Communicative Social Justice Training for Resident Advisors:

RA's Experiences and Uses of Training

by

Jessica Zhivotovsky

University of Colorado at Boulder

Department of Communication

Dr. Cindy White, Department of Communication, Thesis Advisor, Honors Council Member

Dr. Patricia Sullivan, Department of English, Committee Member

Dr. Matt Koschmann, Department of Communication, Committee Member

Defense Date: April 5th, 2016

Communicative Social Justice Training for Resident Advisors

Table of Contents

Abstract

Resident advisors seek to foster an environment where residents feel safe and included in their residence hall community. Training has become increasingly crucial as the resident advisor role becomes more complex and ambiguous. Not all training is effective and it is important to help resident advisors move from "knowing" what to do to successfully enacting their knowledge in daily interactions. This study examined how resident advisors enact training on social justice topics in conversations with residents on inappropriate behavior, particularly inappropriate behavior that could make others, such as under-represented students, feel offended or excluded. Twelve interviews with both new and mentor resident advisors at a large southwestern university were conducted in order to better understand how resident advisors make sense of their role, experience training, and how they use their training in difficult interactions with residents. Three main themes were identified in analysis: sense making about the RA position is influenced by a relational understanding of the role; training is necessary for the role but also very hard to put into practice; and resident advisors feel that enacting the training is much harder than expected. One particularly interesting finding was that RAs say conversations on inappropriate behavior rarely occur because their floor or residents are unique, positioning their experience as different than others. These findings highlight the challenge for resident advisors to enact their training in conversations when attempting to maintain relationships with their residents.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Cindy White for her immense support and encouragement throughout the honors process. Her generous time, patience, and passion fostered an encouraging environment throughout this challenging process.

I want to thank Dr. Patricia Sullivan for not only dedicating her time and insight as my committee member, but also inspiring me to continue my learning and development through writing and reflection.

I also want to thank Dr. Matt Koschmann for dedicating his time and insight as my committee member. Dr. Koschmann's flexibility and understanding throughout the honors process has been greatly appreciated.

Finally, I would like to recognize my honors thesis class for the vast encouragement and feedback throughout the last year. This project would have felt nearly impossible to complete without your kind words and endless support.

Chapter 1: Literature Review & Rationale

Introduction

Universities face the challenge of creating an inclusive environment where all students feel welcome. One reason this is particularly important is because residential university campuses often require students to live on campus. Living and learning with others can be challenging for students and heightens the need to actively help students learn to engage with others in ways that are accepting and appropriate. One way universities seek to address this within residence halls is by training resident advisors to address interactions by residents that may not promote a safe and inclusive environment for all students.

Helping to create an inclusive environment can be a particularly challenging task for resident advisors for several reasons. First, resident advisors, who are also students, are expected to balance their academic work with the maintenance of their community and other resident advisor duties. They are both members of the community as well as leaders within the community, which can create a dynamic environment that is difficult to maintain. Second, creating and maintaining this environment can be challenging because residents are not always familiar with appropriate ways to interact with their peers. For instance, a resident may feel unwelcome due to intentional or unintentional offensive language used by other residents. Helping residents learn appropriate ways to interact in their community often becomes the responsibility of the resident advisor.

To prepare resident advisors for these situations, training programs centered on a wide range of topics are provided to resident advisors. This allows the RAs to both receive resources and helpful tips to handle these interactions and learn how to create and maintain an inclusive environment. This study examined a university where training for resident advisors includes

considerable attention to the topics of social justice and inclusion. At this university, when incidents of inappropriate behavior occur, resident advisors are expected to have a discussion with involved residents about the intention and the impact these decisions have on the community as a whole.

Many of the problems that are faced in the residence halls center on inclusive environments and resident behavior. It is not uncommon for a resident to single out others or make them feel excluded. For instance, one resident may not always get along with another because he/she resident feels the other does not fit in with the community. A typical example is when a resident isn't invited to participate in activities with other residents on the floor because he/she is viewed as different. When these types of situations occur, resident advisors are often called upon to have conversations with the resident who engaged in this inappropriate behavior.

Most universities provide RAs with training to help them anticipate and manage this sort of inappropriate behavior (Elleven, Allen, & Wircenski, 2001), and the university studied in this project has been actively seeking to address this in RA training. However, whether this training is actually useful for the RAs and meets the institutions needs has not been studied. This research project will examine how resident advisors at a predominately white institution experience and utilize training on social justice topics in their work. More specifically, this project will examine how resident advisors talk with residents about problem behaviors related to race or gender in residence halls. This is being studied to better understand how resident advisor training is enacted in everyday conversation between residents and RAs.

Residence Hall Benefits

The residence hall environment is important to understand because many, if not all, university students will live in the residence halls their first year. At most institutions, this is a

requirement for all first-year students. Research has shown that there are many benefits for students who live in the residence halls and many of these benefits can be attributed to how the RA interacts with both their residents and their community. Gentry, Harris, and Nowicki (2007) claimed, "students who reside in residence halls have the opportunity for personal and community development by living, working, and learning together with other residents" (p. 61). Besides the affordability, research found that "residential hall experiences foster the development outcomes of a range of capacities: empathy, tolerance, academic engagement, and active thinking" (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall & Lewis, 2012, p. 160). The RA, who is trained on residence hall policies and relationships, facilitates the development of residents both directly and indirectly by facilitating conversations and working to create a safe community. Living in the residence halls can increases student retention rates, which is crucial for many institutions (Harwood et al., 2012). To help increase retention and ensure residents are benefiting from this experience, RAs live in the residence halls and are charged with working to create an inclusive and supportive environment.

If a resident does not feel welcome in their living environment, this can lead to a decrease in both retention rates of the institution and benefits for the resident. One common reason residents do not feel welcome is because of the way they are treated by their peers in the residence halls. Another potential reason residents may not feel welcome is because of how the RA of the community handles situations and facilitates conversations between residents. Overall, the RA has a large responsibility to help ensure that residents benefit from their time in the residence halls.

Problem Behavior and Microaggressions in Residence Halls

Creating an inclusive environment in residence halls is not easy and there is evidence that not all residents feel welcome in the community at all times. A key influence of the sense of community in residence halls is dependent on the way residents treat one another. Most residence halls present a more diverse living environment than students have encountered living at home. This can be due to diversity in resident backgrounds, genders, sexuality, ethnicity, customs, and more. Residents are not always familiar with how to treat others, especially those they may not share similar identities with, in a way that is positive and constructive. Incoming residents are not always aware of their communication patterns and relationships. It is not uncommon for residents to make offensive comments to their peers without understanding the impact of such comments.

Research in the area of microaggressions has shed light on both how interactions can negatively impact the community and how ways of communicating with others can exclude people, even when it does not involve overt bias. Microaggressions are defined as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are 'put downs'" (Huntt et al., 2012, p. 162). Microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations are three categories of microaggressions that occur in everyday interactions. All three types of microaggressions have the potential to occur in the residence halls. Microinsults are classified as more subtle behaviors; for example, dismissive looks or gestures. The more "old-fashioned" forms of racism are categorized as microassaults. These are more conscious decisions made by the communicator and can be both verbal and nonverbal. When minorities discuss these occurrences it is common for others to invalidate them and the situation. These microinvalidations "minimize or deny the racialized experiences of people of color" and have a very negative effect on minorities (Huntt et al., 2012, p. 162). Invalidations can occur from other peers, RAs, or even professional staff both

inside and outside of the residence hall. Although overt racism may have decreased in both frequency and intensity over the years, racial microaggressions, a much more subtle form of discrimination, continue to exist. One major reason racial microaggressions are very challenging to address and difficult to recognize is because "they are hidden in everyday interactions" (Wong, Derthick, Saw, & Okazaki, 2013, p. 182).

Research in the area of microaggressions is becoming more common and has revealed the impact of these interactions on individuals in marginalized groups. For instance, Huntt et al. used focus group data regarding racial microaggressions at a predominately white institution to uncover what students of color typically experience in the residence hall environment. The researchers identified over 70 racial microaggressions in their study. Four overall themes were identified, including racial jokes and verbal comments, racial slurs that were written in a shared community space, segregated spaces that often had unequal treatment, and a sense of denial or minimization of racism from others in the housing department or the larger institution. Research has also examined the impact of microaggressions related to gender, sexuality, mental health, and other marginalizing factors (Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011).

Shelton and Delgado-Romero (2011) broadened the research of microaggressions to examine how they are evident in behavior around sexual orientation. Their study examined the themes, experiences, and sexual orientation microaggressions in the context of psychotherapy. Shelton and Delgado-Romero (2011) found seven themes of sexual orientation microaggressions. Some of the most prevalent themes to this research include the assumption that sexual orientation is the root cause of all presenting issues, avoiding and minimalizing sexual orientation, making attempts to over-identify with the LGBTQ community, and making stereotypical assumptions about these individuals. These types of assumptions and the behaviors

these assumptions produce have a negative impact on LGBTQ individuals. In the residence halls, participating in these inappropriate behaviors creates unsafe and non-inclusive environments for those who identity as LGBTQ, further highlighting the presence of microaggressions in this context. Although this research occurs in the context of psychotherapy sessions, it is still prevalent to everyday interactions and the experiences that happen in the residence halls. This research adds to the pressing need to address these behaviors and interactions.

Although research on transgendered microaggressions is limited, Chang and Chung (2015) found that microaggressions do exist in the LGBTQ community and that the microaggressions experienced by transgendered individuals are unique depending on how the individual identifies along the gender spectrum. Chang and Chung (2015) claim that different microaggressions exist for each identity, such as gender queer or gender nonconformity. These microaggressions can be as subtle as being called a "man" or "woman" when an individual does not identify with a binary, but on a spectrum. Overall, this research further showcases how microaggressions, though usually very subtle, can target minority groups, such as LGBTQ individuals. Thus, microaggressions, such as those experienced by transgendered individuals, are likely to be experienced and present in the residence halls.

When these types of inappropriate interactions and behaviors occur in the residence halls, it often becomes the responsibility of the RA to facilitate a conversation with residents about this behavior. During RA training at this particular institution, racial profiling, bias motivated incidents, and other social justice topics are discussed to help RAs identify this behavior. Facilitated discussions around social justice topics can have a positive impact on the residents and the community, which likely leads to the importance of having this portion of training. Arboleda, Wang, Shelley, and Whalen (2003) claim that students who take the opportunity to

discuss racial or ethnic issues enhance their learning. Facilitating these conversations ideally reduces the number of microaggressions present in the residence halls and creates a safer and more inclusive community for everyone.

RAs are expected to help students learn how to interact with each other to create an inclusive community where all residents feel welcomed and valued. Huntt, Mendenhall, and Lewis (2012) claim that the administration's, staff's, and policy actions/reactions are a key factor in how students of color experience their time in the residence halls, including RA reactions. It is important that residents feel comfortable utilizing their RA as a resource, especially in instances where microaggressions are impacting the community. It is also crucial that RAs know how to address this behavior in conversations with residents. However, this can present problems when residents may not be aware of or believe they present microaggressions. This is why the RA role is significant in creating a safe and inclusive environment and why it is necessary that RAs be trained to understand how to handle these situations.

