to engage in difficult dialogue; these conversations are not always entered into willingly. For the purpose of this study difficult dialogue includes conversations that are personally challenging for the RA to engage in and conversations that are challenging for others to engage in with the RA. Romney (2005) defines dialogue as “focused conversation, engaged in intentionally with the goal of increasing understanding, addressing problems, and questioning thoughts or actions” (p.2).

Engaging in dialogue that is personally difficult to discuss can come up in a myriad of different circumstances. The dialogue can be personally difficult because of the content, the people involved, and the context (Sue, 2015). Participants also note that the conversation might have an effect on their life and their leadership role.

Several participants have noted these difficult conversations. For instance Maria shared that during the course she was involved in a class discussion around religion. This particular topic was not difficult for Maria because of her own personal views and approach. However, in the midst of the conversation she

offended one of her classmates. She was not aware of this offense until her class facilitator spoke with her about it later and walked her through the situation while discussing the impact that the conversation had on her classmate. "Someone brought up what I said to her and she had to pull me aside and explain it to me," she recalled.

This conversation was particularly difficult for Maria because she was initially unaware of the feelings involved around the topic. However, she was able to benefit from the safety of the environment and better understand her own reactions. She shared, "I figured this was a safe space, a brave space so I was confused during the follow up conversation." Her assumption of safe space caused her to believe that she could say whatever she felt like in the conversation. She did not realize that her conversation could have an effect on others. The realization that her words unintentionally, had a negative impact on someone was difficult for her.

As a result of the conversation she was able to reflect on that situation and the learning that she experienced. During her reflection she noted "You make these assumptions that certain things are okay and certain things are not okay and understanding that it's different for everyone can allow you to connect with people and that's a huge skill especially for leadership." In the midst of a difficult dialogue she was able to find learning and reflect on how that particular situation had influenced her leadership. The above illustrates how RAs are often asked to create environments where people can engage in dialogue and push the limits of

conversation. The intervention provides opportunities for them to see what those spaces could feel like.

Difficult dialogue does not only occur in the direct function of leadership in the RA role. Participants in the study reflected on difficult dialogues that they experienced beyond their leadership role as RAs and how those dialogues effected their willingness to further engage in those types of conversations within their role. During one of the interviews, Scorpio discussed the challenges that he had with his mother and how he often had difficulty expressing himself to her, which influenced his willingness to converse with others.

I remember using some of the stuff from the RA class to be able to express my emotions to her during a conversation. We were talking and she would say some things that made me feel uncomfortable. I reached the point where I was just getting so frustrated that I didn't really want to talk to her. Then I remembered that I should express my emotion and say I'm feeling this. It was really difficult, but I felt a lot better about it even though it was very difficult.

Scorpio's experience illustrates that he was able to engage in a difficult conversation as a result of the knowledge gained during his time in the intervention.

RAs can face difficult dialogues for a number of reasons. Lacey is on staff in an ethnic theme house. Ethnic Theme houses place a special emphasis on focusing on the culture of the particular ethnicity of the house. Lacey does not identify with the theme of her house and she is the only black person that lives in the house as well.

Lacey discussed an incident with one of her residents that from her perspective was about race. She explained,

There was one day when I was standing outside my door in a hoodie cause I was about to go to the ceramics studio, and one of my freshmen girls came out and like jumped. She was like Oh my God why are you wearing that? I didn't really know what to say in that moment. I headed to bathroom and she was coming out of the bathroom and we ran into each other again, and she freaked out again. She wasn't even thinking about the same kind of racial implications that I thought about when she freaked out about me being in a hoodie.

Lacey had previously discussed that prior to being exposed to the emotional intelligence concepts she felt like it was her role to make people feel safe in situations and not isolate them. She also went on to further discuss her perception of being a black female in a leadership role. This combination of circumstances led her to reflect on that particular situation. She said "If someone did that with something outside of my own racial identity, I'd probably feel more comfortable pointing it out. I need to address that, I need to bridge that gap without making people feel uncomfortable, and helping them feel more aware." This quote shows how she could easily challenge someone around this topic when it was not about her, but once the dialogue became personal it was difficult for her to consider engaging in the dialogue. After reflection, her willingness to consider engagement in

difficult dialogue even in the midst of her own personal discomfort for the benefit of her resident appears to be an adjustment of her leadership.

It appears that RAs modify their leadership actions in order to engage in difficult dialogue. They also recognize that difficult dialogues can take different forms due to the content, the context, and the people involved. Through engagement in difficult dialogue there is an opportunity for RAs to become exposed to the perspective of others. These quotes represent the majority of the participants in the study. The participants not represented by these quotes came into the course comfortable and willing to engage in difficult dialogue as revealed through their interviews.

**A deeper understanding of the perspective of others.** Due to their position RAs have to work with students from diverse backgrounds who bring a wide variety of perspectives of the world. RAs work with students that are very intelligent and encouraged to question most situations and individuals that they come across. The study site seeks to foster an environment of intellectual curiosity and RAs are expected to develop an ample understanding of the various students' perspectives by engaging in active and generous listening. For the purpose of this discussion generous listening is defined as "listening without deciding whether you agree or disagree with what is being said or whether you like or dislike what is being said" Felton, Bauman, Kheriaty and Taylor (2013, p. 85).

One way that RAs are encouraged to gain an understanding of their students' perspectives is through opportunities provided during the course which engage



them in discourse about the topics that are pertinent and relevant to their future role as well as to their current interactions and daily lives as students. Paul discussed being much more aware of others' views while being in the course. He noted " I think one of the things that the class showed me was that a lot of people have a lot of perceptions that just aren't right. I wouldn't say actually right, but are just really engrained in them." This was somewhat shocking for Paul who assumed that around certain larger topics perspectives would be similar among students in the RA role.

Paul reflected on people expecting him to engage in all types of discussions. "I think part of it's because my major makes me equipped to talk about these things in a more nuanced way, in those spaces I'm expected to be more vocal and understanding of people but that's not always the case." He discussed that through his class discussion interactions he was able to "have more of an understanding of where people are coming from when I feel they are wrong." This deeper understanding has influenced Paul's leadership role to approach exchange of ideas with his residents in a different way. Paul is now ready and able to listen and absorb what others say to him as opposed to listening and attacking.

Brian did not discuss any expectations placed on him due to his major. He did however, share some similar reflections to Paul in regard to appreciating the views of others. Brian acknowledged that while "he might not agree with why someone might be offended by something, it's not his place to say that they aren't offended."

This was a shift in thought and behavior from exposure to his classmates' unfiltered and uninterrupted perspectives during the course.

While Paul was able to understand the different perspectives of others around topics, Lilo was able to learn how to use her own reflection of values and life experiences to comprehend the perspectives of others. The activity from the course that had the biggest impact on her was an activity in which pairs come together as partners and tell each other a story of when they had a change of opinion. The partners are encouraged to listen actively and generously to each other. They are then given instruction to tell their partners' story back to them in first person as if they were their partner telling their own story. "It was learning a different way of listening, an actual tool that I want to use again. You really get to see how they think about issues, and you get a clear sense of what they value as a person," said Lilo. Utilizing listening to understand a person's values provided Lilo a better understanding of and enhanced her ability to see things from their perspective.

There was one RA whose perceptions on this topic was an outlier in comparison to the other RAs in the study who solely focused on the positive aspects of their deeper appreciation. Tony did speak to a deeper appreciation for the perspective of others, however, this appreciation caused him to be less tolerant of others around topics that he feels are sensitive and offensive to others. He said,

I don't want people forcing their thoughts on others, just because it's their thoughts. I don't want to tolerate that. What do I do though as the RA? I'm

unsure. Everyone has a perspective, but it's not cool if that comes at someone else's expense.

He continued to grapple back and forth with this topic throughout the interview. While his perceptions are different from that of his peers, he still has an appreciation that is important to note.

RAs' appreciation for the perspective of others is illustrated throughout this section. This appreciation for the perspective of others has the potential to allow the RAs to get to know their residents in ways that they might not have been able to otherwise. One area that this could potentially happen is around identity.

**A deeper appreciation for personal identity and the identity of others.**

Identity is a critical component of a person's existence. Fearon (1999) refers to identity as "either (a) a social category, defined by membership rules and (alleged) characteristic attributes or expected behaviors, or (b) socially distinguishing features that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential or (a) and (b) at once" (p.i). Identity as a concept with its multiple constructs is woven throughout the course content both explicitly and implicitly. All participants of the study discussed the topic of identity during our discussions and spoke to reflection and exploration of the concept of identity.

Tessa spent time reflecting on her leadership identity. "I don't think that I'm the best leader I could be at this point. I think I'm still struggling to find balance in who I am as a leader" she said. Her definition of leadership and her interactions with leaders prior to participating in the course contributed to this identity. "I think I

learned through the course that it was okay to be me. I had this notion in my head that I needed to be this loud person that delegates tasks.” Her identity as a leader shifted as a result of understanding various leadership styles, learning from her peers, and having her leadership identity validated. “I feel like I found more of the leader that I want to be as opposed to the one that I thought I should be,” she said.

