



How Expectations Do Not Equate with Practice: The Gendered Reality of the Female Resident Assistant

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RESIDENCE HALL AND HOUSE EMPLOYEES (RESIDENT ASSISTANTS) at postsecondary institutions in Canada are an important part of the social and rules-based structure that allows these facilities to operate. These employees are challenged with varied situations that require the application of mediation, authoritarian, recognition, and referral skills. To date, studies have ignored the ways in which the experiences of RAs may be gender-specific. This study, conducted with Canadian university residence employees, used an online survey of scale and open-ended questions to establish if the experience of female RAs matched the available information on the resident assistant position. Survey responses indicated a distinct difference between what female RAs believed was expected of them and the actual experiences they had while working within residence halls. It was also clear that some female RAs felt that they were treated as surrogate mothers in the residence setting. Current literature on resident assistants may not accurately reflect their experience; the resident assistant position appears to be a gendered space in which biological sex and gender play important roles in employee experience. The training literature for RAs could be revised to prepare female students for these specific challenges.

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The writing of Gregory Blimling (2003) and other authors (Clark, 2008; Posner & Brodsky, 1993; St. Onge, Ellett, & Nestor, 2008) describes the work and expectations of housing and residential life staff (community advisor, don, etc., hereafter described as resident assistant [RA]) in a thorough, but very general, way. Collectively, these authors divide the resident assistant position into three thematic contexts. First, the resident assistant is employed as a student liaison and frontline advisor for other students. Second, the resident assistant is employed as a disciplinarian, charged with monitoring and enforcing facility and cultural norms within the residence facility. Third, the resident assistant is an educator. These roles are complex, and

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In each of these leadership roles the resident assistant is recognized as having supervisory influence over others, though the literature on RAs rarely addresses differences in the experiences of the diverse range of individuals in these positions. Yet how and to what degree anyone can access authority may vary significantly based upon one's social location. Extant leadership and gender research, for example, concludes that the leadership experiences of males and females differ in a variety of contexts (Brown, 1979; Chapman, 1975; Dobbins & Platz, 1986; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Unfortunately, gender-based findings are often overlooked when the research context extends beyond the study of professional management or women's/gender studies projects. Such is the case with extant literature on the resident assistant position in which gender is overlooked when referencing the position and its expectations.

This project is an extension of a small qualitative pilot study done with resident assistants at one Canadian university. The pilot project revealed significant challenges for female RAs in their ability to access peer leadership power within residence. This project extended the pilot study by using an online survey distributed to participating postsecondary institutions across Canada. The survey contained both scale and open-ended questions designed to measure the resident assistant experience. The survey was structured to answer the following questions:

Do female RAs feel that expectations of them are different from those for male resident assistants?

Do female RAs experience a gender bias in their work, either self-imposed or from outside pressures?

Do female RAs feel socially sanctioned in their work because they are female?

If there is a mismatch between the general understanding of the position and the lived experience of female RAs, this may negatively affect female student leaders. The findings of this study, therefore, have important potential implications for the training of RAs.

FEMALES IN STUDENT LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Research that specifically addresses gender and the resident assistant position is scarce (Posner & Brodsky, 1993). Articles that address female leaders in a postsecondary, extracurricular context are available, but these works use residence communities as an example instead of a focus, while gender discussion is limited to sex-differentiated differences (England, 1988; Romano, 1996). These works provide evidence that female students face pervasive barriers to leadership practice across a range of student leadership roles in postsecondary settings. Older available works on student leadership that reflect gender use sex as the determinant for gender-based conclusions, and they freely exchange the words "woman" and "women" with "female" (Komives, 1991).

Kent and Moss (1994) concluded that biological sex plays a negligible role in the emergence of leaders in a university peer-group setting, but that effect is strongly regulated by

the gender roles that individuals occupy. Students showing male-linked personality traits working within small groups on a collective task were more likely to emerge as leaders in those groups. These male-linked traits are socially associative characteristics that are often used to assign masculinity to a person or object (Kushell & Newton, 1986; Rodler, Kirchner, & Holzl, 2002). Traditional male and female roles often fall distinctly within the confines of these dichotomous associations for leaders, where one will take on the male leadership role, and the other the female (Etaugh & Liss, 1992; McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 1999). England (1988) found that female leaders, even those with postsecondary education, were compartmentalized into maternal and domestic work roles. Students entering the residence setting of postsecondary education carry these social understandings for gendered leaders with them and may apply them as rules of conduct for the leaders they encounter in the new environment. Predetermined role expectations from students could create a contradictory space for resident assistants who are expected to offer nurturance to students, as well as serve as disciplinarians.