At times, RAs may not always be able to recognize microaggressions, creating many challenges for creating an inclusive environment. RAs need to be trained on how to recognize these occurrences to take the next step of facilitating these difficult conversations. Furthermore, RAs need to be able to recognize when they contribute to a microaggression, such as invalidating the experiences of others. If an RA is an unintentional bystander, they are ultimately contributing to the environment. These challenges effect whether or not residents feel comfortable discussing the occurrences of inappropriate behavior with their RA. Knowing that these situations can be challenging to maneuver, RAs need to be well prepared to handle these conversations and facilitate an educational discussion about biases.

RA Role and Preparation

The RA position is essential to residence life success. Resident advisors serve "a crucial role in establishing, facilitating, cultivating, and maintaining an environment for personal and community development for their residents" (Gentry et al., 2007, p. 61). The duties of this position vary from institution to institution; however, RAs are generally the first resource that residents utilize for help finding resources, mediating conflict, or asking questions. Arboleda, Wang, Shelley, and Whalen (2003) claim that "environmental influences gained in the residence halls, such as friendships and sense of community, have a powerful influence over students' development" (p. 518). The RA position is utilized to mentor residents through their time in the residence halls by creating friendships and a welcoming community.

Resident advisors receive training to learn how to create a safe and inclusive environment for their residents. At the predominately white institution studied in this project, one goal of RA training is to further knowledge on social justice topics. Some examples of these social justice topics include racial profiling, gender issues, affirmative action, sexuality, human rights, and immigration. These trainings are designed to help RAs facilitate conversations with residents when injustice is present in the residence halls or across campus. This can be anything from racial acts, to microaggressions, to a bias motivated incident in or outside of the residence hall community.

It is very difficult for RAs to enact this training due to the complexity of the conversations and the impact on the residents involved in the situation. Each conversation an RA has is different and dependent on what the conversation is about and who is involved in the situation. For example, one conversation may be centered on offensive language and another may be centered on something written on a white board. This means RAs need to be proficient in enacting these types of conversations because they cannot always know what topic will be

discussed in advance. Additionally, RAs do not always know the background of a student's experience with racism or microaggressions. In some cases, these situations may have occurred in the residence halls multiple times without the RA noticing. This history plays a large role in how the RA should handle the situation. If these occurrences are a repeated issue for a particular resident, the incidents can be escalated to a professional staff member.

To prepare them for their work with residents, RAs at the institution studied attend extensive training and in-service learning sessions. These sessions offer ways to teach RAs skills on how to handle conversations around microaggressions and foster an inclusive community for all residents. Elleven, Allen, and Wircenski (2001) state that RAs will continue to face increasingly complex issues, and that it is necessary to train RAs on ways to handle these situations. The RA role has become increasingly complex as expectations for the role have increased from merely programming and enforcing policy around the residence halls, to facilitating conversations around social justice topics to help residents learn how to interact with others. Plus, each institution has their own long-term goals of affecting student behavior and it is likely that these intentions will be absorbed into the RA role, impacting how RAs interact with their residents.

Other researchers have also discussed the importance of training. Murray, Snider, and Midkiff (1999) state that the performance of the RA positional duties demands extensive training on multiple topics. Some of these topics include counseling and communication skills, conflict resolution, group dynamics, and RA responsibilities. In order for RAs to have satisfactory job performance, the training must be applicable and effective to their day-to-day responsibilities. Although it makes sense that universities seek to provide training for RAs to help them in their role, the impact and value of this training needs to be explored. Unfortunately, the impact of RA

training has not been studied; however, there is a large body of research on the impact of training in organizations.

Training and Performance in Organizations

Training is an important feature of many organizations, and the research on residence life indicates that training and mentoring RAs is an important concern for many institutions. However, research on the impact of training in a variety of organizational contexts has demonstrated that not all training is effective. This is important because "billions of dollars are spent annually by organisations on employee training and management development" (Martin, 2010, p. 520). Due to rapidly evolving and changing environments, there has been an increased need to train employees to meet increased demands. Just in the USA, spending on training "has been estimated to be from $55.8 billion to as much as $200 billion and is likely to increase" (Martin, 2010, p. 520). Knowing that training spending is expected to increase, it is crucial that training is applicable and effective.

Training is designed to provide trainees with essential skills and tools necessary for good job performance. Ghosh, Satyawadi, Mukherjee, and Ranjan (2011) state that "the goal of training is to enable employees to master the knowledge, skills and behaviours emphasized in training programmes and to apply them to their day-to-day activities" (p. 248). This view of training importance is also supported by Tai (2006), who claimed that training is viewed as a crucial strategy to assist employees in their knowledge and skills in order to meet certain challenges that are present in their positions. These potential challenges are discussed during training in order to provide employees with necessary tools. Tai (2006) states, "it is important for an organization to maintain a necessary competence in its employees through adequate training" (p. 52). If employees are not competent, they cannot handle the challenges faced in their

positions and are likely to be unsuccessful in meeting their positional expectations. Adequate, or successful, training provides a way to ensure that employees are competent in their positions. This ultimately leads to greater organizational success.

Ideally, training programs foster growth in employees and the successful enactment of skills learned in training within day-to-day positional interactions leads to better job performance. However, Saks and Belourt (2006) claim, "reports indicate that only about 10% of what is learned in training is applied on the job" (p. 629). This finding alone gives insight into the serious challenge that training can create for an organization. Ineffective training creates a loss of time, energy, and resources to those involved, including the employees and organization. Researchers have identified different aspects, or characteristics, of both the individual and the organization that have the ability to impact whether training is beneficial or not. The amount of learning, the opportunity to perform, training transfer, and the amount of training follow-up are characteristics of training that can influence whether or not training has a positive impact on work and the organization.

The amount of learning is one way to analyze the effectiveness of training. Stolovitch and Keeps (2011) claim one purpose of training is "to create a change in the learners that they constantly reproduce without variation" (p. 10). In other words, trainees should be able to produce adequate and acceptable outcomes consistently once trained properly. This view of training emphasizes improving job skills that involve specific tasks that are repeated over time. "Through intense training the learner becomes increasingly able to reproduce the learned behavior with fewer errors, greater speed, and under more demanding conditions" (Stolovitch & Keeps, 2011, p. 10). For example, filling out the same report every month provides trainees with the opportunity to complete similar tasks in a standard way.

Employees typically attend training sessions to understand the expectations of these tasks. This training allows employees to learn how to properly complete these tasks. Although there is evidence that training can improve performance of specified tasks, it is not clear how this research might inform situations where training focuses on interaction or communication. Training for tasks is different than training for interactions. Interactions are much more dynamic and it is highly unlikely that two interactions, or conversations, will ever be the same. The goal of training is not to simply transmit the information that the organization finds important, but to transform the learner. Overall, training can lead to learning when the trainee adopts the knowledge and skills taught and can effectively utilize them across multiple situations and contexts.

One difficulty with ensuring the effectiveness of training relates to the high complexity of transferring skills that are utilized in dynamic and ever-changing conversations. It is likely that most technical skills can be trained rather easily, since most technical skills have a set procedure. However, as mentioned previously, training that seeks to influence interaction is more challenging because each interaction will vary and there is no specific set of actions or procedures that can be used to ensure that an interaction will be positive and successful.

One common way to evaluate the effectiveness of training is through training transfer. Training transfer involves the generalization and maintenance of different skills that have been trained on the job. In other words, it is the transfer of the skills gained during training to the work environment (Saks & Belcourt, 2006). Ford, Quiñones, Sego, and Sorra (1992) claimed that the more opportunities workers have to perform the things learned in training on the job, the higher the level of training transfer. This study examined 180 Air Force technical trainees and found

that work context and individual factors shaped whether or not workers were able to perform the task learned in training.

Ford et al. (1992) claim, "the opportunity to perform focuses on a subset of all the work experiences obtained by a trainee after training" (p. 512). In this research, three dimensions are critical to training transfer. These included breadth, activity level, and the types of tasks performed. The breadth is greater when there are a greater number of trained tasks performed on the job. Activity level, the second dimension, is related to the amount of repetition of the trained tasks. This means that the greater the repetition of completing trained tasks on the job, the greater the amount of training transfer. Finally, the types of tasks include the complexity and difficulty of the work. Overall, the types of tasks people do in their work vary, impacting training transfer. When trainees complete tasks they learned in training in their work environment, they have a greater opportunity to perform. This ultimately provides trainees with a greater chance of success in their positions. This may be different when we think about interactions rather than technical skills, but understanding how training is utilized is helpful in understanding how skills are transferred from training to daily positional duties.

Additionally, general factors including organizational, work context, and individual characteristics enhance or inhibit the transfer of training knowledge, ultimately impacting the effectiveness of the training (Ford et al., 1992). Included in the organizational factor were the goals, objectives, and values of the organization. If the trainee's goals, objectives, and values align with those of the organization, a higher training transfer is expected. Supervisory attitudes towards the trainee, workgroup support, and the pace of workflow in the workgroup are factors of the work context. For example, a positive supervisor attitude regarding training is more likely to increase the training transfer for the trainee. Included in individual characteristics are the self-

efficacy and the ability level of the trainee. Self-efficacy plays a large role in the amount of training transfer according to this research. "Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's expectation or confidence that tasks can be successfully performed" (Ford et al., 1992, p. 515). It was expected that higher self-efficacy, lead to greater training transfer and greater opportunity to perform.

Ford et al. (1992) found that trainees received different opportunities to perform, or work with, trained tasks. This was expected because many factors affect the opportunities to perform trained tasks, as discussed earlier. This was related to differences in supervisor attitudes, workgroup support, the trainee's self-efficacy, and the trainee's cognitive ability. Thus, the work context and individual characteristics, the two general factors discussed earlier, played a large role in training transfer and effectiveness. When individual characteristics and the work context were favorable, such as high self-efficacy, positive supervisor attitude regarding training, large amounts of support from a trainee's colleagues, and high trainee cognitive ability, there was a greater chance that trainees performed more complex and difficult tasks, while also leading to a greater breadth of experience. Trainees who experienced these positive factors were more likely to have greater and more diverse work experiences. Plus, these trainees were able to perform these tasks even with greater accuracy and efficiency, increasing the amount of training transfer.

Research has also explored trainee reactions to training sessions based on how training was implemented. Ghosh, Satyawadi, Mukherjee, and Ranjan (2011) examined trainee reaction to successfully understand ways to improve training. Ghosh et al. used questionnaires that measured trainee reactions of an induction program in India to indicate which aspects of training need to be emphasized. In this study, the most important factor that affected trainee reaction was the communication of the trainer. Thus, if the trainer had poor communication, such as not

speaking clearly or too quickly, the trainees reacted negatively to the training and were more likely to have less training transfer. The negative perception, or reaction, of training actually affects the amount of training transfer. When trainees have a poor perception of training, they attempt to disregard the importance of the information and applicability of the information to the their position. Both training content and training context were two categories that emerged within this research to help categorize trainee reactions. Training content includes the communication and clarity of the training as well as the practical application of the training to one's position. The context includes other aspects of training such as the venue, food served, and the facilities provided. Ghosh et al.'s research exemplified that trainees have reactions to multiple aspects of training, but that trainer communication is the most critical in affecting trainee reaction.