While Tessa was exploring her leadership identity, Brian grappled with his own racial and ethnic identity, as well as that of others. This grappling occurred through conversations with others as well as his own self-reflection. Prior to the course Brian did not have a clear definition of identity. He did not agree with the concept of identity because “creating or labeling identities lock you into something.” He struggled with the idea of being labeled, even if it was a label he was placing on himself because “it would lock him out of certain things.” His lens on the concept was one of deficit and through conversations with his class facilitator and listening to the experiences of his classmates his lens began to shift. While Brian currently does not fully agree with the idea of identity, he is able to acknowledge his various identities and the role that they have in his life, as well as how identity can be a vital component in others lives and experiences.

“The course did an interesting job of bringing in identity, especially with regard to race”, said Tony. Tony spent time discussing the section of the course that focused on microaggressions. He explained, “ this has always been difficult for me, but like sitting down during the class talking about microaggressions stuff... it made me think about my friends and that this stuff is real.” He went on to reflect on a

conversation that he had with his friend after the microaggressions section, and how that conversation effected his view of his friend.

My friend is half black and his dad is a pastor in a bad neighborhood. We were talking about these microaggressions and he started telling me stories about his life and how people treat him. It blew my mind, because he's an amazing person and I had no clue.

This experience allowed Tony an opportunity to explore and have a better appreciation for the identity of others.

Racial and gender identity was a topic that came up for the three African-American participants as well as the one Native-American and Hispanic participant in the study. While there are two additional students who demographically could be considered students of color they do not personally identify with that demographic marker. The former set of participants discussed their racial identity in terms of its effect on their leadership, their experiences of race in different settings, and an appreciation for their racial and/or cultural identity. Frank noted "this course has definitely helped me become more aware of what I build my identity off of and when the opportunity presents itself in the community how to best articulate that or integrate that into the learning experience." Frank's awareness of his identity and the way that it can serve as a catalyst for conversation and provide him with opportunities to help others learn more about their identities can be of value to him in his RA role.

Frank and Maria both discussed heightened identity awareness as a result of a particular course activity titled “Circles and Dots.” The activity requires participants to select three identities on a list that are represented by various circles and dots. They are asked to place those three circles or dots on a name tag and then engage in dialogue around the topic. Maria experienced a realization during the course of her strong identification with being a woman. “I realized during our circle and dots activity that being female is so important to me and that I see so much strength in femininity. I was into female empowerment before, but I’m much more cognizant of it now.” She attributed this awareness to a greater sense of confidence in her ability to be a resource and empower other students around issues of gender and understanding of feminism.

Research question one sought to understand the perceived differences in RAs leadership during and after formal exposure to an emotional intelligence course. This section has demonstrated perceived differences in willingness to engage in difficult dialogue, an deeper understanding of others, and an appreciation for their own identity and the identity of others.

### **Research Question 2**

How do RAs discuss their application of emotional intelligence concepts into their leadership role?

Data regarding application of emotional intelligence emerged throughout the participant interviews. Four themes emerged from the data. These themes are (1) applying listening skills, (2) facilitation (3)space creation skills and (4) authenticity.

**Listening skills.** For the purposes of this paper there are three types of listening. They are active listening, empathetic listening, and generous listening. Active listening has been described as a multistep process, including making empathetic comments, asking appropriate questions, and paraphrasing and summarizing for the purposes of verification (Cramer, 1998; Gordon, 2003; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). Empathetic listening is paying attention to another person with empathy, applying the basic principle of seeking to understand before being understood (Huitt, 2009). Felton, Mauman, Kheriaty and Taylor (2013) define generous listening as “listening without deciding whether you agree or disagree with what is being said or whether you like or dislike what is being said” (p. 85).

According to the participants, applying listening skills helps to address various situations. This could reflect crisis management or positive engagement with others. Scorpio works in an apartment building with upperclass students. These students are often isolated from each other and from their staff. Establishing relationships can at times be quite difficult and often residents will only come to their RA for transactional needs like lock outs, unless they have a relationship with that person or are in a state of crisis. Scorpio said, “We are in an apartment complex. It’s not a set up that encourages residents to just come and talk to me and get to know me.” During our conversation Scorpio reflected on a crisis situation that he was involved in and what he was aware of during that situation. “I wanted to be present in the moment with them and help them. I wanted them to feel that I’m engaging with them, really listening to them and trying to figure out what they’re

feeling and validating what they're feeling." Scorpio was applying empathetic listening in a crisis situation with his resident. In that moment he felt that it was important to be present with the resident and make sure that he was not only "really listening", but actively being present and supporting the resident by simply listening.

Not all interactions with residents are around crisis. Many interactions are conversations that provide opportunity for rich engagement and understanding. Brian discussed often approaching conversations being solely focused on his argument or perspective and how he at times missed what the other person was saying as a result. He reflected on his experience in the course with the "Tell My Story" activity mentioned earlier in this chapter and how it had an effect on how he listens to residents and friends.

When I listened I learned a lot and when I was speaking without someone else talking I could speak a lot and go into depth that I was not necessarily planning on and they weren't necessarily planning on when they were sharing with me. There is value in listening as a leader.

This reflection and application of listening skills has allowed him to engage with others in a different way that has the potential to impact his role as a leader.

Lacy learned "how to place myself more relative others", as a result of the "Tell My Story" activity. "To think about it made me actively aware that I wanted to be a good listener, and actually pay attention to what people are saying. I think it was very eye opening into the way I normally interact with people." This quote was similar to other RAs who reflected on wanting to be better listeners than they were



before assuming the role. Lacy discussed feeling a need to adjust her listening style to make sure that she was being an engaged RA and getting to know her residents. She stated, “you can get to know people on a deeper level by listening, and not surface stuff but really listening and going beyond commonalities.” In addition to reflecting on being more aware and intentional with her listening, she also noted “I think it’s also made more warm and open to people.” Lacy found multiple applications and benefits for her listening skills that benefited her in the RA role.

Lilo also reflected on the “Tell My Story” activity. She said, “it was learning a different way of listening, and it was an actual tool that I would want to use again in another setting.” She discussed trying to incorporate what she took away from the activity into an activity in her house called “reflections”. “Listening to someone else so that you can tell their story as if it was your own can be so powerful. That is something I would want for my residents.” Lilo expressed the desire to apply listening skills into her interactions with her residents and to impress upon them her perceived value of the skill.

While Lilo was incorporating listening skills into formal activities, Melissa discussed utilizing questions as a way to actively engage her residents in conversations. Melissa described herself as “a pretty laid back person who can deal with her problems on her own.” As a result she acknowledged that she often assumes that others can do the same. She discussed having a heightened sense of awareness around making sure to ask questions of her residents that she normally would not ask. “Sometimes you really have to check in because they just seem like

they're ok but you can't just leave it there." The use of questions and actively checking in with residents has proven to be a valuable tool for Melissa. Listening beneath the surface has given her an opportunity to interact with her residents and develop meaningful relationships.

It appears that the application of listening skills can affect RAs enactment of their leadership role. This effect can lead to further opportunities to apply skills and knowledge learned. One of those areas for opportunity is the facilitation and creation of space.

**Facilitation skills.** Some define facilitation as an art. Facilitation is assisting participants in pushing themselves to a new level, meeting the needs of a team or group, and evaluating the process (International Association of Facilitators, 2002). Frank was strategically thinking about how he could help facilitate conversations in his house. "Another aspect of being a leader is I think being so from the sidelines and by providing the necessary environment or conditions to encourage these conversations," he said. He went on to discuss being much more thoughtful of his presence as a facilitator and what topics he chooses to engage in as a facilitator. As a black man he had a heightened sense of awareness of the role he played in facilitating dialogues around the Ferguson shootings and other student demonstrations on campus around Black Lives Matter. "I think in facilitating these conversations, really being cognizant of the fact, while something may be well-intentioned, you never know who's in the room and what experiences they've had."

This quote exemplifies Frank's understanding of his role as a facilitator and the number of factors that can be at play while facilitating conversations.

Maria had a different approach to the concept of facilitation and its application in her role. Maria spoke to being concerned about including everyone in the group in her role as facilitator. "I'm much more aware of well I really try to look out for, does this person feel comfortable talking like this, or interacting like this, or talking about this topic." Maria, similar to other RAs in the study saw their as facilitator as the guide or leader of the conversation. While they did not discuss feeling a need make the conversation their own, they did feel a need to "help the conversation be meaningful for everyone." Understanding your role as a facilitator and as a participant in a conversation particularly as an RA can be helpful engaging with residents and building your facilitation capacity.

Lilo believed that she had experience with facilitation, but not on the scale she has to use it as an RA. During her first week with her residents Lilo had to facilitate a conversation about personal stories of identity. "I'm sure my experiences in the class were able to help me do that effectively. I tried lots of different things with the large group, and then in small groups. I thought the whole experience was enlightening." Lilo willingly applied facilitation skills that she learned from the course and from her perspective saw positive results from her facilitation efforts.

**Space Creation Skills.** Along with facilitation, RAs spoke of actively engaging in creating spaces where students' facilitation of dialogue and conversations could occur. At times the creation of space can be quite simple, even to the point where the

RA does not realize in the moment that it is occurring. These spaces can be literal spaces such as door rooms or lounges, or metaphorical spaces such as space in someones mind. Tony has a strong desire to not be what he would describe as a stereotypical RA. His description of a stereotypical RA is “one who needs direct power, a total lame with a title”. As an RA of primarily freshmen he feels like his residents do not need an RA for the reasons that a freshmen might need. “Everyone is a junior on my hall and junior year is tough. Everyone has their own focus on my floor and they just happen to live with each other and it’s just kind of difficult to find where I can insert myself into that whole equation and somehow have a positive effect,” he said. Even though he was unsure of his place he decided to buy his residents Dinosaur shaped chicken nuggets also known as Dino nuggets and have them in his room one night. He had a significant amount of residents come out and just sit in his room and talk as a result of simply offering dino nuggets. As a result of that experience he has tried to continue to have his door open and residents have begun to drop in even without the dino nuggets.