Discrepancies between the expectations and subsequent experiences of females in student leadership positions may be apparent if individuals identified as female are expected to be both nurturing and exhibit male-gendered traits to access leadership. Romano (1996) explains that, because of the existence of predetermined expectations for female leaders, female student leaders must modify how they lead in order to comply and be recognized. Romano also observed that “men were intimidated by their assertive, outspoken temperaments” (p. 680) if women were direct and

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firm. Women in the study shared that the complexity of leadership issues they dealt with was not taken seriously by other students. Forrest, Hotelling, and Kuk (1984) found that women face subtle forms of discrimination within educational institutions, which prevents them from fully pursuing leadership roles in the student body. This finding was echoed by Astin (1993), who found that some women were held back by the difficulties of being perceived as aggressive personalities.

The residence setting needs to be considered a potentially gendered space, but in existing literature the resident assistant is instead understood as removed from the difficulties associated with gender and social interactions. This is best illustrated by the work of Blimling (2003), who authored the guiding text in resident assistant training and education. This text, now in its seventh edition, does not address the diversity that is inherent in the population of individuals who choose to work in student leadership while in postsecondary institutions. There is no mention in Blimling’s

work of how gender differences affect the resident assistant position, and there is very little that addresses sex or gender differences within the population of students the RA supervises. Similarly, Posner and Brodsky's (1993) statistical analysis of resident assistant effectiveness ignored gender differences. Although gender data was collected for demographic purposes, they did not use this data in their analysis of student, individual, and employer evaluation of resident assistant effectiveness.

It is possible that these researchers are simply assuming that the resident assistant position is a manifest form of the student leadership position explored in traditional leadership literature (Bass & Stogdill, 1981; Borgatta, Bales, & Couch, 1954; Chapman, 1975; Hollander, 1961) and is therefore subject to traditional analysis of leaders and leadership. If this is the case, then these researchers could be applying a traditional Western understanding of leadership to this highly specialized and derived manifestation of the leadership paradigm. The traditional leadership view often excludes females as proper peer leaders and instead places them in a special class within the larger group of follower. Though Bass and Stogdill's (1990) *Handbook of Leadership* is widely regarded as a guiding work in the field of leadership research, in this expansive text, women are allotted only one short chapter, and this chapter is included in the "Diverse Groups" section of the text.

This application of previously understood social leadership roles to a new environment may have a great influence on the way postsecondary students understand leadership roles. Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) explore the idea of the social engineering of leadership roles when

they show how exposure to counter-stereotypic leaders changes the way that individuals evaluate leaders overall. When exposed to strong and effective female leaders, individuals showed a measured difference in the way they evaluated them. The findings in each of these research studies demonstrate that the social construction of leaders has a great influence on the acceptability of females in leadership roles overall.

Social stereotypes surrounding gender and leadership may be especially apparent for student leadership in postsecondary institutions. This age group has been shown to harbor previously formed social understandings about sex, gender, and leadership (Heilman, 2001; Lips, 2001; Ridgeway, 2001; Rosenkrantz et al., 1968). Having learned these gender-specific roles while growing up, and often with direct

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entry into postsecondary residence from the childhood home, many individuals have had little time to challenge these ideas on a personal level before applying them to the new environment of residential postsecondary life. The beliefs of the college students studied by Rosenkrantz et al. (1968) extended into all aspects of life, with particular focus on the gendered divisions within the home and family life. The pervasiveness of gender definitions in the home was confirmed by multiple studies over 20 years (England, 1988; Kane & Sanchez, 1994; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2009), and this could provide insight into the specific gender expectations of female student leaders in residences where the RA serves as both disciplinarian and housemate.

Mulder and Clark (2002) assert that designated leaders in the residence space should serve as interim parental figures. Witt (1997) explains that gender roles are learned and solidified within the home. If notions of gendered behavior are carried into the surrogate household of postsecondary residence living, then the individuals who are supervisors in this arena become surrogate parents and have the learned gender roles of parents thrust upon them. For mothers and female surrogates, gender role assumptions are those of child nurturance (Cook-Gumperz, 1995), selflessness, and over-arching concern for others (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). For males, the stereotypical gender role is that of master of the house, "self-assertive and motivated to master" (Eagly & Steffen, 1984, p. 735). If females are expected to be caring and concerned for others, in contrast to the expectation that males act in the world and master that world, females will be at an automatic disadvantage when asked to

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serve a punitive role or to be the master of a residence house. This study sought to explore the lived experiences of female RAs to see whether or not such role contradictions were characteristic of their work.