Additionally, there is evidence that single sessions of training are less effective than training that includes follow-up. Martin (2010) found that utilizing multiple training follow-up techniques aided in the trainees' understanding of the material presented by increasing training transfer. Several different techniques were found to increase training transfer. Action plans, performance assessments, peer meetings, supervisory consultations, and technical support are some of the tools that can be used as training follow-up (Martin, 2010, p. 523). Action plans are written documents that consist of steps that the trainee can take to implement the materials learned in the training session. These are completed "during or immediately following training" (Martin, 2010, p. 523). Performance assessments include actions that are taken in order to measure the behavior of a trainee in their work environment. Peer meetings frequently consist of scheduled meetings with training groups "to provide application support and motivational encouragement" and to discuss how these skills are being applied in each trainee's position

(Martin, 2010, p. 525). Barriers of the training application were also explored within peer meetings, and it is common for these meetings to occur relatively frequently by either a professional staff employee or an external consultant. "Supervisory consultations are designed to put the trainee's immediate supervisor into the role of coach or mentor to encourage skill application" (Martin, 2010 p. 524). Because the trainer is not always the supervisor of the trainee, this also provides a growth, or stretch, opportunity to the supervisor. This way, it is not only the trainee benefiting from the training, but also the supervisor. Overall, training follow-up should be viewed as a necessary component of training because when training transfer is increased, the effectiveness of the training to both the trainee and the organization is greater.

Although most universities provide RAs with this on-going training (Elleven, Allen, & Wircenski, 2001), it is clear that the impact of this training may not be as straightforward as the organization would hope. For example, in the case of RA training, follow-up provides the opportunity for the trainee to receive constant mentorship and encouragement of the skills learned during training. In other words, it is likely that if training follow-up is increased for RAs, training transfer will be increased based on prior research. However, training follow-up is not always present or standard for RAs.

There are also other factors that impact the success of training for RAs. For example, an RA with high self-efficacy, a supportive staff, and a supervisor with a positive attitude regarding training is likely to have high training transfer. These favorable characteristics would allow the RA to be more effective in their conversations with residents on microaggressions. There are many overarching factors that can largely affect the applicability and success of training for trainees. Part of the challenge for RAs is actually enacting the content and skills they learn in training.

Although previous work contributes to our understanding of training, we need to consider how individuals utilize what they learn in training. Research in the area of expertise and communication skill has considered how individuals learn to enact the knowledge they acquire (Etringer, Billerband, & Claiborn, 1995; Wilson & Sabee, 2001). This is important because communicators enact what they are trained to do in different ways. Because this project seeks to understand what RAs do in their work with residents, research on enactment can be useful in thinking about the experience of trying to actually do the job of dealing with problem behaviors of residents.

Using Knowledge: Expertise and Enactment

The purpose of training is to help employees enact their learning outside of the training session. Another critical issue with training programs is not only the transfer of knowledge, but of the type of knowledge that is transferred. The work and research on training doesn't often think about a person's ability to use what is learned. However, there is a set of research that has looked at this.

This research considers how individuals enact or utilize skills and information they learn. Most of the research on how people use things they have learned focuses on the differences between novices and experts in terms of their knowledge and their ability to use what they know. This research indicates that novice and expert knowledge lead to different ways of enactment, where expert knowledge is more ideal and successful in most situations. Etringer, Billerband, and Claiborn (1995) discuss the differences between novices and experts in terms of declarative and procedural knowledge. Procedural knowledge allows individuals to be more efficient in their position because they are able to make connections about how to treat unique situations. Procedural knowledge is stored more slowly, which can make it difficult to gain. However, when

this knowledge is stored, it can be retrieved nearly effortlessly (Etringer et al., 1995, p. 9). Declarative knowledge, the opposite of procedural knowledge, "is factual and is stored in the form of propositions" (Etringer et al., 1995, p. 8). Research indicates that it is possible for individuals to have declarative knowledge, but not possess the procedural knowledge they need to enact what they know.

Applying these ideas to the area of training, it seems clear that one problem individuals face after training is figuring out how to enact what they have learned—that is, how to get from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge. There are many benefits to developing procedural knowledge. One of the most important benefits is that the knowledge is executed more efficiently in conversation and action. In turn, this makes those with procedural knowledge better problem solvers. In thinking about RA training, it seems clear that it would be helpful for RAs to gain procedural knowledge while in training so they can successfully enact the skills gained during conversations with residents.

Many types of procedural knowledge entail communication and, in the case of RAs, the issues with understanding whether RAs are able to have conversations with residents that influence behavior. In any interaction, communication competence plays a role in the outcome of the conversation. Wilson and Sabee have discussed communication competence as a theoretical term, rather than a construct (2001). The definition of communication competence has been largely debated, and Wilson and Sabee (2001) argue that instead of creating a concrete definition, it would be more beneficial to analyze the meaning and role of communication competence within a particular theory of communication.

Enactment boils down to whether or not people can competently do things communicatively. A good example is having a discussion with others about microaggressions.

Success in personal relationships, such as the one that exists between an RA and her residents, is partly dependent on communication competence. It is also likely that each person displays incompetence at least a few times when communicating. Due to this, training may be useful in helping RAs communicate competently, which can lead to more influential and successful conversations. In many ways, communication competence is the combination of learning and enactment; we expect RAs to move from the declarative knowledge of knowing what they are supposed to do to actually acting procedurally. In order to do this, RAs need to possess the knowledge of what to do in these situations as well as express communication competence in those areas. To help RAs express this competence, it is crucial to train RAs on how to successfully have these conversations. However, as mentioned previously, it is very likely that each conversation will be enacted differently, based on the severity of the situation, individuals involved, and topic of conversation. This is why it is important for RAs to not only possess the knowledge of what to do, but to ensure that RAs can actually manage interactions with residents effectively.

Although research has been conducted on these areas individually, previous research has not answered questions that connect residence halls, training, and enactment. More specifically, research has not explored how RA training is enacted in the residence halls. As the RA role becomes increasingly more complex, it is crucial that RAs enact their training in a way that benefits the residents and residence halls as a whole. Ideally, when creating a safe and inclusive environment, microaggressions experienced by students are minimized. Furthermore, training is crucial to organizations and if we want people to do their jobs well we need to provide it. Organizations spend a lot of time and money on training; however, we know that it is not always the case that these trainings work. We need to know if RAs are enacting this training in an

effective way. This way, the residence life department can tell if this training is working and useful to RAs and the department as a whole. If this training is not working, than an analysis of the institution's training should be conducted to understand areas of improvement.

Research Questions

Knowing that resident advisors are required to attend training sessions throughout their time as an RA, it is crucial to understand both how this training is experienced and how resident advisors make sense of this training. The resident advisor position is very complex, making it difficult to maneuver. There is an expectation that RAs will be able to deploy what they learn in training sessions in their daily interactions with residents. Social justice training is expected to be utilized frequently in the RA role because inappropriate behavior can be exhibited by residents as they learn appropriate ways to interact with others in the community. It is expected that resident advisors address this problematic behavior through challenging conversations. Although it is critical that resident advisors enact their training effectively, a large part of this enactment is dependent on how this training is experienced and perceived by trainees. This leads to two different research questions that will address these dilemmas.

RQ 1: How do resident advisors experience and make sense of training?

RQ 2: How do resident advisors use their training in interactions with residents around

problems of inclusivity or microaggressions?

Chapter 2: Methods

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 12 mentor and new resident advisors employed for the 2015-2016 academic year at a large, public university with a predominately white student population. At this particular institution, there is a distinction between new resident advisors and mentor, or returning, resident advisors. A new resident advisor is a first year RA who was hired for the current academic year. A mentor resident advisor is one who has returned for at least a second year and likely has more experience handling challenging situations. At this institution, mentor resident advisors are expected to help new resident advisors adjust to the RA role and handle difficult situations. All participants attended at least the fall 2015 resident advisor training before starting their position for the academic year. Most of the resident advisors attended in-service trainings as well, which occur nearly every month. In-service trainings are similar to other trainings offered in the department. These are mostly lecture-based and attempt to provide RAs with information for positional success. Attending all training sessions and in-service sessions is a job requirement, meaning job action can be taken if training is not attended. The content of all training classes focused on positional expectations and a range of social justice topics. The ages of the participants ranged from 19-22 and interviewees consisted of seven males and five females. A total of four participants were mentor resident advisors, while all other participants were in their first year of the role.

At the institution where this research takes place, there are over 200 resident advisors across 19 different residence halls. The number of resident advisors in each residence hall varies depending on the number of students living in the building. A larger residence hall, which houses over 500 residents, will have more RAs than a smaller residence hall. The number of RAs per

building is strategically decided based on how to best meet the needs of the residents and the

department. Most of the staff sizes will range from about six to seventeen resident advisors per

building. The diversity of the students within the building also differs, depending on the focus of

each hall, which likely lead to some resident advisors experiencing more instances of

microaggressions.

Procedures

Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling method. A standardized e-mail was

sent to potential participants who met the requirements of the study. This email requested

participation in an interview in the spring of 2016. If a resident advisor chose to participate, he or

she was reminded that their participation was voluntary and that there was no penalty if he or she

chose not to participate in the study at any time. Every resident advisor who agreed to participate

in the study was given an informed consent form. No written documentation of consent was

requested to maintain confidentiality. Instead, verbal confirmation that the participant had read

and agreed to the consent form was accepted.

Twelve interviews were conducted to gather descriptive narratives of how trainings were

utilized when having discussions with residents about inappropriate behavior. All of the

interview responses were audio recorded and later transcribed. In order to protect the anonymity

of the resident advisors, pseudonyms for the RAs name, residents, and residence halls were used.

Each interview lastly roughly 30 minutes. Every interview began with questions about the

participant's background as a resident advisor and then focused more in depth on his or her

experiences in the residence halls.

Analysis

After transcribing each interview and editing transcripts to remove identifying information, open coding was used to find to identify a range of themes throughout the responses of the interview questions. Comparative analysis was also used to identify major themes throughout the responses. Once this was complete, research questions were considered to analyze how to best explore the questions presented in the study.

As expected, each resident advisor had different experiences throughout their time as an RA. These experiences were largely dependent on which residence halls resident advisors work in, which residents RAs are responsible for, and who supervises the resident advisors. Although each resident advisor experienced the position differently, common themes were present. This allowed for both a deeper analysis and emphasis on shared experiences.

Rationale

Interviews allowed for a deep understanding of how resident advisors experience the interactions that exist in the residence halls and how they utilize past training sessions when handling these conversations. Both of these topic areas have not been previously explored in-depth, adding to the need to study the enactment of training in the residence halls context.

Resident advisors, as first line responders, are more likely to experience these inappropriate behaviors. This is especially true as residents learn appropriate ways to interact with their peers. Often times, microaggressions are very subtle and hidden in everyday interactions, which can make data difficult to understand in quantitative research. By examining the experiences of individuals who are trained to have these conversations and to recognize these occurrences, there is a better understanding of how department wide resident advisor training is enacted and utilized by resident advisors.