While Tony was inadvertently creating space and facilitating opportunities for his residents to come together, Tessa was very intentionally setting up spaces for her residents. “Residents come to my room when they are stressed and just want to decompress.” Tessa spoke to that decompression space being important to her during her freshmen year and wanting to provide that for her residents for that reason. “I give them chocolate, and tea, and listen to their problems”, she said. Creating a relaxing space for her residents could be seen as a simple gesture but it

has proven to be effective for Tessa. “ Students come to my room because I can relate to them, and it feels good.”

Facilitation and space creation can be both challenging and rewarding for RAs. Part of what is challenging is the actual act, but also the role that the RA has as leader in those scenarios. One area that can assist with feeling more comfortable in these scenarios is authenticity.

**Authenticity.** Merriam Webster (n.d.) defines being authentic as being true to one’s own personality, spirit, or character. Multiple RAs in the study alluded to feeling like the course was one of the first spaces where they could be authentic and hear authentic views from others. Brian said, “I appreciated the real discussions that we had. It was a nice change to have real and frank discussion with my peers.”

Lacey was raised to believe that as a black woman she had to be “twice as perfect to be taken seriously.” This belief weaved itself into her concept of leadership along with the belief that “leaders need to pretend like they know everything.” During our conversation she discussed her own internal fear of being a leader “I knew I could do it, it was more of a fear of people discrediting me as a leader,” she said. Her belief that she would be discredited caused her to back away from certain situations because of how she would be perceived. She later went on to discuss coming into her role this year and remembering being told throughout the course that she did not have to know everything and that her experience was valid simply because it was hers. “I’ve been blatant about my strengths and my limitations, what I know and what I don’t know.” This honesty she believes has helped her progress

with her residents and her community. “Despite all of our difference and being the only black person of color in the house, and still being honest and okay with who I am allows me to connect with people, and has made me a stronger leader in that way.” Lacey’s ability to engage with her resident as her authentic self and have confidence in who she is has had a positive effect on her role in the house.

There was a time in Maria’s life where she was very closed off about her very private life situations. She is now in a place where “ I swallow my pride and am honest and open when I need help. I try to set the example that way, and empower them to ask for help when they need it.” She has seen the benefit of the shift in her behavior with her residents and with her close circle of friends. She approaches those situations from the perspective of “if there’s one person who heard me, and they go get help, then I think it’s worth it.” Maria utilizes her authenticity for the benefit of others, while Lacey did not have a specific intention. Both women found positive applications for being their authentic selves in their role.

Paul described himself as “not really one to mince words about things.” He noted how that authentic part of him can be challenging for others to interact with. “Certain types of people don’t respect being challenged in the same way that I imagine people do.” Paul being his authentic self has pushed him away from some residents, but he believes that it is important for those interactions and experiences to occur with and for his residents. While Paul’s application of authenticity is not similar to Maria and Lacey’s, all three provide interesting glimpses into the way that authenticity can be applied into the RA role.

Research question two sought to identify how RAs discussed their application of emotional intelligence concepts in their leadership role. This section has illustrated how RAs apply emotional intelligence through listening skills, facilitation and space creation skills, and authenticity.

### **Research Question 3**

What emotional intelligence constructs do RAs perceive to be most essential to their leadership?

Emotional Intelligence encompasses specific constructs aimed at understanding and regulation of emotions. As Goleman (1998) described five components essential to emotional intelligence. Those constructs are self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills. All five of these components emerged in the data in various different ways from the participants. Four were found to be the most essential: self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The fifth component that did come up in the data is self-reflection. Even though it was found in the data, RAs did not perceive this component to be essential to their leadership.

**Self-Awareness.** Self -Awareness is defined as the ability to recognize and understand personal moods and emotions, and drives as well as their effects on others (Goleman, 1998). Self-awareness was seen as the most essential emotional intelligence construct in that all ten participants discussed self-awareness throughout their interviews. Self-awareness can include self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, and a self-deprecating sense of humor (Goleman,1998).

Tessa expressed a richer self-awareness as a result of seeking out feedback from others. Tessa had not received significant direct feedback from others around her leadership behavior prior to taking the course. As mentioned previously she developed a deeper appreciation for identity as a leader throughout the course. As a result of various role-plays and class exercises she was able to receive feedback on her style, which allowed her to have more confidence in herself. She also discussed a deeper awareness and connection to her emotions.

For me the emotions activity really just brought to light that I have trouble accessing my emotions sometimes and that emotions that I find easier to express, others might not. That really made me aware of where I come from and who I am and where other people are coming from,

Her self-awareness as a result of feedback has allowed her to not only focus on aspects of her life that will help her, but also aspects of other peoples lives that have the potential to enhance her interactions with them.

While Tessa gained a richer self-awareness through feedback Tony reflected on his moods and personality while thinking about how he interacts with others. "I became an extrovert last year. I was not previously. I'm an only child. I used to get my energy from sitting in my bed and reading books, but now I need to see my friends," he said. Seeing his friends and being able to spend time with them helps him to be productive in his role. He realizes that he needs that interaction in order to feel energized and engaged with his residents. This understanding has proven to help



with making sure that he is taking care of his own needs so he can assist others with theirs.

Somewhat similar to Tony, Frank reflected on being much more self-aware of his needs and how not having those needs met can affect his residents. While discussing some of the ways he has shifted to take care of his needs he noted, "I find myself taking more time out of the day for my own mental health and well being, because I can't help other if I can't help myself." He found that taking this time not only allows him to be refreshed and committed, but it also allows him to relate to his residents in ways that he had not expected. He also spoke to being aware of his interactions and how he physically shows up and how that can "shape the relationships that I have." His awareness of himself and the impact that he has on others allows him to be strategic and thoughtful with not only his residents, but himself as well.

Brian spent time reflecting on his self-awareness specifically in the concept of being a leader. He said, "being in the position of a leader allows me to be more self-aware of when my thoughts are leaning more towards myself than other people." For Brian, being a leader means considering the effect on the group at all times. This self-awareness shows up primarily when decisions need to be made. Brian discussed doing what benefits the group more often than not. The benefit to the group was based off of his own perceptions of what was best for the group. Brian believes that self-awareness "allows me to shape my self-view in what I hope is a more positive

thing.” For Brian, self-awareness is essential to allowing him to be an effective leader and to advance his own self-view.

**Motivation.** As defined by Goleman (1998) motivation refers to a passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status. Motivation was a component that emerged for the majority of the participants of the study. Hallmarks of motivation are a strong drive to achieve, optimism even in the face of failure, and organizational commitment (Goleman, 1998).

Paul sought out feedback because he wanted to be successful in his role. “ I feel like I’m holding myself accountable for the students, because they don’t know what to hold me accountable for yet,” he said. He was acutely aware of his role with his residents and the potential effect that he could have on them. He wanted to make sure that he was doing his part to ensure that his residents were getting what they needed. He spoke of having a very concrete conception of what being a “good RA” was. This concrete conception kept him very aware of what he was doing, but it also slightly limited him from seeing the other possibilities in his role and in the uniqueness that he can bring to the role.

Tessa finds motivation for her role in her residents. She enjoys seeing them “find their groove” at Stanford. “I think what’s the most motivating for me is actually just sitting down and talking to one or a couple of them and just hearing their stories and their backgrounds” Tessa has the opportunity to interact with residents in this way on a frequent basis. This motivation allows her to complete the tasks of her role at times when she does not want to.

Melissa shared a similar motivation to Tessa. She reflected on how when she is stressed out her desire to be there for her residents keeps her going, "I remember getting that call from another RA and I was like oh my gosh it's one my babies. I have to take care of them." She spoke about being moved by her residents in ways that she had not expected, "I was talking about my residents with my boyfriend and I started crying." Her motivation to be there for her residents and assist them allows her to continue to carry out her role during different circumstances.

Scorpio has an intrinsic motivation to help others. "I feel I've had this desire for a long time to help people and to be of the most service I can", he said. This intrinsic motivation is both similar and different than Tessa and Melissa. Scorpio's motivation is not solely about the residents, it is about helping people in general and this role provides an opportunity to do that. Scorpio also noted that now that he is in his role, the residents that he has developed relationships with and maintaining those relationships also motivate him.

In addition to residents contributing to motivating RAs in their role. RAs also discussed being motivated by their fellow staff members. Lilo discussed not wanting to let her fellow staff members down and wanting to feel like she is contributing to the group. "I think about how much time they're investing and I don't really want to seem like king of person who doesn't pull their weight." Frank also discussed being motivated by his fellow staff members. "To be able to learn and live with them has really been phenomenal", he said. Being able to engage with his staff motivated Frank to want to be a better RA and continue "inspire and to learn to excite."