METHODOLOGY

The study was developed using a modification and simplification of the Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson (2003) QUAL → QUAN Sequential Transformative Design (pp. 225, 228). In this framework, qualitative data is analyzed, and the analysis is used to produce a quantitative instrument. The research reflected in this study used a mixed survey, incorporating both Likert-scale response questions and open-ended response questions. Likert-scale questions used the 5-point scale, with values 1 to 5 corresponding to the following statements: *disagree completely*, *somewhat disagree*, *no opinion either way*, *somewhat agree*, and *extremely agree*. Twelve scale-based questions were presented. The survey also included

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open-ended questions designed to allow respondents to comment on the survey theme and questions and to provide more contextual examples of situations they had encountered. The open-ended questions were divided into two parts: the first, contextual and personal sharing of specific experiences as a resident assistant; the second, an area for the respondents to comment on research content and focus. Some basic demographic data were also collected as part of the survey, reflecting the age of the participants, the institution at which they were employed, and the number of years they served as resident assistants.

The survey was presented using SurveyMonkey.com, an online survey provider, so that surveys could be accessed by any member of the sample population with access to the Internet. The survey was posted for two months. Although the website was available to anyone, the web address for the survey was distributed only to interested individuals and/or management teams from Canadian postsecondary institutions' residence divisions. Invitations for participation were extended to 12 geographi-

cally distributed Canadian postsecondary institutions, each with active residence communities and employees who serve as resident assistants. The survey was open only to female RAs (i.e., women and those individuals who identify as female), as the questions reflected the lived experience of female RAs. Responses were received from resident assistants at eight of the 12 institutions.

Data collected from the surveys were analyzed using two different methods. The scale data were subjected to basic descriptive statistical analysis, assuming normally distributed data, in order to determine the mean responses for each question. This allowed for accurate analysis of question mean responses, inter-question mean comparisons, and individual responses over the mean. Basic thematic analysis was conducted on the open-ended data to determine if respondents showed congruency in responses. In addition, open-ended responses were compared to one another and scale data to explore whether participants were measuring and describing their experiences the same way. For example, if respondents give the word "disciplinary" as their most common RA experience but produce a counseling example, they may be evaluating their role differently than they actually experienced it.

RESULTS

In total, 41 completed surveys were collected during the period of online availability: a response rate of about 17% of the estimated 235 possible participants. The eight participating institutions have, on average, fewer than 20 female RAs. The resident population ranged from about 500 students to roughly 8,000 students during the fall and winter semesters.

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This sample size, although small relative to the available pool of respondents, represents a portion of the resident assistant population that is sufficient to make preliminary conclusions about the study subject matter.

Answers to most scale questions indicated that respondents believed there was little difference between their experiences as female RAs and the understood expectations of the position (Table 1).

The advisory and authoritative roles that participants agreed upon are elements that Blimling (2003) emphasizes in his writing on RAs. Respondents also highlighted specific issues that are not discussed in Blimling's writing, referencing gender division related to expectations and care-giving (Table 2).

Conclusions are based on a simple rank value of the mean responses to scale questions.

Table 1

Roles Related to Gender Expectations of Resident Assistants

Survey Question	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation (σ_x)
My boss's expectations are the same for male and female resident assistants.	4.39	0.97
I am often required to assume an advisory role with students.	4.37	0.70
I am often required to assume an authoritative role with students.	4.37	0.70
I find that male students treat male and female resident assistants differently.	3.90	1.11
My students' expectations are the same for male and female resident assistants.	3.66	1.06
I find that female students treat male and female resident assistants differently.	3.46	1.12
My RA experience is the same as that of my RA colleagues.	3.39	1.20
The RA position is the same for men and women.	3.05	1.20
Female resident assistants are taken less seriously than male resident assistants.	2.59	1.16
I sometimes have difficulty accessing authority with students.	2.22	1.19

Table 2

Divided Gender Expectations Related to Care-Giving and Mothering

Survey Question	Mean (\bar{x})	Standard Deviation (σ_x)
I am often required to assume a care-giving role with students.	4.00	0.97
I am often treated like a mother figure by students.	3.29	1.27

Most respondents believed that their supervisors had almost no difference in expectations for male and female RAs (= 4.39). When this response is contrasted with the perceived similarity in student expectations for male and female RAs, respondents had lower expectations for receiving gender equitable treatment from this group (= 3.66), which suggests that female RAs are expecting to be held under a gendered lens by their students. The belief of female RAs about their students' expectations is noteworthy when we consider that many respondents reported that the situations they were most commonly called upon to handle involved peer counseling or advising (e.g., "As a female I felt most students were comfortable coming to me to get advice on situations and to have someone who would listen, no matter the situation" and "She would just need someone to talk to, or in some cases I would have to calm her down and bring her back from the brink of self-harm").