Institutional Context

Each institution has different expectations and positional duties for resident advisors, making it crucial to provide more context on the expectations of resident advisor participants in this study. At the particular institution where this research takes place, resident advisors participate in the 121 Model. This model of RA work emphasizes one-on-one interactions between RAs and residents as a way to build a connection and foster RA knowledge of residents. Each RA participates in the 121 model (engaging in interactions with residents), works three-hour shifts at the community center, completes duty shifts, responds to incidents, completes administrative work such as bulletin boards and door decorations, and attends multiple required meetings.

The 121 Model takes up about 40% of the position, meaning that facilitating one-on-one conversations with residents is time intensive. More specifically, the 121 Model outlines expectations for structured and themed conversations with residents. At the beginning of each theme, RAs are provided specific information that outlines the overall goals, learning outcomes, framing questions, and supporting questions of the theme. Resident advisors are expected to facilitate these conversations with a minimum of 60% of their residents every theme. It is also a requirement that RAs complete 100% outreach, meaning that resident advisors have to be intentional in seeking relationships and facilitating 121 conversations will all residents. Each theme lasts on average just over a month, and six different themes are completed throughout the academic year.

In order to understand resident advisors' experiences of training at this institution, it is useful to describe the training these RAs experienced over the last year. Resident advisor training consists of different sessions targeted to help trainees gain different skills. Some training sessions are more basic, focusing on job requirements, completing required documentation, and

mandatory reporting. Other training can be more complicated, such as learning best communication practices for the position. All resident advisors are required to attend fall training, spring training, and in-service trainings unless approved by petition. In-service trainings occur a few times a semester and focus on particular topics set by the residence life department. Within the last year, the institution also implemented a mandatory pre-employment workshop, which is required to complete for all new RAs to maintain eligibility for the position. New RAs attend six different sessions throughout the spring semester before starting their positions in the fall. These sessions begin by covering basic skills, such as time management, needed for the position. The pre-employment workshop also allows new hires to not only begin learning about social justice topics, but to start having these challenging conversations with others on these topics too.

A few different training sessions are provided by the department that aim to help resident advisors enact the skills discussed during training in scenarios that represent likely occurrences while on the job. Behind Closed Doors is one these training sessions. Mentor, or returning, resident advisors are "actors" in the situations, which allows mentors to help new RAs transition into their role. Mentor RAs are provided with instructions on how to interact with the new resident advisors and are reminded that these scenarios are meant to be as realistic as possible. Multiple rooms are prepared for this training session and each room offers a unique situation.

Each scenario has either been encountered by a previous RA or has a large likelihood of occurring throughout the year. This is based on the professional staff predictions and history of incidents in the residence halls. These scenarios range from talking with a homesick resident, to managing a roommate conflict, to confronting alcohol and other drug policy violations. Each room has a similar procedure to keep the process standardized. The scenarios are read to the

volunteering first-year resident advisors before the situation is encountered, providing information that could have been spotted while on duty, such as sights, sounds, and smells. Once the scenario is understood, the volunteering resident advisors confront the situation while the rest of the resident advisor staff and professional staff observe.

Behind Closed Doors offers a safe environment to learn how to enact the skills learned during training. If a resident advisor does not know how to respond to a particular situation, he or she can pause the situation and ask for help. After the resident advisors confront the incident, the staff debriefs on how to best handle the situation in the future, positive aspects incorporated by the resident advisors, and areas of improvement. This feedback can be centered on the actual policy procedure itself, such as forgetting to ask for resident identification, to the way the resident advisors present themselves in the situation. A good example of this type of feedback is appearing too authoritative due to the crossing of arms.

Helping Skills Lab is another memorable training session focused on enacting learned training skills. Helping Skills Lab attempts to help resident advisors address more emotionally sensitive and triggering situations in a similar procedure to Behind Closed Doors. These scenarios can range from concerns from residents about someone's wellbeing, to eating disorders, to suicide ideation. Some scenarios are confronted by just one resident advisor. This is dependent on the likelihood the resident advisor will confront this type of behavior while having a conversation with a resident instead of while on duty with a partner.

Professionals who are trained to have these sensitive conversations will observe these scenarios. Some of the incidents can be emotionally triggering for resident advisors. The professionals provide tips on how to best handle these situations and can offer more context about the resources offered to residents experiencing these traumatic situations. Having

professionals in the scenarios also provides resident advisors with the opportunity to ask

questions about how to best handle these incidents from a different perspective. It is not

uncommon for professionals to discuss how to best communicate with individuals who are

experiencing serious behaviors, such as suicidal thoughts or body image issues.

Overall, these types of training sessions provide resident advisors with the opportunity to

actually enact what they are taught during training sessions. Although these sessions are much

more triggering and personal for RAs, they have proven helpful for handling similar situations

while on the job. Understanding this context, such as the 121 Model, Behind Closed Doors, and

Helping Skills Lab is crucial when analyzing how resident advisors perceive their role and enact

training in daily interactions.

Chapter 3: Findings

The following section outlines three different themes that were present throughout interviews of resident advisors at large institution with a predominately white student body population. Each theme is divided into sub-themes to provide a deeper understanding of how training is enacted in the resident advisor position in conversations on inappropriate behavior with residents. The participants' language is utilized to provide an understanding of the interviewees' experiences in their roles. The three main themes identified in analysis were understanding and enacting the resident advisor role, the role of training in resident advisor work, and interacting with residents and enacting the resident advisor role.

Understanding and Enacting the Resident Advisor Role

A key aspect of the interviews was participants' descriptions of how they understand the resident advisor role and how they perform their work as RAs. The interviews revealed the ambiguity of the position for participants, the ways participants view communication skills within the role, and how their relationships with mentor RAs impacts their ability to enact the role.

Resident advisor role and communication with residents. The resident advisor role is complicated and dynamic. The position requires a constant balance of mentorship, friendship, and authority. Some interviewees discussed the complexity of managing their position with their residents and had a difficult time clearly communicating their perception of the role. When struggling to discuss how he views his role as a resident advisor, one interviewee stated, "um… to help and be there for your residents… and I think that's the um… main goal… is whatever they need, um…to be there for them… and um… to help them through the first year of their college career…" (Evan). By keeping his perception of his role general and nonspecific, this

particular interviewee highlights the ambiguity of the resident advisor role. Helping a resident through the first year of his or her college experience can mean multiple things for each RA. The lack of clarity of one's role can present varying issues to resident advisors when deciding how they should engage residents and balance contradictory demands, such as participating in rule enforcement, while also having a desire to befriend residents.

Each resident advisor is likely to view his or her role differently. How each resident advisor perceives the RA position within the residence hall influences their experience in the role. Resident advisors position their role on a friendship versus authority figure spectrum. On one end, resident advisors view their positions as centered around community building and working to foster close and impactful friendships. This includes having honest and vulnerable conversations with residents. On the other end of the spectrum lies the role of enforcing policies. Those who identify on this end of the spectrum are more likely to present and value an identity of authority.

When responding to what parts of being an RA he has enjoyed or found most satisfying, one resident advisor highlights how the resident advisor position is grounded in social interactions. He states,

> I'm a big people person and having that… that social aspect really… has been the most
> enjoyable part of this job… I mean… beyond like the busy work of being an RA it's
> like… that's what makes it like worth it at the end of the day…you go back and you can
> talk to people that like… you know that are your peers… and that way you can have like
> conversations that you know foster not only your growth, but their growth as well (Ryan).

Grounded in his perception of the role, this response showcases the importance of managing influential relationships with residents and the complexity of having a position based

on social interactions. By marking his residents as peers, he positions himself as someone who doesn't view the meaning of the RA position as enacting authority. When removing the authoritative view and power of the RA role, it is clear that this RA values friendships with his peers over enforcing policy. This value of friendship is strengthened because this interviewee stated this as a response to a question about which parts of the RA role are most satisfying to him. Additionally, by stating that he has conversations with residents that also benefit himself, he positions his relationships with his residents as reciprocal. This reciprocal relationship further fosters an environment where friendships and development in relationships is valued.

Many resident advisors discussed how social their role is, increasing the need to possess social competence. Most of the interviewees claimed that people skills, such as communication skills, are utilized most frequently in their position. At the southwestern institution where this research took place, the 121 Model is utilized as the primary way to build community within the residence halls.

One female interviewee mentioned, "the skills I probably utilize the most in my position are my communication skills… just because I'm constantly working with so many different people. I have about forty residents and not a single one of them are alike…" (Sophia). This resident advisor draws out how critical sufficient communication skills are for successfully influencing residents and facilitating conversations. As a response to which skills in the resident advisor position are most influential, one male interviewee further supported this claim of the importance of social skills when he mentioned, "communication is huge…being able to approach people and have targeted conversations about things…" (James).Working with many different people implies that not all residents can be communicated to in the same way. This means RAs need to be able to adjust how they interact with their residents to have positive conversations.

One interviewee stated Motivational Interviewing, a practice frequently discussed during training, is seen as one of the most applicable skills to utilize while interacting with residents. Motivational Interviewing can be described as a way to approach communicating with residents. The technique seeks to let others guide the conversation, ideally creating a comfortable environment for residents.

When prompted about the skills utilized most in the position, one female resident advisor responded with,

> Hmm… I think clear communication and motivational interviewing... I find that it's a lot better to listen than to speak sometimes. I think my residents really appreciate that when I do speak it's because I'm being able to talk about what they've said in the past. Also, I said clear communication because I feel that communicating with my residents is the biggest and foremost factor and I want to make sure that they are actually being heard and represented in what I'm doing (Victoria).

This example further provides evidence for the importance of communication skills, especially because the interviewee restates and marks the importance of clear communication in the same response. This quote also showcases that resident advisors need to be strategic in holding these conversations, meaning a balance between listening and speaking is crucial and needs to be explored. By listening, this resident advisor is able to show that she values her residents' perspectives. Strategically referencing prior conversations has been a successful technique for facilitating meaningful conversations. She referenced that her residents appreciated referencing prior conversations, which is important for building a strong and inclusive community for all students. Plus, this is helpful for the 121 Model, where each theme tends to build off of the prior ones.

One resident advisor highlighted communication skills differently. When responding to the most important skills in the resident advisor position, this interviewee stated, "being able to talk to people, doing everything in my power to put on a friendly face if, if I'm having a rough day… I'll still try and interact with my residents in a positive way" (Anthony). Communication is not just verbal, but presenting oneself in a positive and welcoming manner. By marking this, the resident advisor highlights the work and strategy of maintaining one's nonverbal communication when interacting with residents. These people skills, which can be perceived and managed differently for each RA, help create and maintain an inclusive environment for all residents.

While communication skills may look differently for each resident advisor, they are marked as necessary for success in the position in interview responses. This is important to the positional requirements of the 121 Model and for creating a community where residents feel heard and appreciated.

Mentorship facilitates learning by doing. Resident advisors claimed they learn more from enacting the RA position and working with other RAs, especially when working with more experienced RAs, than from training sessions. Learning occurs more often when new resident advisors are paired with RAs who have generally experienced complicated situations previously. Resident advisors always confront duty incidents with a partner and rely on their partner for support in challenging situations.