Participants in the study discussed how the RA role can be exhausting, challenging, and invigorating. They discussed being motivated primarily by their residents and their fellow staff members as well. This motivation allows RAs to continue in their role when it becomes challenging and not as fulfilling as they would like.

**Empathy.** Empathy is the ability to understand the emotional make up of other people and a skill in treating people according to their emotional reaction (Goleman, 1998). While empathy is often easily recognized it is not often easy to develop. Empathy was seen as an essential component by more of the male participants than the female participants. Empathy can be seen in cross cultural sensitivity and services to clients and customers (Goleman, 1998).

The importance of empathy emerged from the interview data with Scorpio in a number of different ways. There was an underlying thread of empathy in most of his reflection around his interactions with residents. While discussing the nuanced relationship between leaders and their followers he stated,

How do I still manage those relationships in a way that people can trust and confide in me and be able to talk things through? Empathy is one of the really good things that I took out of that, how when times are difficult just the way that leaders can approach different situations.

This statement exemplifies Scorpio's value of empathy and its role for him in regards to his leadership role and application of leadership.

Scorpio discussed the importance of empathy with regard to his overall approach to leadership. Maria had a heightened awareness of the power of empathy and how utilizing it can effect her residents and their impression of her as a leader. Maria describes herself as “always having been an empathizer.” She discussed how a class discussion on microaggressions helped bring awareness to the essential component of empathy. “Being much more aware of it, its really changed kind of how I see things and I talk about things, whether they’re sensitive or not,” she said. While empathy had always been a skill that Maria believed she had, the above quote illustrates a shift in the essential value of empathy in her leadership role.

**Social skills.** The final component that emerged from the data were social skills. Goleman (1998) defines social skills as proficiency in managing relationships and building networks and an ability to find common ground and build rapport. Social skills are about managing relationships with others. It is often thought of simply as friendliness however, it is more than that, and there is purpose in social skills. Some hallmarks of social skills are effectiveness in leading change, persuasiveness, and expertise in building and leading teams (Goleman, 1998).

Maria described herself as being “a people person”. While being a people person, does not automatically dictate social skills, Maria discussed effectively utilizing those skills with her residents. “I have a lot of athletes in my house and they can be tough at times. So I made friends with a couple and now I’m good with the athletes.” Maria effectively identified a group of residents that had the potential to be difficult to work with or reach and then utilized her social skills to connect with

members of the group and then leverage her relationship with them to build a relationship with the rest of the group. This strategic use of social skills was essential to allowing Maria to build a community and develop relationships with her residents.

Lilo reflected throughout our interviews about other people's perceptions of her. She also reflected on how her cynical nature contributed to those perceptions and resulted in a lack of the social interactions that she sought to have. During one of those reflections she noted,

I think I've learned a lot more about how I interact with people, and also the skills for getting people to talk and build connections. So I think after the RA class, I probably lean more toward soft skills or fuzzy skills. It's always been something I've been really interested in doing, but now I definitely do.

Lilo's strategic move to utilizing social skills illustrates her understanding of their potential value in her leadership role as an RA.

While Lilo struggled initially to understand and implement the value of social skills, Frank saw their importance and utilized them in a number of different ways. He utilizes social skills to engage the residents individually for the creation of a cohesive house community. Frank discussed his "behind the scenes work" of helping to shape a community. He worked very closely with his residents to create a dorm government and helped to connect them with each other through conversation facilitation and helping residents to see their unique talents and skills. He had a unique perspective on his role, he stated "I'm an advocate of the idea that in every

job or position you should strive to put yourself out of a job.” His ability to step outside of himself and utilize social skills to catalyze community exemplifies the importance of those skills to his role.

Research question three sought to identify the emotional intelligence constructs that RAs perceived to be the most essential to their leadership. This section has shown the perceived essential nature of self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills to the RA role.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings for the three research questions that guided this study on RAs at a highly selective university perception of his/her enactment of leadership. Findings from two separate individual interviews were discussed in relation to the guiding research questions for the study. Participants perceived a change in their leadership around a willingness to engage in difficult dialogue, a deeper appreciation for the perspective of others, and a deeper appreciation for their identity and the identity of others. Participants applied their emotional intelligence through listening skills, facilitation and space creation, and authenticity. Finally, participants found self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills to be most essential to their leadership role.

The final chapter of this study will focus on connecting the research findings to the existing literature and theoretical frameworks guiding the study. The following chapter will discuss the major findings of the study, contributions to the

research literature, implications for practice, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.



## **Chapter Six: Summary of findings and implications**

### **Introduction**

The conduits of the residential experience are the Resident Assistants (RAs). The RAs help to bring a large number of students from various backgrounds together in a common space. RAs primarily achieve this by “establishing a personal relationship with students through daily contact with them” (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990, p. 24). In order to establish these personal relationships through the enactment of their leadership, RAs must be trained, given leadership development opportunities, and consistent on-going support and guidance. Research has focused on RA training, but not the utilization of emotional intelligence in that training (Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Bowman& Bowman, 2005; Deluga & Winters, 1990). Little is known about how RAs benefit from exposure to emotional intelligence as a way of enhancing their leadership role. Thus, this study highlights RAs perceived changes and or benefits from exposure to the concepts and practices of emotional intelligence.

This research introduced first hand accounts of the lived experiences of Resident Assistants (RAs) in relation to a course grounded in emotional intelligence. In addition, this study examined the perceptions of RAs about the enactment of their leadership. This study, examined the RAs leadership experiences and emotional intelligence exposure prior to the course as well as their experiences during and after the course.

RAs are increasingly recognized as a significant part of the overall student support system. As previous researchers noted, the “resident assistant serves the most comprehensive role in the student affairs division” (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990). These students receive training and support, but it is necessary to understand how exposure to emotional intelligence through an organized course intervention can affect leadership.

The purpose of this study was to understand what influence, if any, a course grounded in emotional intelligence has on an RA’s perception of his/her enactment of leadership. Emotional intelligence was defined as the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others (Mayer& Salovey, 1997).

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What differences do RAs at a private, elite university in the Western U.S. perceive in their leadership during and after formal exposure to emotional intelligence?
2. How do RAs discuss how they apply emotional intelligence concepts into their leadership role?
3. What emotional intelligence constructs do RAs perceive to be most essential to their leadership?

This chapter provides an overview of the current study. It includes a brief account of the rationale, purpose, research questions, methods, a summary of

findings and contributions to the pertinent literature, implications of the study for policy, practice and further research.

## **Method**

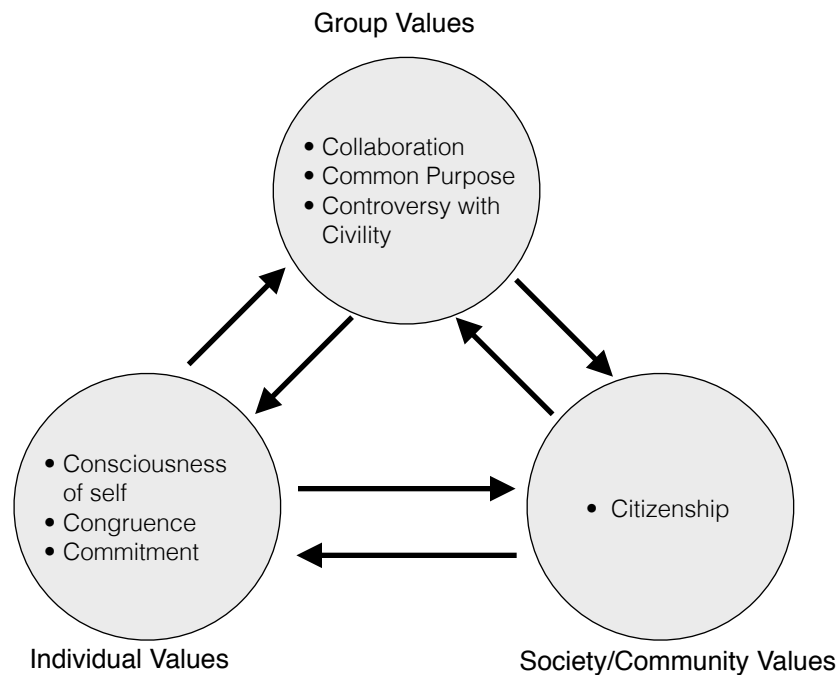
In this study I utilized qualitative methodology. Purposive sampling was used to select the 10 participants in the study from first year RAs who participated in a course based on emotional intelligence. Purposive sampling has two primary aims. “The first is to ensure that all the key constituencies of relevance to the subject matter are covered. The second is to ensure that, there is some diversity included in each criteria so the impact can be fully explored” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The participants participated in two semi-structured interviews. The first interview focused on the participants’ life history prior to being selected as an RA and taking the course and the subsequent interview focused on their experiences during and after the course.

The data analysis approach for this study was based in phenomenology and grounded theory (Moustakas, 1994; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The data sources included participant interviews, course syllabi, and facilitators weekly debrief notes. Open, axial, and selective coding were utilized to analyze the data and examine the data in the context of the research questions.