There is evidence that female RAs maintain the expectation that male and female leaders will be treated equally by the students they supervise, even when confronted with personal experience to the contrary. In fact, 55% (from wide-ranging institutions) agreed with the statement "*I am often treated like a mother figure by students.*" According to Eagly and Steffen (1984), as well as Cook-Gumperz (1995) and England (1988), the stereotypic nurturing, mothering space is inherently unequal and gender-specific. Therefore, if female RAs recognize and report being treated as mother figures by their students, they are occupying a gendered leadership space at work that could affect their ability to lead or gain agency with some students.

Finally, one question generated strong disagreement. The statement "*I sometimes have difficulty accessing authority with students*" received a "disagree" or "strongly disagree" response by 71% of the respondents. Presumably, this means that the female respondents interpret their level of authoritarian practice as both adequate and appropriate within the residence but does not speak to whether or not this authority is gendered in nature.

The purpose of the open-ended questions was twofold. The first was to establish similarities between the duties of resident assistants at each of the participating institutions. This was done by asking respondents for a description of their basic resident assistant duties. Their responses were then compared with job descriptions provided from participating institutions. Job descriptions were very similar from institution to institution, with common responses: "maintaining the house as a safe place," "advising students—recognizing and referring," "conducting x number of rounds shifts per week/month," and "enforcing standards." There were no outliers in responses from participants, indicating that positions were comparable. Descriptions of duties were followed by an inquiry into the most common situations addressed by female RAs. Respondents were then asked to relate a typical scenario faced in their role as resident assistant. Many gave similar responses; in identifying which situation they needed to address most frequently, 70% listed times when disciplinary action was required. In addition, almost 50% of respondents listed advising other students as an important part of their work. Mediation did feature in some of the responses of individuals for this question, but it did not make up a major portion of the responses.

When responding to the request to “Please give a brief description of one example of this type of situation,” 55% referenced a scenario in which the resident assistant was called upon to mediate a situation that did not involve peer counseling or discipline. These situations often called upon the resident assistant to act as a decision facilitator for students and focused heavily on mediation of interpersonal issues. This difference between what the respondents believe their job mostly consists of and the stories they related presents the possibility of differences between the actual duties and perceived main duties being performed by these RAs.

The last portion of open-ended responses asked for comments on the study topic itself. This yielded several responses, which were divided between great interest and engagement with the topic and confusion over the purpose of the project itself. Those individuals who engaged directly with the topic area left comments that made it clear that they found their experience as female RAs to be quite different from what is generally understood as the experience of the typical resident assistant. They felt that their experiences were not reflected in the general understanding of the resident assistant position and that this difference sometimes created some distress. One participant commented,

I find that as a female RA there is a whole host of unspoken expectations that you receive from your team members, boss and students alike. . . . students, especially male students, when they are addressing you tend to use pet names (like sweetie, etc.) and feel the need to ask you questions (like “can I have a hug?”).

This type of statement was echoed by other respondents. “I note frequently the difference

in the way I am treated as a female advisor as opposed to my male counterpart,” shared one participant, and “I have always thought that it is easier for a male advisor to be authoritative as it is very common for male residents to dismiss a female advisor’s authority” commented another. These individuals have seen male and female RAs treated differently while on the job. This sentiment was not shared by all participants, however. One participant commented,

Overall I feel that women are treated differently only if they perceive themselves to be different, i.e., a small female thinks she is too tiny to deal with large males. However, I am confident. I do think male students think they can flirt with females to get away with things.

Although this respondent believes that female RAs are not at a disadvantage by default, she also demonstrates an understanding that they may be vulnerable to self-deprecating feelings concerning their authoritative role, which in turn makes them vulnerable. This is a statement which *ipso facto* places female RAs in a double bind: You are different only if you perceive yourself as different, but those over whom you hold authority treat you differently than your peers; therefore, you must be different, which challenges your perception of non-difference.