Some RAs mentioned that being paired with a mentor RA as a duty partner can be helpful since they are more prepared to confront challenging situations. One interviewee stated,

> I think the most important thing is…um… having those mentors to train you throughout
> the year, not just in those like two weeks of training cause I, I don't really think that

that's where I learned majority of like what I do as an RA I feel like I've learned it like

on the job (Sophia).

By commenting on the importance of having mentors train others throughout the year, the

dilemma that learning needs to occur outside of training sessions is highlighted. It can be

difficult to have and expect ongoing training, especially from other student employees, but this

personal account highlights how critical it is to have experienced resident advisors assist with

handling difficult situations.

This comment also addresses that training can occur outside of lecture-style training

sessions. Knowing that resident advisors have complicated and ambiguous roles, it should be

expected that learning continues with each new situation. Overall, providing training on

unexpected situations is difficult, creating the need for experienced RAs to help guide newer

RAs through difficult interactions and conversations.

The Role of Training in Resident Advisor Work

Training plays a large role in the resident advisor position by attempting to provide

resident advisors with necessary skills for success in the position. The interviews revealed the

challenges of training resident advisors on skills needed for facilitating difficult conversations.

This challenge was further highlighted by personal accounts that explain that experience

facilitated more learning than training.

Training is often seen as distant from experience, but practice is helpful. Resident

advisors attend required training frequently with the goal that training will directly translate into

practical experience. However, attending training is different than experiencing the role. The

ambiguous resident advisor role is difficult to provide training on and resident advisors mention

that training is not the same as actually experiencing challenging incidents.

Some resident advisors highlight the difficulty of learning how to enact their trained skills in actual interactions. When discussing what resident advisors wished was included in training, one resident advisor discussed the difficulty of building a community. He stated,

> They just give us ideas, they don't really train us on how to implement anything… so like… like I really want to know how to get my entire floor to just be like this big unit and have a lot of fun together… um and there is definitely no formula… but it would be nice to include that in training a little bit (Wyatt).

This interviewee mentions the difficulty of training resident advisors on enactment when there is no standardized procedure for enacting the RA role. In this particular context, the interviewee is discussing building a community, but more broadly there is no formula for training resident advisors on how to enact their position as a whole. He also further highlights the challenge of implementing what is learned during training to on-the-job occurrences. Discussing skills versus training others on how to properly enact these skills can not be described as the same thing. This interviewee mentions how helpful it would be to receive training on how to actually implement the ideas discussed during training. In other words, he is highlighting the dilemma of learning how to enact training. This adds to the importance to understand how to help trainees move from "knowing" to "doing".

When discussing where she feels she has gained the skills she utilizes in her position, one resident advisor stated,

> I truly believe that most of my knowledge that I have from being an RA has come from being on the job, doing the job, and just like living out what it means to be an RA. I think there are some things that need to be addressed before you can dive into the role, but… um… I truly don't think two weeks of training is necessary (Sophia).

This interviewee further highlights the difference between training and physically experiencing the job. Although frequent and in-depth training attempts to prepare resident advisors for having difficult conversations, this interviewee mentions that the lengthy training is not exactly useful or entirely needed for success in the position. This resident advisor claims that training does not provide resident advisors with practical experiences to help them throughout their position. In other words, she strongly believes that most learning happens from experience, which highlights the importance of learning while on the job and discounts the usefulness and practicality of training sessions.

Although training facilitators attempt to create training sessions that are more hands-on and engaging, implementing and designing these types of activities can be challenging when over 200 RAs are required to attend all sessions at the same time. Interviewees were adamant in mentioning the difficulties of sitting in lecture settings for long periods of time. However, participants frequently discussed activities where they were able to enact trained skills in realistic scenarios as a very memorable, positive, and useful part of training. Enacting skills during training sessions, such as in Behind Closed Doors and Helping Skills Lab, provides resident advisors with the opportunity to practice skills that are needed for success in the position.

As mentioned previously, Behind Closed Doors offers a range of scenarios for new resident advisors to confront. These scenarios are typically based on contractual university policy violations and have a large likelihood of occurring at least once throughout the year. The training sessions that discuss the steps and procedures of how to handle policy violations are typically less hands-on and engaging for resident advisors. Thus, getting the opportunity to enact the set procedures in a safe environment helps RAs gain confidence in confronting future situations.

This also helps RAs solidify the skills taught during prior training sessions, which helps increase training transfer.

When discussing training as part of the RA position, one resident advisor stated, "having that kind of hands-on experience with those incidents or knowing um…what to do when we are confronted with an alcohol situation or drug situation is very helpful…" (Samantha). This resident advisor specifies how helpful the hands-on experience in training can be after learning what to do when confronting policy violations.

Another resident advisor marks Behind Closed Doors as opposite of the rest of training. He states,

> During these lectures I was tired, and I was not super excited to be there, and I… you know… didn't pay attention or… I wasn't super engaged in the training process. So some of the better parts of training were the Behind Closed Doors, where you actually model the situations that you're going to confront… I thought that was really helpful… I think that takes away a lot of the nerves about doing it for the first time… I think that's a lot more valuable than sitting and listening to a lecture… because even if you agree with somebody's point and they tell you… you know you should have this conversation when someone says gay or fag or whatever… I can agree with that on an intellectual level and still not be ready to have that on a psychological level I guess… and that's why I think Behind Closed Doors is one of the more memorable experiences (James).

By commenting that he wasn't engaged during lectures and stating that Behind Closed Doors was a better part of training, he further marks the importance of engagement during training sessions and the ability a trainee has to disregard information one finds impractical or unimportant. This interviewee also highlights the difference of intellectually agreeing with

someone, such as a trainer, and actually being ready to have conversations on inappropriate behavior. Utilizing these engaging training sessions allows resident advisors to feel more confident when later confronting incidents and provides participants with the opportunity to practice these skills.

RAs know what to do, but doing it is challenging. When discussing training and on-the-job experiences, many resident advisors admit they know procedures on how to handle common duty situations. In fact, a lot of training is dedicated to simply teaching the steps and procedures to take when confronting common policy violations. However, resident advisors admit there is a large disconnect that occurs between knowledge and action. Interviewees claim they "know" what to do, but that the actual "doing" is difficult. Although these RAs know the proper steps to take for many common situations, there is something missing when these RAs attempt to actually handle challenging situations that do not have set procedures.

Some resident advisors mentioned critical thinking skills as useful in handling situations. One interviewee mentioned,

> In addition to [these skills] I've used a lot of critical thinking skills because some of these… um… situations that they bring to me require extra thought that they're not in the handbook or whatever so I kind of have to think on my feet about that (Samantha).

This resident advisor notes there is a difference between being able to handle complicated situations and following steps in a handbook. The handbook provided to RAs outlines necessary steps and procedures to take when handling common policy violations. This interviewee mentions that critical thinking is necessary to handle situations that are not already outlined, showcasing that resident advisors need to be able to quickly think on their feet and move from not fully "knowing" to actually "doing".

There are many resident advisors who claim that conversations on inappropriate behavior do not occur often, hinting at the difficulty of enacting the skills taught in training when having these challenging conversations. When discussing how training is experienced, one resident advisor mentioned,

A lot of the situations that we deal with as RAs... like you can like you can teach it, or like you can say so much… but like you will never really know how to go like know how to really really handle something until like you're put in that situation and hopefully when you're in that situation you're with somebody who has been in that situation before so they can kind of take the ropes or you're just like good on your feet and you know kind of what to do…. It's really hard to train us everything that we're going to need for this job because it's so unexpected (Sophia).

By mentioning that you can't really know how to handle something until you're in that situation, this interviewee largely differentiates "knowing" from "doing" and emphasizes the importance of "doing" for success in the RA position. The resident advisor not only puts a large emphasis on physically going through the motions to "know" how to handle difficult situations, but also of the importance of having an experienced duty partner who can help her navigate these challenging interactions. Acknowledging that it can be difficult to train resident advisors, she highlights the dilemma that because the resident advisor position is dynamic and complex, training RAs on every potential situation is not realistic. This forces RAs to learn how to maneuver complicated situations by utilizing previous training on different situations that may not be completely applicable or relevant to the current interaction.

Social justice topics are not applicable as expected. Although conversations centered on social justice are highlighted as necessary and important by this residence life department,

interviewees indicated that most social justice training isn't actually used on the job. Social justice is a large portion of the training that occurs for resident advisors because the department values awareness and understanding of social justice topics. When referencing the department as a whole, one resident advisor mentioned,

> It feels like there's a set agenda and that you… if you disagree with them… there's no meeting in the middle… so it's hard to kind of have good faith with them when they… when you know that they're not going to go the other way with you (James).

With slight frustration, this interviewee narrated his experience with social justice training. This comment explains why social justice topics are difficult to provide training on by marking that social justice oriented conversations are difficult to have with those who do not align with your values. If there is no "meeting in the middle", than it is likely that both parties involved in a training session or interaction leave unsatisfied. This lack of perceived collaboration may cause resident advisors to feel their values and thoughts are dismissed, causing resident advisors to shy away from potential conversations that challenge the values of residents.

Some resident advisors claimed that social justice training was impactful for personal life because it expanded and challenged personal views. One interviewee stated,

> Social justice discussions that we have [are very helpful] because I know that that's a part where you can continually learn more about either your own identity or how to interact with other identities and I think that in general is just important as a life skill so… (Samantha).

Justifying this social justice training as an important life skills broadens the applicability of this training to more than just the RA position. This perception provides RAs with the opportunity to utilize the training, even if this is not utilized in the way intended. Training seeks

to transform the learner, and although this training is not being used as intended, it is still challenging and influencing the thought processes and interactions participants have with others.

By claiming that challenging conversations are not necessary due to the perceived lack of microaggressions, which will be discussed more in-depth shortly, resident advisors justify their little to no use of social justice topic training in their community and in their position. Resident advisors claim they utilize this training in their personal life, justifying the time spent in training.

Interacting with Residents and Enacting the Resident Advisor Role

A large portion of the RA role revolves around interacting with residents. Three sub-themes emerged that represent how RAs engage with residents about inappropriate behavior and microaggressions in the residence halls. Interviewee responses revealed the dilemmas present around addressing this inappropriate behavior. Each theme is illustrated with personal accounts that were discussed during the interview process.

Conversations on inappropriate behavior rarely occur. When discussing inappropriate behavior in the residence halls, resident advisors had a difficult time recalling either general or specific instances of experiencing this type of behavior. Most resident advisors actually claimed they never had conversations focused on inappropriate behavior with their residents. For those interviewees who did claim to have these experiences, they mentioned that these experiences did not occur frequently. This becomes challenging when resident advisors believe this type of behavior occurs, but that this is not something they experience personally.

Due to the complexity of understanding why these conversations rarely occur, resident advisors were prompted to explain why they believed they did not experience inappropriate behavior in their own communities. The reasoning communicated by resident advisors can be linked to identity and position. The justifications on the lack of conversations ranged from

positioning oneself as "lucky", and thus as an exception to the rule, to explaining that residents' identification of one's authority prompted a shift in residents' language and behavior.