## **Summary of findings**

Findings are summarized and discussed in light of the extant literature. These findings are examined by the primary questions of this research. These are presented according to the major areas of focus of this research study, including:

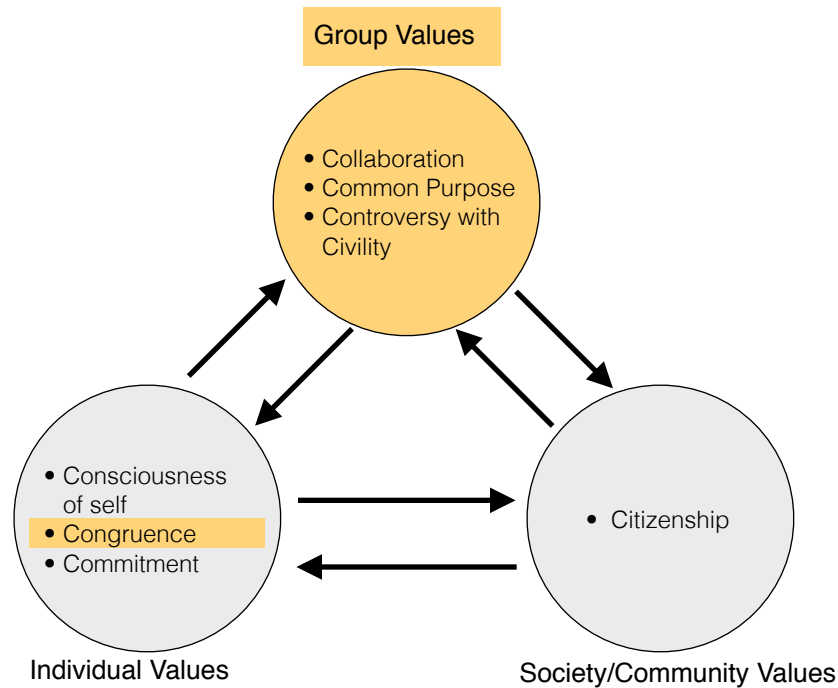
perceived differences in RAs leadership enactment, application of Emotional Intelligence into RAs leadership role, and perceived essential constructs of emotional intelligence to RAs leadership. The findings are further discussed in relationship to the theoretical framework of The Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Komives & Wagner, 2012).



*Figure 6.1: Diagram of the Social Change Model (HERI, 1996)*

**Perceived differences in their leadership enactment.** Data revealed that there is a perceived difference in RAs’ leadership as a result of knowledge and skills gained in an emotional intelligence course. Such a difference relates to engaging in difficult dialogue, understanding the perspective of others, and a deeper appreciation for the concept of personal identity. The primary findings relate most closely to the “Group Values” of the Social Change Model of leadership. In this area,

the values emphasize the group as a collective. The three values are not able to be achieved without the collective work of others. Figure 6.2 summarizes these findings graphically.



*Figure 6.2: Perceived differences in leadership enactment of RAs after formal exposure to emotional intelligence using the diagram of the Social Change Model (HERI, 1996)*

**Engaging in difficult dialogue.** Participants repeatedly cited examples of participation and facilitation of difficult dialogue. Participation in conversations that may turn difficult is a part of the RA role. The ability to successfully navigate those conversations allows RAs to be responsive listeners and allow students to express themselves without the fear of being judged. The success of these difficult dialogues allows RAs to create relationships with residents built on trust and experience. This

is congruent with Blimling & Miltengerger (1990) who assert this essential component of relationships in the success of the RA. Engaging in difficult dialogue is congruent with the Social Change Model of leadership value of controversy with civility. Controversy with civility refers to the ability to engage in difficult dialogue and move towards a common purpose through that dialogue.

These difficult dialogues also allow for student learning to occur for both the RA and their resident. This directly aligns with Ewell's (1997) insights on learning in higher education. Ewell (1997) posits that learning is about making meaning for each individual through the use of patterns, connections, and relationships. Difficult dialogues can be an incubator for this particular aspect of learning to occur. Ewell (1997) also discusses the importance of reflection in learning. After engaging in difficult dialogue RAs often reflect on the situation with their supervisor and are often encouraged to go back to the resident that they engaged in the dialogue with to reflect on the conversation and the outcome.

This study also advances the notion that after exposure to emotional intelligence, difficult conversations may influence the RAs' own lives and their roles as leaders. As a result, RAs appear to be better prepared to address such conversations beyond their practice as RAs. This can be seen in Scorpio's willingness to engage in a difficult conversation with his mother. That conversation does not directly impact his role, but it does have an influence on his personal life and his overall leadership abilities.

***Heightened understanding of the perspective of others.*** Amada (1994)

detailed the residence hall as being one of the most culturally diverse living environments that college students will ever experience. This is evident in the findings of this study. RAs, in addition to being student leaders, are also students and residents in the halls themselves. The findings of this study suggest that RAs found benefit in understanding the perspectives of others. The RAs learned not only about other people but also themselves in response to other people and in context with the situation. This is in concert with Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling's (1996) assertion that one of the most powerful learning opportunities is found in interpersonal interactions with peers.

RAs heightened awareness of the perspective of others led them to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of their own perspective. This is congruent with the work of Russell & Stone (2002) that discusses the importance of appreciating others as a critical component of servant leadership. The authors discussed the importance of showing concern for the needs of others as well as their interests and backgrounds. As a result of this heightened understanding RAs report feeling more confident about their role as leader during interpersonal interactions. The Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCMLD) speaks to the understanding of others being a defining characteristic of group values. The ability to collaborate from a collective understanding of values is critical in the SCMLD. In the understanding of others, RAs are developing some of the base components to meaningful collaboration from shared group values.

***Enhanced appreciation for the concept of personal identity of self and others.*** RAs also reflected on their identity and becoming more comfortable with who they are by examining developments in their leadership. Facilitator notes from the course showed that throughout the course the RAs often commented on being “forced” to grapple with ideas and experiences that they have not had to address before. They also commented on this course being the first opportunity that they had to discuss the types of topics offered.

Komives and Wagner (2012) discuss seven values that are the foundation for leadership for social change. Congruence is one of those seven values. Congruence refers to a person identifying their values, beliefs, and emotions and acting consistently with them. The findings of this study demonstrate that during and after the course RAs’ appreciation for their personal identity contributed to congruence with themselves as described by Komives and Wagner (2012). The RAs’ appreciation for their own identity allows them to highly regard the identity of others as well as help others begin to value their own identity. Their appreciation of who they are and who others are allows them to be confident in their role and confident in their interactions with others.

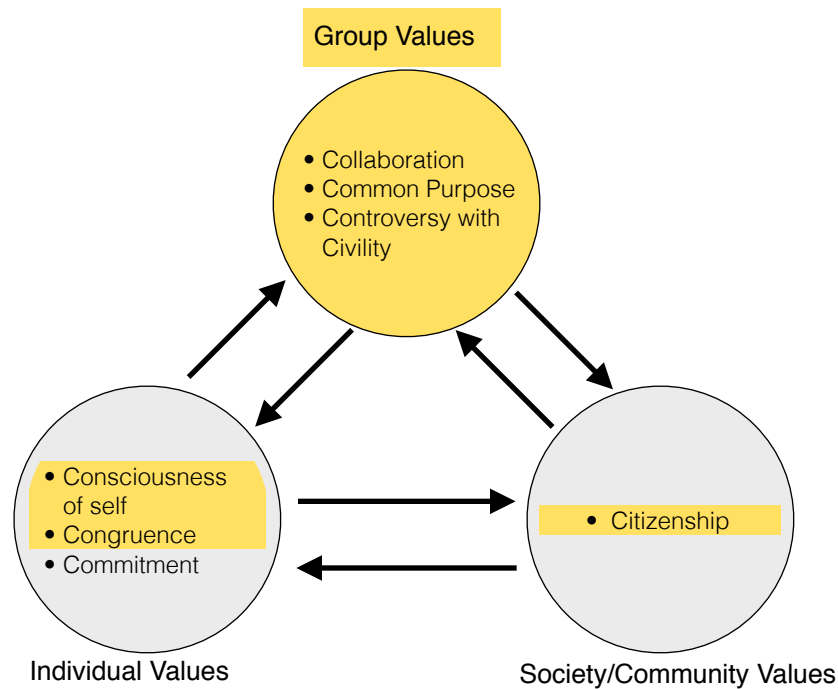
The RAs’ perceived difference in their enactment of leadership contributes to their ability to be a successful RA. Paladino et al. (2005) found that a lack of confidence in the role leads to RA burn out. The perceived differences in leadership enactment of RAs in this study suggest an increase in confidence, which could lead to greater security and longevity in the role. The Social Change Model of leadership



distinguishes between knowledge of self and knowledge of others. The RAs in this study reported the course impacting both knowledge areas. This cross over helps to demonstrate the interconnected nature of the three areas of the Social Change Model of leadership. RAs continued to cycle through developing knowledge of self, which informed their understanding of others. They also would learn about the identity of others, which informed their knowledge of themselves.

**Application of emotional intelligence constructs into the RA role.**

Findings of this study suggest that RAs are able to apply emotional intelligence constructs to enact their leadership role after reflecting and adjusting their personal leadership styles. Such application appears to require listening skills, facilitation skills, space creation skills, and authenticity. In the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCMLD), these skills are strongly related to the development of individual values. There was a strong relationship between the consciousness of self, the development of congruence and the development of commitment and the skills that RAs described learning as a result of the course. In addition, there is evidence that in the development of individual values, these skills formed the ability to engage in group values in the SCMLD. There is also evidence that in the development of these skills, RAs moved towards society and community values. These dynamics are illustrated in Figure 6.3 on the following page using the Social Change Model of Leadership diagram.