A number of respondents claimed not to have experienced this difference in expectations. “I have never had any gender-related issues with being an RA—nor have I heard of any,” shared one participant, although she was quick to admit that she had only worked in a single-gender situation. “I don’t think there is any difference between the male and female RAs and how they are treated or respected,” stated another respondent. She went on to argue that perhaps male students were

just more difficult to handle than female students and that the gender of the resident assistant had little to do with it. Some respondents seemed not to notice that they were highlighting a gender difference. One woman said, “Generally, when situations require authority, RAs work in pairs (female and male). Usually, the males will take the authoritative role in this type of situation, but not always.” Although this statement is not overt, it does conform to the idea that male resident assistants take on the authoritarian role by default. Finally, there were some respondents who were unable to engage with the topic at all, attempting to call into question the very nature of the survey. “Is this actually relevant?” one respondent asked.

DISCUSSION

According to the survey data, a measured difference exists in the way that individual female RAs view and understand their role and how gender affects their ability to do their job effectively. Some believe that gender plays a significant role in the way they must act and react when they do their jobs, pushing them into behavioral patterns and a particular leadership status reserved for women. A much smaller percentage of the sample believes that the leadership role taken on by a female resident assistant is particular to the individual and without limitations imposed by gender. These respondents perceived no difference between male and female RAs in terms of their access to power or authority.

The group of female respondents who recognize gender bias as resident assistants may face additional challenges on top of the original gender-linked bias. If female RAs understand that devaluation of female RAs and student

leaders is occurring—and therefore perceive themselves as second-class citizens—it is possible that they will see little hope of escape and may not work to effect social change, inadvertently perpetuating this social ideology in the students they supervise. Conversely, if the RAs are able to recognize the difficulties associated with being female RAs within a male-first/male-strongest/male-best system, then it is possible that they are better prepared to counter an inherent male leadership preference in their students. Recognition, although potentially problematic in some cases, provides women with the first tools they require to work against harmful and degrading work expectations (Williams & Wittig, 1997).

The second group of women, those who claim that emancipation of the female leader rests solely on the shoulders of the individual woman and her engagement with the social norms surrounding leadership, presents a confounding difficulty. This ideology removes responsibility from the social structures that limit the female leader and places the impetus directly on the shoulders of the leaders themselves. The assertion that the individual has the ability to change his or her status within

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an established social structure ignores the overwhelming influence that the world around us plays on who we are and what we are permitted to accomplish (Gladwell, 2008). Saying that a young woman who has taken on the role of resident assistant can influence the way she is perceived by refusing to acknowledge the social role her gender plays is simplistic and impractical and ignores the social and ideological factors inherent in systems that see themselves as entirely meritocratic (Brodie, 2008).

Most respondents stated that their role was primarily, or at least significantly, authoritarian insofar as it related to enforcement of regulations and frontline norms. But when asked to share a typical resident assistant action, many of these same individuals cited situations when they acted as mediators or go-betweens in regulating non-disciplinary problems. This discrepancy between the individual's perception and typical lived experience is telling, and it points to a potential disconnect between the way the position is advertised and understood and its reality for female applicants. It may be that these women are drawing attention to mediation as a kind of authority that is readily available to females within this residential context. The idea that women (mothers in particular) are often charged with solving the relational difficulties between children (Cook-Gumperz, 1995) may factor into the discrepancy between female RAs' perceived experiences and the stories they shared. Although this alone is not conclusive, it does point to the role that the larger social ideology surrounding discipline, access to power, and gender (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Kent & Moss, 1994) plays within the postsecondary residence. By serving as the mediator, the female resident assistant

occupies a leadership space that is potentially different from her own expectations.

Resident assistants are simultaneously viewed as loving and caring but also as the enforcers of rules and regulations that students perceive as limits to their freedom. For the female resident assistant, being viewed as loving and caring may reinforce authority by accessing the social space of mothering and "let's work through this" problem solving, but it also limits the ability of these young female leaders to access the "do what I say" authoritative power necessary for some portions of their job. When the female RA acting as a problem solver is contrasted with the male RA acting as an authoritarian leadership figure, it becomes clear that these roles mirror the traditional household family structure described by Etaugh and Liss (1992). There are few social structures that are more influential for the North American individual than that of the gender roles associated with the family (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Etaugh & Liss, 1992; Witt, 1997). This structure may allow the female resident assistant more agency with students but could create a compartmentalization of female leadership for students and student leaders.