Interestingly, many resident advisors attributed "luck" to their lack of conversations on microaggressions or inappropriate behavior. Resident advisors claimed they were "lucky" because their resident's did not have issues interacting with others appropriately. One interviewee stated, "so particularly on my floor, I don't think I've seen it… um… in terms of the way that they interact with each other with regard to their race or their gender… um… so I've been lucky on that front…" (Samantha). When residents know how to positively interact with each other, resident advisors don't need to address issues of inclusivity. In this personal account, the resident advisor marks "particularly on my floor" when explaining her experience with residents and inappropriate behavior throughout her time as an RA. By marking this, she is claiming that she is an exception to the norm and that even though she doesn't believe she has seen inappropriate behavior with her own residents, it still occurs with the residents she is not responsible for. With these types of accounts, resident advisors positioned themselves in a way that differentiated their personal experiences from the normal experiences of all other resident advisors.

Additionally, this resident advisor stated she doesn't believe she has "seen", or witnessed, inappropriate behavior. By stating this, she is not claiming that these inappropriate behaviors do not occur, but that she doesn't think she's personally witnessed them occurring. The lack of recognition or attention to these behaviors causes resident advisors to be blind to these occurrences. This difference between what occurs and what is noticed is important in understanding why these conversations on inappropriate behavior rarely occur. After all, if a resident advisor doesn't "see" these occurrences, it is unlikely they will be addressed. Better

training on how to recognize these occurrences will help RAs know when to address this behavior in the residence halls.

One resident advisor stated that he has not experienced this inappropriate behavior and continued to justify this claim by stating, "it's never as overt as calling somebody out. If it does happen, it goes under the radar silently… where people just get excluded by natural forces" (Anthony). First, by noting that these occurrences are never overt, this resident advisor also highlights the difficulty of recognizing this type of behavior. Unless a complaint is brought forth, a resident advisor cannot really confront inappropriate behavior if they are not able to recognize the behavior in the first place. Second, by stating that people are excluded by natural forces, this resident advisor is claiming that exclusion is not attributed to people's behaviors and interactions. When RAs position resident behavior as unintentional and part of normal student behavior, they reduce the agency RAs have to actively create an inclusive environment.

Put simply, it is not likely that a majority of resident advisors "lucked out" with whom they were assigned as residents. When this justification for the lack of conversations on inappropriate behavior was used, many resident advisors claimed this "luck" made their jobs much easier when trying to create a safe and inclusive community for their residents. By specifically noting that the minimal need for these conversations made their positions easier, RAs marked these conversations on inappropriate behaviors as challenging.

Some resident advisors believed that their role and title of resident advisor changed the way residents communicated and interacted with them. In other words, resident advisors believe that the title of "resident advisor" prompts residents to change their language in conversations. One resident advisor claimed,

I think a lot of the reason I don't see that side of the resident's behavior is that... uh…

they act differently around me… that I'm not one of them…so… they will… they'll act

like their around their boss kind of thing…This resident advisor continues to state,

[inappropriate behavior] even happens when you're not around… which is often… I'm

not in the hall 24/7. I live in a private room… don't keep the door open all the time…I

have two floors so a lot of the time I'm not on the other floor. So I don't… I don't…

think I see a lot of that. Sometimes I hear about it (James).

This change in behavior reduces the chance for inappropriate behavior to occur since

residents are more cautious of their language and actions. These statements give a deeper insight

into the types of justification used to normalize this minimal amount of conversation that occurs

around inappropriate behavior.

When the resident advisor attempts to explain why he believes he doesn't see this

behavior, he explains that this inappropriate behavior occurs when he isn't around. He justifies

this by commenting that his residents act differently around him, as if he were their boss. This

justification showcases the perception of a challenging power dynamic between the resident and

RA. By stating that he isn't around the hall often, and attempting to justify why, he attempts to

position himself in a way where he is not necessarily responsible for not noticing this behavior.

He does this because he claims inappropriate behavior occurs at times he can't address it. By not

being present to address this behavior, he removes the responsibility of holding these

conversations from himself. This particular resident advisor never mentioned addressing this

behavior, even after explaining that he does hear about it occurring. By noting that he hears of

this behavior occurring, but never specifying that he addresses this behavior, he showcases that

addressing this problematic behavior may be linked to more than just a shift in resident behavior or lack of presence in the community.

Overall, by claiming that resident's change their language, which could actually occur, resident advisors are able to remove the responsibility of addressing these occurrences from themselves. This leads to fewer opportunities to have constructive conversations on this behavior, which could teach residents how to appropriately interact with one another.

Friendship makes conversations challenging. Resident advisors have the complicated role of managing friendships and their identity of an authority figure when confronting situations. This is especially challenging when confronting situations that occur with their own residents. This dynamic can be very stressful and difficult to maintain. Knowing that this can be a large stressor for resident advisors, frequent discussions occur on how documenting one's residents can impact the community.

As mentioned previously, some resident advisors value the friendship and mentorship role they possess with their residents more than the authoritative role. This can make having these challenging conversations difficult when a resident advisor attempts to maintain that identity of trust and friendship. After asking how one RA views his role, he asks the clarifying question, "my perception or my residents' perception?" (Ryan). By simply asking this question, the interviewee begins to highlight the difference of how one may view his or her role as an RA versus how residents perceive the RA role.

This interviewee later stated,

I don't know... I've been thinking a lot about this and... I think it's not like.... Because I'm attached to a title of being an RA, that they just see me as an authoritative role... and I feel like because of how other RAs interact in the building with other residents that

like… they already have this preconceived notion of what an RA is for worse or for

better… so like, my… my resident's perception of an RA is totally different from… you

know… someone else's residents and stuff like that (Ryan).

This interviewee begins to showcase that this identification and perception of the RA role

is frequently considered and challenges the way RAs feel they should interact with others.

Resident's, especially those who have a preconceived idea of what the RA role is, are likely to

see the resident advisor role very differently than how RAs view their role. This difference can

make it even more challenging for resident advisors to manage their friendships when they are

already attempting to position themselves as friends and peers to residents, working against

preconceived notions.

When discussing what positional aspects are least satisfying in the RA position, one

interviewee mentioned,

It's a little discouraging because I'm still a college student, I'm still…you know… a

human being… and I still like to have a certain amount of freedom… and I feel like

having that RA hat on 24/7 just restricts me to that identity as an RA and I can't… be or

do anything else outside of that identity (Anthony).

This conflict of how the RA identity impacts everyday interactions influences how

resident advisors attempt to manage relationships with their residents. For many, it feels like

working against the idea of the RA position. Resident advisors are expected to prove their

friendship to their residents, while reminding their residents that they exist as a "normal" person

outside of the resident advisor role. Managing these relationships is already tough, and

potentially having a conversation on inappropriate behavior could risk the relationship.

For some, having this conversation on inappropriate behavior may not be worth risking the relationship that currently exists between that resident and RA. A lot of work goes into managing relationships and having these challenging conversations can negatively impact the relationships that exist within the community. This potential fear of negatively impacting a relationship may result in resident advisors purposefully choosing to disregard, or even ignore, the presence of inappropriate behavior all together.

How to have a difficult conversation. Although resident advisors rarely have these conversations on inappropriate behaviors, interviewees were able to provide what they believed would be helpful tips when confronting these types of behaviors. Though many of these tips were discussed during social justice training, they are not utilized frequently by resident advisors in their position.

As mentioned previously, addressing these types of behaviors is very difficult for resident advisors. When discussing how conversations on inappropriate behavior are handled, one RA stated,

> Handling inappropriate behavior brings up that confrontation… and… um…
> confrontation is pretty much all the time hard… especially if that confrontation doesn't
> really go as planned… It goes back to relationships I think… I think you want to be their
> friend but you also need to be that person in their life that you know… can call them out
> on their bullshit and you know be an authority figure at times… (Evan).

This resident advisor begins to present the dilemma of not only addressing the difficulty of confrontation, but also of managing a relationship that values friendship and authority. It is clear that this resident advisor believes confrontation negatively impacts relationships with residents, especially when these conversations do not go as planned.

One common tip included asking for clarification on the resident's intentions. When asking for clarification, the resident advisor is no longer making assumptions about the resident. One interviewee stated, "don't have like a preconceived notion… of like, you know... don't take sides… like you want to hear both sides of the story…" (Ryan). This resident advisor places a large importance on understanding the entire story. When a resident advisor structures a conversation in this way, they position themselves to not make unfair judgments of individuals. Facilitating a conversation in this way also gives the resident the opportunity to critically reflect on how word choice can impact the conversation and another individual, even when harm to another was unintentional.

A frequent conversation in the residence life department is centered on intent versus impact. For example, although a resident does not intend to be hurtful in their language, sometimes the impact of this language to another individual is actually hurtful. When viewing interactions in this way, residents are provided with the opportunity to remove themselves from the situation to understand how language can impact others.

Another technique frequently discussed by resident advisors was attacking what was said, such as the term "gay", rather than the individual who used that language. When discussing the language used during conversations, rather than the individual who used the language, resident advisors are able to work towards maintaining a relationship based on friendship. When an individual is questioned, rather than challenging the offensive term, one is assuming the negative intentions of the individual speaking. In addition, when attacking individuals rather than language, it is more likely that the individual will be defensive in their responses, further complicating the conversation for the RA. This can not only hinder the future relationship

between the RA and resident, but this can also diminish the work already spent on fostering relationships with the community and resident.

Connecting the Findings

Resident advisors vary on how comfortable they report they would feel if they had a conversation on inappropriate behavior. Although interviewees can list helpful tips, such as the ones previously discussed, many would have a difficult time actually holding these conversations, further leading to the importance on ensuring enactment in the RA role. These conversations on inappropriate behavior are unique to each situation, adding to the difficulty of learning how to actually manage these conversations. Unfortunately, this feeling of being unprepared for these conversations could lead resident advisors to disregard this type of behavior regardless of the impact and seriousness situation. Although training on how to facilitate these conversations occurs, when resident advisors mention they wouldn't feel prepared to have these types of conversations they are highlighting the difference between experience, or "doing", and training, or "knowing".

The interviewees were able to highlight that the ambiguity and perception of their role can lead to difficulties in confronting inappropriate behavior with residents. This is due to differences in how resident advisors attempt to position themselves with their residents, ranging on a scale from a friend to an authority figure. The findings were rooted in interviewee statements to further understand both how resident advisors make sense of their role in the residence halls and justify their thoughts and actions with residents.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The ambiguity of the resident advisor role creates many challenges for the individuals occupying the position. Managing relationships with residents, which is dependent on how a resident advisor perceives their role in the residence halls, has proven challenging for RAs. The desire to foster relationships with residents influences how a resident advisor interacts with their residents, which can make it difficult for RAs to notice and confront inappropriate behavior among residents. Moreover, RAs may avoid engaging residents about problem behavior when they believe facilitating a tough conversation on inappropriate behavior will negatively impact current and future relationships with residents.

Prior research discussed the importance of the RA role in creating and maintaining a safe and inclusive environment for all residents. The personal accounts of RAs in this research supported the previous research that claimed training is important and necessary for good job performance in the RA position. However, the interview data revealed the difficulties RAs encounter in "seeing" inappropriate behavior, such as microaggressions, that might negatively impact the residence hall environment. Interviewee accounts also revealed the difficulty RAs anticipate around engaging residents in challenging conversations about inappropriate behavior. In both prior literature and in interviewee responses the challenge of enacting skills learned during training in daily conversations was emphasized.