*Figure 6.3: Application of emotional intelligence concepts in the RA role using the diagram of the Social Change Model (HERI, 1996)*

**Listening Skills.** The findings have shown that RAs report the ability to use listening skills, including active, empathetic, and authentic listening. Listening skills are essential to developing relationships and effective communication. Both of which are necessary for effective leadership.

RAs reported that the discussion and exercises that occurred during the listening week of the course enabled them to be more focused listeners. The application of these listening skills appears to improve the RAs' leadership ability, which aligns with the work of Russell and Stone (2002) who indicated that listening is a critical way that leaders show respect and appreciation for others. Listening is essential for effective leadership. Komives et.al. (2005) found that listening was an

essential skill for student leaders in establishing interpersonal efficacy, which was a component of leadership identity development. Findings of this study appear to suggest that RAs were particularly able to perceive and understand the emotion of others. This skill development is connected to the “consciousness of self” discussed in the SCMLD. The RAs in this study worked to develop a consciousness of their selves and their presence with others to more fully engage in listening.

**Facilitation skills.** Facilitation in the context of higher education is defined as to render easier or promoting critically reflective learning (Brockbank & McGill, 1998). Facilitation occurs in a wide variety of situations for an RA. Facilitation can be formal or informal. RAs often facilitate conversations that can be difficult because of the topics, participants or context of the conversation. Not all conversations are difficult, but all participants should be heard and the conversation should progress. RAs in this study found facilitation skills to be one of the skills that they applied into their leadership role. This is congruent with the work of Brockbank and McGill (1998) which suggests how the use of facilitation cultivates the learning relationship and acknowledges that there is potential for self-challenge and challenging others, as well as the notion that learning is reciprocal.

The skills of facilitation are reflected in the SCMLD. Citizenship and collaboration as discussed by Komives & Wagner (2012) align with the skill of facilitation found in this study. Citizenship pertains to being actively connected to the community that you reside in and being an active participant in the change efforts of that community. Collaboration refers to the snowballing effect of collective

contributions particularly valuing the diversity found within the group. RAs discussed utilizing facilitation to bring residents together around a common cause as well as feeling a desire to connect and bring residents together to help move the residential community forward.

***Space creation skills.*** Space creation refers to the creation of physical as well as emotional space. Creating physical space is an act of finding a space where residents can come together and discuss topics that they decide that they want to discuss. The creation of emotional space refers to creating an environment where residents can decompress and express themselves in a way that is beneficial for them while not disrespecting the space for someone else. The creation of spaces is essential for helping to develop residents individually as well as a collective group. The findings suggest that RAs understand the importance of space creation and utilized these skills.

These findings match the social change model of leadership values of citizenship, common purpose, and controversy with civility as discussed by Komives & Wagner (2012). Citizenship as noted earlier allows people to connect in a responsible way. The creation of spaces can provide a physical space for this to occur. Common purpose focuses on a high level of group trust and shared responsibility. The creation of both physical and shared spaces has the potential to provide opportunities for this trust and shared responsibility to develop and flourish. Finally, controversy with civility refers to the importance of differing

viewpoints that will emerge in a group and the process of utilizing these viewpoints to create change and move the group forward.

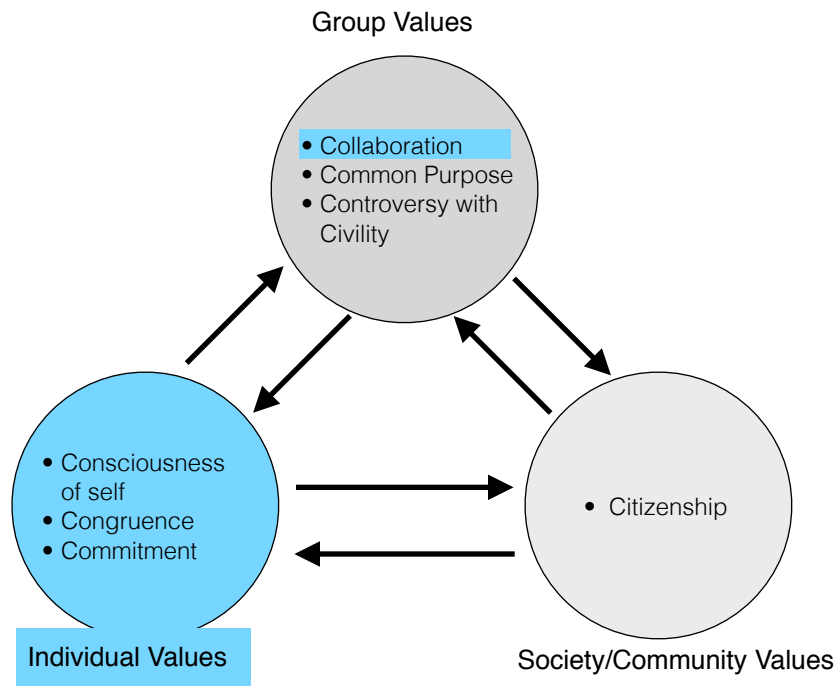
RAs' skill to create spaces for their residents strengthens their ability to develop relationships with residents and enhance their leadership ability. As a result, RAs are better prepared to help lead their residents and their residential community. This is consistent with the work of Komives et al. (2005) that found that group influences are a significant component of developing a leadership identity. The group influences refer to learning from group members, the ability to practice new skills, and learning from membership continuity.

***Practicing authenticity.*** According to Shankman, Allen, and Haber-Curran (2015) authenticity can be defined as developing credibility, being transparent, and aligning words with actions. They go on further to state that “emotionally intelligent leaders live their values and present themselves and their motives in an open and honest manner” (Shankman, Allen, & Haber-Curran 2015,p.51). The findings of this study suggest that RAs are able to be more authentic with themselves and others in their leadership. This authenticity directly aligns with Komives and Wagner’s (2012) work regarding the SCMLD’s values of congruence and consciousness of self.

Being authentic allows RAs to model the behavior and vulnerability that they would like to see in and from their residents. As George (2007) notes, authentic leaders create an environment for empowerment and encouragement for authentic leadership amongst the people they lead. Similarly, Avolio and Gardner (2005) note that authentic leaders “lead by example” with transparent decision making,

confidence, hope, and resilience. These are the types of skills and behaviors that RAs hope to elicit in their residents through their leadership.

**Perceived essential constructs of emotional intelligence to RAs leadership.** This study's findings revealed that RAs perceive that certain constructs of emotional intelligence are most essential to their leadership practice. These include self-awareness, motivation, empathy and social skills. These skills map most strongly to the individual values in the SCMLD. Goleman (1998) notes five essential components of emotional intelligence, four of the five are noted in the above. The fifth is self-regulation. Self-regulation refers to controlling or redirecting ones moods. While this component was mentioned in the study, it was not seen as essential to the RAs' perception of their leadership. Figure 6.4 on the following page highlights the components of emotional intelligence that RAs thought were essential as they relate to the Social Change Model.



*Figure 6.4: Constructs of emotional intelligence RAs perceive to be most essential to their leadership using the diagram of the Social Change Model (HERI, 1996)*

**Self-awareness.** The findings of this study suggest that self-awareness was identified as an essential component contributing to RAs leadership. RAs were able to reflect about the importance of self-awareness in their leadership role. RAs were able to consider the importance of their own emotions and the management of those emotions in relation to their ability to effectively build relationships and maintain themselves as a leader. This is congruent with the work of Komives et al. (2005) that found that a deepening sense of self-awareness was a component of developing a sense of self. This developing self was an essential component of students' leadership identity

Self-awareness directly aligns to the consciousness individual value of the SCMLD (Komives & Wagner, 2012). As the model suggests self-awareness is a foundational element of the leadership process. Self-awareness can come through different modes. As a result of participation in the course, RAs understand the essential nature of self-awareness to their leadership role.

**Motivation.** Motivation is defined as a passion to work that extends beyond money or status (Goleman, 1998). Motivation can be intrinsic, occurring within a person or extrinsic occurring outside of a person. The findings of this study revealed that RAs were immensely motivated in their role. The application of these motivation skills is what kept them grounded and allowed them to remember why they took on the leadership role during difficult times. RAs motivation in the role was primarily to give back to others in the same way in which their RAs gave to them. RAs were also motivated by their desire to learn about others and get to know people. This finding agrees with the work of Mitchell (1987) that notes that motivation includes energy, direction, and persistence.

Commitment is one of the seven values of the SCMLD (Komives & Wagner, 2012) that sits within the larger umbrella of individual values. Commitment requires an intrinsic passion or energy to a cause. The findings surrounding motivation situate within the value of commitment. One component of that value is a purposeful investment toward action. RAs perceived motivation as an essential construct that allowed them to continue to invest in their leadership role for the benefit of their residents and community.



**Empathy.** Empathy is the ability to understand the emotional make up of other people and a skill in treating people according to their emotional reaction (Goleman, 1998). According to RAs empathy is an essential construct of emotional intelligence that contributes to their leadership. RAs discussed the importance of trust in empathy and noted the importance of utilizing empathy to gain and maintain the trust of residents. This aligns with the work of Russell and Stone (2002) that note that establishing trust is one of the most essential parts of good leadership. Russell and Stone (2002) discussing the work of Shaw (1997) asserted that leaders must demonstrate concern for people in order to gain trust.