The roles that resident assistants are most often called upon to undertake (counselor, disciplinarian, and teacher) each carry gendered associations (Correll, 2001; Reskin & Roos, 1990). These sociological elements associated with the resident assistant position provide avenues for research that have been only superficially explored. Most often, the resident assistant is discussed in a uniform and non-differentiated way, with little attention paid to the individual differences between leaders and the specific challenges that individuals may face.

Failure to discuss the care-giving aspects of the position indicates a possible devaluing of these aspects. It is also possible that, because care-giving is more often carried out by female RAs, these contributions are not considered important aspects of the position by male authors of training manuals or texts. Without this acknowledgement of the potential challenges faced by female RAs, training manuals provide women with few resources, and they are thus forced to work through professional challenges on their own while working as student leaders in residence.

The high variability in responses suggests the possibility for further discussion and research. If young women, each doing very similar jobs, have such disparate experiences and understandings, there must be other social factors at work within postsecondary institutions and beyond. If women have experienced difficulty as student leaders in residence simply because they are women, much work remains to be done in educating young men and women about leadership and ability. A starting point for potentially improving the working lives of female RAs is to provide training materials for potential RAs that acknowledge difference and prepare women for the particular challenges they may face.

Implications for Residence Life Professionals

As residence life professionals, it is the responsibility of managers and supervisors to ensure that students who undertake the role of resident assistants are properly prepared for their roles during the school year. Although this preparation cannot possibly address all potential issues and scenarios that a resident assistant will encounter, major themes and principles

must be covered. It appears that gender, both as it affects the work of individual RAs and the social influence it exerts, plays a role in the RA experience. If residence professionals are not discussing and addressing gender issues and influence with their RAs, above and beyond student-centered sexuality and gender-identity-based topics, then they are ignoring an influential force that can drastically alter the RA experience. With the topics addressed here, residence life professionals have a stepping-off point to explore gender issues within their teams and to evaluate whether male and female RAs are having different, gender-specific experiences. If this is occurring within their teams, there is an opportunity to develop gender-based training that will help male and female RAs interpret, understand, and engage with gender and leadership issues within their residence halls. The advantage of doing so is that more equitable gender spaces can exist within the residence and the leadership space, whether traditionally male or female, and these spaces can open to more students. The danger of not engaging with the topic of gender and leadership roles is that we continue to perpetuate, even silently, gender and leadership norms that differentiate what is appropriate for males and females, devaluing and discounting those who do not fit that framework.

Limitations

Results of this study revealed some limitations in its design. Although the sample size for this study is sufficient to make preliminary assertions about women in the resident assistant position, the response rate fell just below 20% of the estimated eligible population (where total potential participants were estimated at 235 for the eight participating

institutions). A larger sample size could have bolstered statistical results.

The study relied on individuals self-identifying as women, but given the online nature of the survey presentation, no verification was possible, which left the survey open to respondents who did not identify as female. In addition, the researchers were unable to access contact information for potential participants, and presentation of the opportunity to participate was vetted through the residence and housing departments of the participating universities.

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Discussion Questions

1. The authors suggest that residence hall professionals should explore gender issues within their RA teams and "evaluate whether male and female RAs are having different, gender-specific experiences." Do you believe male and female RAs on your campus are having different experiences? Describe how you would go about investigating this if you supervised a team of RAs.
2. Review the training content used with RAs on your campus for evidence of gender bias in how RAs are prepared to do their jobs. What did you find?
3. Discussions about contemporary leadership often acknowledge that collaboration and effective conflict resolution (mediation) skills are keys to success. Presuming this is true, how can the RA position, as an entry-level leadership position, be used to develop these skills? Are women more likely to exhibit these skills and therefore find success as leaders?
4. Review the description for the RA position on your campus. Of the major roles/responsibilities outlined for the position, which carry a socially gendered association? How might this information be used in developing training? in performance management and evaluation?
5. If a female RA espouses traditional role socialization as described in the study (i.e., "selflessness, and an over-arching concern for others"), how might this impact her work as an RA?
6. Talk to someone from a culture other than a traditional, Western one about their understanding of leadership. What are some differences? How can you apply what you have learned to residence life and housing?
7. The study cites a perceived difference in the way that female RAs are treated with respect to authority. One RA noted, "I have always thought that it is easier for a male advisor to be authoritative as it is very common for male residents to dismiss a female advisor's authority." Another commented that some male residents think they can "flirt with females to get away with things." What can residence life do to combat gender bias in the residence halls?
8. This study highlights care-giving as a quality that is more often expressed by female RAs and an aspect of the job that is devalued. What are some innovative ways to educate, train, and support male RAs to value care-giving?