Situating Findings in the Literature

RAs justify their relationships with residents based on how they view their role. Resident advisors work diligently to balance their academic responsibilities with their role of working in the residence halls as first-line responders. Previous research conducted by Elleven, Allen, and Wircenski (2001) discussed challenges inherent in the resident advisor role, specifying that many

of these challenges stem from the complexity and lack of clarity of the role. Elleven et al. argue that the RA position has become increasingly complicated over time, due to positional expectations increasing from simply programming in the residence halls to facilitating directed and challenging conversations with residents. Not only is having these conversations challenging, but resident advisors are also responsible for building a safe and inclusive community for all residents. Elleven et al. argue that resident advisors will continue to face increasingly complex issues over time due to the unclear, overwhelming, and increasing expectations of the position.

During interviews, the challenge of maintaining relationships with residents was frequently mentioned, which relates to the many different perceptions of the RA role. Not only do different perceptions of the RA role exist among resident advisors, but residents also have their own perceptions of the RA role. Most resident advisors claimed that their residents' perception of the RA role was largely based on an authoritative view, which differed greatly from the personal perceptions mentioned by RAs.

Elleven et al.'s research of the RA position can be used to explain how and why resident advisors perceive their roles differently than their peers and residents. As mentioned in personal accounts, many resident advisors described their role as grounded in friendship and claimed being a "people person" is critical for success in the position. RAs talked about how their daily job requires interacting with many different people, stressing the importance of communication skills for success in the position. Few interviewees grounded their position in authority, which is more likely to align with how residents perceive the RA role. During interviews, resident advisors justified their interactions with their residents based on their perception of the role. This justification of lack of conversations on inappropriate behavior by RAs continues to emphasize

the importance of analyzing how the difference in perceptions of the position affect the ways RAs interact with their residents.

Although little to no research has examined how a resident advisor views of his or her position effects how they choose to enact the role, it is clear from interviewee responses that perception of the role matters for interactions with residents and peers. This difference in perception of the role adds to the ambiguity and challenge of working in this type of position.

Importance of training in the RA position. Prior research both stresses the importance of training employees for success in their positions and analyzes how to best prepare trainees for their work. Generally, trainings seek to provide employees with the necessary skills and knowledge for satisfactory job performance. Martin (2010) claims rapidly changing environments have increased the need for and spending on training in organizations. University campuses quickly evolve to meet the most current needs of students, faculty, and employees. Attempting to meet these needs fosters an environment of rapid change, leading to an increased need of ensuring that those who work for the university are properly trained for their work.

 The complexity of the resident advisor role, which is frequently adapting to meet the needs of the residents and the residence life department, increases the need to properly train RAs for their positional expectations (Murray, Snider, & Midkiff, 1999). Murray et al. claim that the performance of RA positional duties requires extensive training on multiple topics such as counseling and communication skills, conflict resolution, group dynamics, and RA responsibilities.

Although resident advisors discussed their dislike for training, claiming the training was too long and could be more engaging, many resident advisors still claimed that training is important for success in the position. Resident advisors presented their negative perception of

training in interviews by discussing the aspects less favored in training sessions. The length of training, lecture-style formatting, and small spaces used for sessions were some of the negative comments presented about training. Some resident advisors mentioned that the more technical training, such as learning correct procedures for policy violations, is needed to actively address issues in the residence halls. By mentioning that some parts of training are useful, but highlighting their poor experiences of prior training, resident advisors highlight the importance and challenge of creating training sessions that are both enjoyable and perceived as practical to their roles.

This disconnect between the enjoyment and usefulness of training has been explored in prior research by examining trainee reaction in order to help gain a deeper understanding of ways to improve training (Ghosh, Satyawadi, Mukherjee, & Ranjan, 2011). Many factors can impact trainee reaction such as communication and clarity of the trainer, the practical application of training, the types of venue and food services, and the types of facilities provided. Research has shown that a negative perception, or reaction, to training impacts the amount of training transfer. Thus, when trainees react negatively to training they are less likely to transfer the skills discussed during trainings to on-the-job performance. The negative consequence of less training-transfer when training sessions are poorly perceived increases the need to create training programs that are practical and informative. This negative perception of training could also explain why resident advisors have a difficult time enacting training skills while on the job, since it is likely the participants disregard the information taught.

During interviews, resident advisors highlighted the two scenario-based training sessions, Behind Closed Doors and Helping Skills Lab, as useful and engaging to their roles. Offering more sessions that follow a similar format could result in a higher amount of training transfer and

more positive trainee reaction. This could lead to RAs feeling more comfortable facilitating challenging conversations on inappropriate behavior.

Practice allows RAs to solidify skills taught during training. One way to analyze the effectiveness of training is to explore how much of what is taught in training is used on the job. Training transfer, the transfer of skills learned during training to work life, is one common way to analyze the effectiveness of training. Saks and Belourt (2006) claim that only a small percentage of what is learned during training is applied on the job. Knowing that very little of what is discussed during training sessions is actually used by trainees in their daily position highlights the need to provide trainees with the opportunity to practice the skills necessary for good job performance. This prior research is also supported by Ford, Quiñones, Sego, and Sorra (1992), who claim that the more opportunities workers have to perform the things learned in training while on the job, the higher the level of training transfer for employees.

Research recommends training follow-up to help trainees transfer their knowledge. Practicing skills discussed during training, which is one method of increasing training transfer, can occur in different ways. Martin (2010) found that multiple training follow-up techniques increased the amount of training transfer for employees. Although the techniques mentioned in the research did not specifically include scenario-based situations, resident advisors frequently cited Behind Closed Doors and Helping Skills Lab as helpful and practical aspects of training. For some interviewees, this was helpful because they were able to gain confidence in knowing they could correctly confront incidents. For others, these training sessions were helpful because they provided trainees with the opportunity to actually perform, or practice, the techniques discussed during lecture-based training sessions. These types of training sessions provide at least one opportunity to practice the skills gained during training. As discussed in personal accounts,

this was proven helpful for resident advisors due to engagement, practicality, and the opportunity to perform what was trained.

Interviewees also marked experience as valuable to the learning process because it helps solidify skills discussed during training. Some resident advisors highlighted the importance of working with other RAs who have experience confronting difficult conversations. Mentor RAs are viewed as a valuable resource to new RAs, similar to that of a trainer working with employees. This is because mentors help transition new resident advisors into the challenging and ambiguous position. This transition into the RA role can include learning while "doing", meaning that learning occurs when new resident advisors actively handle uncomfortable and challenging situations with mentor RAs. For some new resident advisors, this learning may take place while observing how a mentor RA interacts with residents both in daily conversations and when confronting policy violations. For others, this learning may take place when actively confronting a situation as the lead RA, but still utilizing the mentor RA as back-up when the situation becomes uncomfortable or too challenging. In many ways, experience can be viewed as a type of training follow-up, similar to that of having the opportunity to perform trained skills. Although experience is different than training, resident advisors mark experience as a valuable part of the learning process.

Problematic behavior in the residence halls isn't addressed frequently. Interviewees noted that conversations on problematic and inappropriate behavior do not occur frequently. Resident advisors justified the lack of conversations centered on inappropriate behavior in multiple ways. First, interviewees justified their experience as different from the norm, claiming they do not witness or "see" these types of behaviors. This was one way to remove personal responsibility for the behavior. Second, when interviewees noted that they were able to avoid

having conversations on inappropriate behavior because they were "lucky", they were noting that the problem of microaggressions and inappropriate behavior does occur in the residence halls, but that their personal experience is different than what actually occurs.

Although previous research found that microaggressions occur, especially in residence halls where residents of many different backgrounds learn how to appropriately interact with each other (Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall, &Lewis, 2012), research did not examine how often this behavior is addressed in the residence halls. Harwood et al. highlighted the importance of residence life professional staff responding appropriately to this type of behavior by claiming that sometimes professional staff unintentionally invalidate the experiences of minorities by minimalizing the potential effects of the behavior. When inappropriate behavior is either ignored or minimalized by residence life staff, they are responding incorrectly to the needs of the residents. By responding in this way, resident advisors are adding to the microaggressions experienced by others in the community invalidation.

This research addressed how often resident advisors facilitate conversations on this type of behavior, which resident advisors personally claim is not very often. Resident advisors have commented that inappropriate behavior does occur in the residence halls, but that because they don't experience this behavior, there are not opportunities to teach residents how to positively interact with one another. This highlights the importance of understanding how to help resident advisors address this behavior, leading to a discussion on enactment.

There is a difference between "knowing" and "doing". One common problem of enactment is the difference between "knowing" what needs to be done and "doing" what needs to be done. Resident advisors frequently highlight the challenge of enacting what has been discussed during training sessions. Although resident advisors mentioned they know tips and can

provide advice to others about how to best facilitate difficult conversations, resident advisors in this study claimed they would not feel prepared to actually have a conversation on inappropriate behavior.

For some interviewees, this lack of preparation is related to how often a resident advisor has practiced the skills of confronting these types of situations. Although Behind Closed Doors and Helping Skills Lab were helpful aspects of training, resident advisors state they rarely encounter this behavior while on the job. This study found that resident advisors can "talk about" what to do if a situation on inappropriate behavior occurred, but that most resident advisors don't actually have experience confronting these situations.

Wilson and Sabee (2003) highlight the role of communication competence in the outcome of interactions. Enactment can be boiled down to whether or not people posses communication competence when interacting with others. Resident advisors claim they have the communication skills, and "know" how to, or have been trained on how to communicate with others. In this particular case, resident advisors possess the knowledge of what to do, but may not have enough communication competence to actually facilitate these difficult conversations. This can be challenging when each conversation on inappropriate behavior is likely different from all previous experiences because each conversation is dependent on the topic, residents involved, and severity of the situation. Interviewee responses and prior research highlight the importance of ensuring that resident advisors have the communication competence to manage difficult conversations that could impact the sense of safety and inclusion residents feels in their living environment.

Procedural knowledge is difficult to gain. Resident advisors confront unique and challenging situations throughout their time in the position, making it likely that no two

conversations with residents are the same. In-depth training on policy violation procedures occurs, but training on interacting with residents occurs less. This can potentially create difficulties for resident advisors as they attempt to facilitate conversations with residents to meet positional expectations, such as those enforced through the 121 Model.

Knowing how to follow set procedures and guidelines can be categorized as declarative, or factual knowledge. Procedural knowledge, which is more useful for resident advisors, is needed to facilitate conversations on inappropriate behavior. Etringer, Billerband, and Claiborn (1995) discuss the differences between declarative and procedural knowledge, mentioning that experts possess more procedural knowledge. Resident advisors are not asked to be experts in their difficult positions, but it may be necessary to possess expertise to effectively enact their role. Although this research by Etringer et al. (1995) occurs in the context of counseling, the challenge of moving from declarative to procedural knowledge is also present in the resident advisor position. Research has shown that although declarative knowledge may be present, some individuals may not possess the procedural knowledge needed to enact what they know (Etringer et al., 1995).