As a result, RAs participation in an emotional intelligence course appears to enhance their ability to extend empathy as a contributing factor to their enactment of their leadership. This allows RAs to become emotionally intelligent leaders. Empathy does not have a direct connection to the Social Change Model, but could be connected to the consciousness of self and the collaboration with others in the individual and group values.

**Social skills.** The leadership role of RAs may be interpreted as one that is primarily social. Goleman (1998) describes social skills as proficiency in managing relationships and building networks. As highlighted by RAs social skills are seen as an essential construct of emotional intelligence that directly influences their leadership. Social skills are more than the ability to interact and hold a conversation with others. Social skill calls for effectively managing relationships and leveraging those relationships as needed.

This finding matches with the value of collaboration from the social change model of leadership (Komives & Wagner, 2012). Social skills are essential for effective collaboration. These findings directly align with the notion that social skills are essential for the collaboration. As a leader an RA must be able to utilize social skills to not only move their residential community forward, but to harness the individual skills of their residents. This is similar to the work of Riggio (2013) that notes that social skills are particularly important in the enactment of the leadership role due to relationship building and the impression that the leader makes by utilizing the social skill.

In summary, the findings of this study align with the results of a study by Dugan & Komives (2007). The study found that leadership could be learned and developed. This study has shown that a course in emotional intelligence can assist with RAs' learning about leadership and the emotional intelligence skills necessary to enhance their leadership ability. It also demonstrates the impact of this type of training on an RAs' development in the Social Change Model.

This study sought to fill a gap in the literature surrounding the usage of qualitative research to understand emotional intelligence and RAs, and the utilization of an emotional intelligence course as further training for RAs. This study contributes to the literature by providing qualitative data surrounding the experiences of RAs in relation to their role and the emotional intelligence course that they participated in.

Data found in this study shows that there are perceived differences in RAs enactment of leadership. In examining the findings of this study and their relationship to the SCMLD, it was discovered that the primary outcomes for students related to the individual values and partially in the group values. There was limited evidence that the society/community values were unearthed. This could be because of the focus of the questions or the primary focus of the intervention on knowledge of self, knowledge of others and engagement with others.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One significant limitation of this study is the site. This study was conducted at a very specific site. The site was selected due to the residential nature of the campus as well as the site offering an emotional intelligence based course to its first year resident assistants. It is important to note this because the findings of this study might not be the same due to university composition, types of RAs, and the structure of the housing program.

This study also focused solely on the RAs experiences. At no point were the RAs' supervisors, former facilitators, or current residents asked about their experiences with the RAs. This provides only one side of the experience with the data and not having the other side could be a limitation to the study. Understanding the experiences of the people who directly interact with the RAs could also be an area for further exploration.

The final limitation of this study is time. The RAs in this study were interviewed during their first quarter in the role. They had finished the course

between 3-5 months prior to being interviewed, and they had officially been in their role 2-4 months. Conducting the study at a different time of the year could have yielded different results.

### **Implications for Practice**

Findings of this study can provide practitioners with valuable information to inform future practice surrounding the training of Resident Assistants. Acquiring a robust understanding of the experiences of RAs who participated in an emotional intelligence based course can provide administrators with information that can inform the way that institutions set up their teaching and training curriculum. From this study, practitioners can learn about the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence skills into their broad training plan.

My study shows that teaching emotional intelligence skills in a formal class setting effects RAs' perceptions of their leadership ability in a positive way. Knowledge of this positive effect can directly benefit not only the RAs, but the broader university community. My study provides practitioners with an opportunity to hear directly from students about their experiences. This is a valuable insight into RAs and what is meaningful to them, as well as what is helpful to developing them as leaders.

The findings of my study offer practitioners an exciting opportunity to engage, teach, and train Resident Assistants in a unique way. Research has shown that even though college students are changing the way that institutions select and train RAs to interact with and assist these students has not adapted or evolved

(Jaeger & Caison, 2006). While my study did not focus on the selection of RAs, the findings do provide promising opportunities for training.

Multiple authors have discussed the need for enhanced training and development of RAs inside and outside their role (Bierman & Carpenter, 1994; Bowman & Bowman, 1995; Denzine & Anderson, 1999; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Jaegar & Caison, 2006;). In addition, the findings of my study suggest that courses based in emotional intelligence theory can provide an effective opportunity for enhancing the training experiences of RAs. The ten-week course provides skills that are useful and impactful to the RA leadership role, but as the findings suggest are also useful to the personal development of the RAs. Practitioners should consider inclusion of the key findings from this study into their training curriculum. If possible, practitioners should work to offer courses for RAs that utilize emotional intelligence concepts before beginning their role. Practitioners should also weave these concepts into staff training and supplemental trainings that occur throughout the year.

The data derived from this study can also provide a useful framework for curriculum creation. However, it is important to note the type of institution at which this study was conducted. Practitioners should use this as a guide and tailor their potential courses to the specific needs of their institutions and population of students.

### **Future Research**

This study examined one aspect of RA leadership development in relation to emotional intelligence. There are opportunities to expand this research as well

different aspects of the topic. I believe that future research should examine (1) emotional intelligence based courses with RAs who are in an enforcer role (2) observing RAs in their role (3) emotional intelligence based courses for the broader student leader population.

The RAs at the site of this study are not tasked with being enforcers of policy. They are asked to establish and maintain relationships and assist as needed in times of crises. This is not the case at all institutions. Some institutions have RAs in the role of enforcing policy and are not primarily focused on relationship development. I believe that understanding the experiences of those RAs and how an emotional intelligence based course might effect their perception of their experience or effect the way they interact with their residents and in turn how their residents view them.

Data collection was completed only through interviews and course notes and documents, additional research could be focused on the actual enactment of RAs leadership in their role. This can provide a different component of the RA experience. In addition to the observations of RAs in their role, interviews with supervisors and current residents could provide some texture to the research and round out the picture of the RA leadership experience.

This research study solely focused on RAs. RAs are just one type of student leaders on college campuses. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of this type of course for the broader student leader population. This has the potential to impact the entire campus community and have a significant effect on enhancing and impacting student learning.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

As a practitioner this study solidified many of the beliefs that I had surrounding emotional intelligence and its potential use in developing leaders. I work closely with RAs, who in my opinion have a unique collegiate leadership opportunity. Utilizing emotional intelligence skills to impact students' perceptions of their leadership has the potential to impact students as well as larger campus communities in a meaningful way. I am a proponent of student learning and this study has reinforced the importance of blending formal and informal learning for the benefit of students. Student learning and leadership development benefits the higher education community and have the potential to pay it forward for generations to come.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

## **INTERPERSONAL LEARNING & LEADERSHIP**

**School of Education, Spring 2014**

### **Course Overview**

"Interpersonal Learning & Leadership" explores research on leadership and the complex dynamics of our changing society. Participants will engage in course work intended to build skills relevant to the Resident Assistant position. Students will practice listening, question asking, self reflection, risk taking, facilitating, conflict mediating, decision-making and group leadership. They will explore how groups of people can come together for intellectual and interpersonal learning and growth within a complex society. Students will develop strategies to build community and facilitate challenging conversations while creating a safe environment for their peers to do the same.

### **Objectives**

Upon completion of this course, students will learn about themselves, their peers, and how to be a catalyst for the development of community through the development of the following micro skills:

Students will be able to demonstrate skills in listening, question asking, reflection, risk-taking and selective disclosure through a recorded conversation with feedback. Students will be able to manage challenging conversation by facilitating group dialogue and mediating/ managing conflict. Students will be able to articulate the vision and goals for their residential area. They will be able to use this vision to manage complex decision-making while establishing legitimacy as a leader.

### **Written Reflections/ Journal Pass**

Students will be asked to participate in a Journal Pass that will continue throughout the quarter. Each student will be given a journal on the first day of class and asked to respond to a prompt after class. Students will have journal groups comprised of the three students to a group. During the following class session students will pass the journal to another student in their journal group who will respond to the previous entry and then answer the next week's prompt (all prompts can be found in the syllabus). Each week students will pass the journal to another person in their journal group who will also respond to the previous entry and a new prompt. Journals will be reviewed by the facilitators during week five and returned to the original owner during class 6 and 9 so that they can review and reflect on some of the entries that other students have made. Remember - the next person who receives the journal is counting on their classmates in order to complete their reflection, so entries must be completed in between class periods and not at the end of the quarter. During Class 10, after students have received their original journals back, they will be asked to present to the class on both their journal entries and their final paper

### **Academic Accommodations**

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will



evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

### **Grades and Expectations**

This is a Pass/No Credit course. A passing grade is:

20% In Class Participation & Small Group Work

20% Reflection Journals

20% Meetings with House staff and/or Section Facilitator

20% Evaluation #1: Midterm Visual Representation

20% Evaluation #2: Final Reflection Writing and Presentation

### **Class Attendance**

Because small group work and participation form the backbone of the course content, no unexcused absences will be permitted. To obtain an excused absence, the student must contact the absence request pane. Only incredibly significant and/or unexpected events will warrant an excused absence. If a student has more than one excused absence, they must meet with an Associate Dean of Residential Education to determine whether they can continue the course.

Students must complete and pass this course to continue in the Resident Assistant/ College Assistant position in the fall quarter

### **Required Course Text**

Articles for the course can be found on courseworks or online.

### **Course Outline**

#### **Weeks 1-5**

##### **Goals:**

Interpersonal Engagement: Creating Connections

##### **Skills**

Week 1: Emotional Intelligence/Social Intelligence

Week 2: Relational Learning

Week 3: Identity

Week 4: Risky Communication

Week 5: Mid Point Evaluation

#### **Weeks 6-10**

##### **Goals**

Engaging Community: Being a Catalyst for Community

##### **Skills**

Week 6: Facilitation

Week 7: Conflict Management

Week 8: Decision Making

Week 9: Leadership and Public Presence  
Week 10: Final Evaluation

## Topics, Readings, and Assignments

### Week 1: Emotional Intelligence/Social Intelligence

#### Prior to Class:

Reading:

*What Makes A Leader* by Daniel Goleman, Harvard Business Review, pp. 93-102, 1998.  
*Leadership Excellence and the 'Soft' Skills: Authenticity, Influence and Performance*, by David Bradford and Carole Robin, Stanford University Graduate School of Business, 2004.

#### After Class

Reflection:

Which of the five components shows up the most in your daily interactions? Which shows up the least? Reflect on how this will impact your style as an RA. Please consider your interactions with both residents and fellow staff members.

### Week 2: Relational Learning

#### Prior to Class:

Reading:

Gottlieb, A.D., Smith, P., Salovey, P., and D'Andrea, V. (1996). Listening Skills, Peer Counseling, Chapter 2 pp. 19-42, 1996.  
Can you read people's emotions? (2013). The New York Times. [http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/03/well-quiz-the-mind-behind-the-eyes/?\\_r=0](http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/03/well-quiz-the-mind-behind-the-eyes/?_r=0)  
Foer, Jonathan S. (2013). How not to be alone. The New York Times. [http://mobile.nytimes.com/2013/06/09/opinion/sunday/how-not-to-be-alone.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=0](http://mobile.nytimes.com/2013/06/09/opinion/sunday/how-not-to-be-alone.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0).

Watch:

Chimamanda Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story", TED Talk ([http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html))  
Cliff Nass talk about social anxiety <https://vimeo.com/73252281> (Password: cl1FF)

#### After Class

Reflection:

1. Respond to your classmate's journal
2. What is the real danger of a single story? When has your "story" been in danger? When have you created a single story of someone else?

### Week 3: Identity

#### Prior to Class

Reading:

*The Disadvantages of an Elite Education* by William Deresiewicz, The American Scholar, Summer 2008.  
*Perspectives on Identity Development* by Vasti Torres, Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession, pp. 187-207, 2011.

### **After Class**

#### *Reflection:*

1. Respond to your classmate's journal.
2. How do the identities that you hold most central change based on those you are with, the environment you are in, and the roles that you play? What identities are strongest when you are at Stanford? What identities are strongest when you are at home/away from campus?

## **Week 4: Risky Conversations**

### **Prior to Class**

#### Reading

*Five Levels of Interpersonal Communication* by Richard P. Francisco, adapted from NTL Reading Book for Human Relations Training (8th ed), pp. 1-5.

*Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans*, by Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, pp. 797-811, 1995.

Sue, Derald W. (2010). Racial Microaggressions in everyday Life: Is subtle bias harmless?, *Psychology Today*, pp 1-5

Sue, Derald W. (2010) Microaggressions: More than just race Can microaggressions be directed at women or gay people?, *Psychology Today*

### **After Class**

#### Reflection

1. Respond to your classmate's journal.
2. Think about the levels of communication article, microaggressions discussion, and the high low activity. What types of conversations do you think you can have with your friends, co-staff, family, and residents before it gets too risky?

## **Week 5: Skill Evaluation**

Class will not meet during week 5. Your facilitator will discuss the midterm activity with you during your week three class.

#### Assignment:

This is an assignment that you will work on with a partner. Your facilitator will give you more information during week three.

## **Week 6: Facilitation**

### **Prior to Class**

#### Reading

*Straight Talk: A Norm-Changing Intervention* by Kaleel Jamison, NTL Reading Book for Human Relations Training (8th ed), pp. 18-28, 1985

*What to Observe in a Group* by Edgar Schein, NTL Reading Book for Human Relations Training, NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, (8th ed), pp. 267-269, 1999.

*Effects of Racial Diversity on Complex Thinking in College Students* by Anthony Antonio, Mitchell J. Chang, Kenji Hakuta, David A. Kenny, Shana Levin and Jeffery F. Milem, pp. 1-6, 2004.

## **After Class**

### *Reflection:*

1. Get back your original journal
2. Respond to the developments and reflections in the journal thus far. What did you read that was surprising or unexpected? How has the process of journaling impacted your learning thus far?

## **Week 7: Conflict**

### **Prior to Class**

#### Reading

*Have Your Feelings or They Will Have You* by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*, Penguin Books, pp. 85-108, 2000.

*Words can be Windows or Walls* by Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Concepts and Controversy in Organizational Behavior*, (2nd ed), Goodyear Publishing Co., Inc., pp. 485-490, 1976.

Brown, Brene (2012). *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead.*

### **After Class**

#### *Reflection*

1. Respond to your classmate's journal
2. Identify an emotion that you felt in this weeks class as you reflected on conflict. Reflect on where that emotion comes from for you. Reflect on other times that you experience that emotion. How does that emotion inform or impact the way you facilitate conversations?

## **Week 8: Decision-Making**

### **Prior to Class**

#### Reading

*Embracing Confusion: What Leaders Do When They Don't Know What to Do*. Phi Delta Kappa, pp. 358-366, 2005.

#### Watch:

Tom Wujec Marshmallow Challenge TED talk ([http://marshmallowchallenge.com/TED\\_Talk.html](http://marshmallowchallenge.com/TED_Talk.html))

### **After Class**

#### *Reflection*

1. Respond to your classmate's journal.
2. We often feel a need to have the right answer and to have it quickly. Where does this need come from and who is it really serving? When might you have this impulse as an RA?

## **Week 9: Leadership and Public Presence**

### **Prior to Class**

#### Watch:

Benjamin Zander's TED talk ([http://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin\\_zander\\_on\\_music\\_and\\_passion.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_zander_on_music_and_passion.html))

**In Class:**

Leadership Video

**Week 10: Final Evaluation & Group Closure**

Bring your Take Home Final and your Journal to this class. Class time will be used to collect these and have group discussion and closure

## **Appendix B**

### **First Interview Protocol**

#### **Begin Tape Recorder**

Thank you for participating in this study. As I explained in my email, I am interested students experiences with and as a result of the RA class. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the purpose or scope of my study?

Just before we began, we reviewed the informed consent form, which you signed. Here is another copy of this form. I want to assure you that your confidentiality will be protected. I will use a pseudonym when I refer to you in my data analysis and report. I would like for you to select that pseudonym at this time. Please try to not choose nicknames or anything that might easily identify you to someone else. Do you have any questions about this before we begin?

I would like to start learning more about your background and experience before coming to college as well as here in college prior to taking the class.

1. Tell me about yourself
2. What types of activities were you involved in at school and outside of school (other than classes)?
3. What is your definition of emotional intelligence? Where did that definition come from?
4. Would you consider yourself to be emotionally intelligent? Why? How? Can you recall a specific situation that stands out?
5. What is your understanding of interpersonal communication? How did you formulate your definition? Do you see yourself as being good at interpersonal communication?
6. What is your understanding of leadership? How did you formulate your definition? Do you see yourself as a leader? Why or why not?
7. You made a choice and were selected to be a Resident Assistant. What experiences do you think contributed to your decision and selection?
8. What motivated you to apply to be an RA? What is motivating you now in your role?
9. What were you most looking forward to in the RA role? Why?

10. Is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss?

That is all the questions I have for today. Would you like to schedule your second interview now, or would you like me to contact you to schedule it?

(the 2nd interview will ideally be scheduled within 1 week after the 1st interview).

## **Appendix C**

### **Second Interview Protocol**

May I have your permission to record this interview?

#### **Begin Tape Recorder**

Thank you for participating in this study. As I explained in my email, I am interested students experiences with and as a result of the RA class. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the purpose or scope of my study?

Just before we began, we reviewed the informed consent form, which you signed. Here is another copy of this form. I want to assure you that your confidentially with be protected. I will use a pseudonym when I refer to you in my data analysis and report. I would like for you to select that pseudonym at this time. Please try to not choose nicknames or anything that might easily identify you to someone else. Do you have any questions about this before we begin?

The last time we met we discussed your background and experience before coming to college as well as here in college prior to taking the class. Is there anything that you would like to add to that interview topic. This time I would like to focus more on your experience during and after the class.

11. What do you feel that you learned about yourself during the class?
12. Were there any aspects of the course that had a greater impact on you? Why?
13. How have your leadership skills changed since you began the class?
14. How have concepts from the class impacted your view and enactment of your leadership skills?
15. What would your residents say about you? Why do you think they would say this?
16. How have your interactions with others shifted since being in the course?
17. How has your self-view changed since being in the class and in your role?
18. Is there anything else that you would like to add or discuss?



That is all the questions I have for today. I will send you a copy of the transcript of this interview so you can review and make sure that I captured everything correctly.

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