Resident advisors highlighted the difficulty of handling conversations on inappropriate behavior in interviews, which can be linked to lacking procedural knowledge. Actually confronting this behavior by enacting the skills discussed during training sessions can be linked to possessing procedural knowledge because there are no set procedures for how to facilitate these difficult conversations. Again, no two conversations are ever the same, making it impractical to expect RAs to handle these conversations with a set procedure.

Interviewees claim to be more comfortable confronting common housing policy violations, such as situations that involve alcohol or other drugs. This can be for a few reasons,

such as the large amount of training that occurs to teach RAs the proper procedure on handling these types of incidents, the large amount of practice that is offered in engaging training sessions, or the amount of experience resident advisors have with confronting these violations while on the job. This marked confidence in confronting housing policy violations can be attributed to the understanding of the procedure and steps for reporting, which requires only declarative knowledge to enact and can be easily referenced in the duty handbook. Both offering more engaging training sessions on ways to address this inappropriate behavior, which helps resident advisors learn to enact trained skills, and having more experience working with these types of occurrences while on the job can increase the confidence resident advisors feel when challenging residents on their behavior.

One reason procedural knowledge is necessary in the resident advisor position is because it helps individuals make connections about how to treat unique situations. Although this knowledge takes more time to store, which could link back to the little amount of training that occurs for resident advisors to practice these incidents, procedural knowledge allows individuals to be more efficient and effective in their roles. Due to the complex and ever-changing dynamic that is present in the resident advisor position, unique situations, such as those on inappropriate behavior or microaggressions, could increase in frequency over time.

One main benefit of having procedural knowledge as a resident advisor is knowledge is executed more efficiently in conversation and action. This, in turn, makes these RAs who posses procedural knowledge better problem solvers. Previous research, as well as interviewee responses from this study, highlights the importance of helping resident advisors move from declarative to procedural knowledge. This move to procedural knowledge can help resident

advisors feel more comfortable in their role as they work to create and maintain an inclusive and safe environment for all residents in the residence halls.

Limitations

Although this study produced valuable results to the areas of training, residence life, and enactment, some limitations exist. All participants in the study were drawn from the researcher's immediate social network. The snowball method, though convenient, could limit the variance in potential interviewee responses. All resident advisor participants also worked for the same public university with a predominately white student population. This may explain why resident advisors perceived the lack of microaggressions and instances of inappropriate behavior. If this research was conducted at an institution with a higher minority population, resident advisor experiences and accounts may have changed.

Exploring training surveys offered by the residence life department would have been helpful in further understanding resident advisors' immediate reactions to specific training sessions. This could have provided deeper insight into why particular trainings were viewed as more applicable to RA position, such as Behind Closed Doors and Helping Skills Lab, based on trainee reactions. Furthermore, it would have been beneficial to interview more mentor resident advisors because of their greater experience with interacting with residents. A better analysis of how different amounts of time spent working in the RA position and in training sessions influences the perception of training applicability could have been conducted to better understand enactment of trained skills. This additional research would provide further insight into how more experienced resident advisors experience communication with residents and enact trained skills when facilitating difficult conversations.

Future Research, Implications, and Closing Remarks

Although this research added to the understanding of how resident advisors enact their training in their daily position, especially in the context of having challenging conversations on inappropriate behavior and microaggressions, future research should analyze how to help resident advisors move from "knowing" to "doing". Further research and analysis of how to train resident advisors on ways to enact the skills discussed during training in complicated and uncomfortable situations can help others understand how RAs help foster a community where individuals know how to positively interact with one another.

Issues of inclusivity exist in the residence halls and this research highlighted how resident advisors at a large southwestern institution with a predominately white student body justify their minimal experience of confronting and handling conversations of inappropriate behavior. This justification occurs in many different ways and can be partially attributed to how a resident advisor perceives their position in the residence hall. The ambiguous position can present many complications for those who occupy it, such as issues centered on identification and maintaining relationships that rely on friendship, mentorship, and authority.

Simply telling people to be more inclusive does not work; individuals will still feel excluded if the practice of how individuals interact with one another does not change. One way to change the current practice is through facilitating conversations that highlight the injustices that exists in the residence hall and university environment. This would ideally help students recognize inappropriate behavior and increase confidence for both RAs and residents in regards to addressing this behavior with peers. The resident advisor position, which is crucial for ensuring the safety of residents, is also centered on fostering student growth and development. This growth and development can occur in many ways, such as learning how to live in a new community, becoming more independent, or improving study and learning habits to succeed

academically. This growth and development, which is fostered through challenging conversations, does not only help residents succeed at the university, but can help residents become positive and active community members. Future research that analyzes how resident advisors can help foster social change through difficult and challenging conversations would be helpful in understanding how resident advisors influence residents in their living environment.

This study analyzed training and enactment in the residence hall environment by gathering personal accounts from resident advisors to more clearly understand how resident advisors chose to enact their training in both their daily positional duties and interactions with residents. As mentioned previously, one way to help solve the issue of creating a safe and inclusive environment for all residents is for resident advisors to challenge residents on their behaviors by facilitating challenging, provocative, and influential conversations that help residents understand how to positively interact with one another. Overall, future research should be conducted to more clearly understand how both the resident advisor role and training that occurs to prepare the individuals for the position can be utilized to ensure safety and inclusivity in the residence halls.
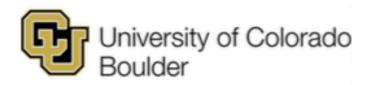
References

Arboleda, A., Wang, Y., Shelley, M. C., & Whalen, D. F. (2003). Predictors of residence hall involvement. *Journal of College Student Development, 44*, 517–531.

Chang, T. K., & Chung, Y. B. (2015). Transgender Microaggressions: Complexity of the Heterogeneity of Transgender Identities. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 9*(3), 217-234. Retrieved February 2, 2016.

Elleven, R. K., Allen, J., & Wircenski, M. (2001). Resident assistant training: A southwestern perspective. *College Student Journal, 35*, 609-616.

Etringer, B., Hillerbrand, E., & Claiborn, C. (1995). The transition from novice to expert counselor. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 35*, 4-17.

Ford, J. K., Quiñones, M. A., Sego, D. J., & Sorra, J. S. (1992). Factors affecting the opportunity to perform trained tasks on the job. *Personnel Psychology, 45*, 511-527.

Gentry, W., Harris, L., & Nowicki, S. (2007). Recognition of emotion in facial expressions and resident advisor effectiveness. *Journal of College and University Student Housing,* 61-69.

Ghosh, P., Joshi, J., Satyawadi, R., Mukherjee, U., & Ranjan, R. (2011). Evaluating effectiveness of a training programme with trainee reaction. *Industrial and Commercial Training, 43*, 247-255.

Harwood, S., Huntt, M., Mendenhall, R., & Lewis, J. (2012). Racial microaggressions in the residence halls: Experiences of students of color at a predominantly white university. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 5,* 159-173.

Martin, H. (2010). Improving training impact through effective follow-up: Techniques and their application. *Journal of Management Development, 6,* 520-534.

Murray, J. L., Snider, B. R., & Midkiff, R. M. (1999). The effects of training on resident

    assistant job performance. *Journal of College Student* Development, 40, 744-747.

Saks, A. M., & Belourt, L. A. (2012). An investigation into the relationship between training

    evaluation and the transfer of training. *International Journal of Training & Development,*

    16, 118–127.

Shelton, K., & Delgado-Romero, E. A. (2011). Sexual orientation microaggressions: The

    experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer clients in psychotherapy. *American*

    Psychological Association, 58(2), 210-221. Retrieved March 12, 2016.

Stolovitch, H., & Keeps, E. (2011). *Telling ain't training updated, expanded, and enhanced*

    (Updated, expanded, and enhanced, 2nd ed.). Alexandria, Va.: ASTD Press.

Tai, W. (2006). Effects of training framing, general self-efficacy and training motivation on

    trainees' training effectiveness. *Personnel Review, 35*, 51-65.

Wong, G., Derthick, A. O., David, E. J. R., Saw, A., & Okazaki, S. (2014). The what, the why,

    and the how: A review of racial microaggressions research in psychology. *Race and*

    Social Problems, 6, 181-200.

Wilson, S. R. & Sabee, C. M. (2003). Explicating communicative competence as a

    theoretical term. In J. O. Greene & B. R. Burleson, *Handbook of communication and*

    social interaction skills (p. 3-50). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

Appendix A:

IRB Letter of Approval

Institutional Review Board
563 UCB
Boulder, CO 80309
Phone: 303.735.3702
Fax: 303.735.5185
FWA: 00003492

APPROVAL

06-Jan-2016

Dear Jessica Zhivotovsky,
On **06-Jan-2016** the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Submission:	Initial Application
Review Category:	Exempt - Category 2
Title:	Communicative Social Justice Training for Resident Advisors: RA's Experiences and Uses of Training
Investigator:	Zhivotovsky,Jessica
Protocol #:	15-0784
Funding:	None
Documents Approved:	15-0784 Consent Form (6Jan16); Recruitment Email; Interview Guide; 15-0784 Protocol (6Jan16);
Documents Reviewed:	HRP-211: FORM - Initial Application;

The IRB approved the protocol on **06-Jan-2016**.

Click the link to find the approved documents for this protocol: Approved Documents. Use copies of these documents to conduct your research.

In conducting this protocol you must follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,
Douglas Grafel
IRB Admin Review Coordinator
Institutional Review Board

Appendix B:

Interview Guide

Questions:

1. How long have you been a resident advisor?

2. How many different residence halls have you worked in? What has been the focus of each of these halls?

3. Why did you decide to become a resident advisor?

4. What parts of being an RA have you enjoyed or found satisfying?

5. What parts have been you been less satisfied with?

6. How do you think about your RA role in the residence hall?

7. What skills do you utilize most in your position?

8. One issue that resident advisors often face is dealing with residents who do things to exclude others or engaging in behavior that makes another resident feel dismissed. For instance, when a resident makes a comment about someone's race or sexuality. Tell me about your experience with residents and these types of behaviors.

9. Can you remember a time when a resident engaged in this type of behavior and you had to talk with them about it? Tell me about that situation.

10. Do you have an example of an event specifically related to race, gender, or sexuality? If so, can you tell me about this?

11. How often do you encounter these types of situations? When and how do you decide to have a discussion about the impact of this behavior?

12. How do you handle a conversation on inappropriate behavior? For example, is there anything in particular that you find helpful when handing these conversations?

13. How prepared do you feel you are when having these conversations?

14. Tell me about where you developed the skills to have these conversations.

15. Part of my study is thinking about how people feel about the training they receive in their jobs and if they use it. Explain your experience with training throughout your time as an RA.

16. Are there things you have learned during training that you have used in your position? If so, what are they?

17. Thinking across the trainings you have received, how do you feel about training as part of your job?

18. What do you wish you had training on that was not included?

19. One focus of the training at this institution for RAs is social justice. I'm interested in how you have experienced this training.

20. Have you used this in your position? If so, how have you used this?

21. Is there anything about this that you would like to tell me that I didn't ask you about?