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Growing Pains: Self-Efficacy Development in Resident Assistants

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the perspectives of Resident Assistants' (RAs) in terms of job responsibilities, the interplay between job tasks and self-efficacy, and mitigating factors that impact the RAs self-efficacy. Mastery experiences, verbal persuasions, and staff dynamic were perceived as the primary mitigating factors that positively and negatively impact a Resident Assistant's self-efficacy. Although not shared by all the participants, other migrating factors included vicarious experiences and physiological/affective states. Student affairs professionals should focus on the impact of staff dynamic, the why and how tasks are completed, and placing a greater emphasis on recognizing the work of resident assistants. It is important to put more attention into supporting Resident Assistants and enhancing their self-efficacy as the role becomes more complex and demanding at institutions of higher learning.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loving family, especially my parents Scott and Kathrine King. My parents, and family, instilled an early value of education in my life and I am glad that I have been able to pursue it further in my life. I owe quite a bit of my opportunity in life to the hard work both of my parents did, and I hope that this thesis will make you all proud. My parents were there whenever I was struggling with my thesis or needed to take a break at home and sit in a coffee shop to get coding done.

I also dedicate this thesis to the various student affairs professionals I have gotten to work with and/or be mentored by in my short time in the field. Many of you have seen at my strongest, but also at my lowest, and yet you always saw the potential in me. I am forever grateful for the work you all do and will continue to do. I hope that this information can benefit fellow housing professionals in the future as it has benefitted me during the study.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my friends and peers. Many of you have impacted me in ways you may never know, but do know I appreciate you all. It was amazing to have people to bounce ideas off of and/or blow-off steam during the stress of graduate school.

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Thank you to the CSA Faculty for the various lessons and knowledge you have imparted during my two years in graduate school. Thank you to the professionals I have worked with and networked with at conferences and on-campus. Your time and dedication do not go unnoticed and I hope to impact others like you all have impacted me.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

There is a need for quality leaders in today's job market due to the increasing need for specialization and skill development (Burquel, 2018). At a minimum, most job postings request communication, writing and organization skills (Selingo, 2016). In addition, leaders need soft skills ("– a term associated with how people get along with one another, communicate, and work in teams-") (Selingo, 2016, p. 34). Other skills needed by leaders include flexibility and resiliency, which are required to lead in an ever-changing world (Burquel, 2018). Some would also argue there is a critical need for leaders who can make difficult decisions with professionalism and grace (Urban, 2019). Others state that there is a need for individuals with a servant leadership background, especially when it comes to careers in the government (Pickens, 2019).

There are numerous books and materials focused on becoming a leader. It might be easy to see great leaders and be attracted to the glamour of the position rather than work on the skills and qualities necessary to become one (Koehn, 2017). One way to develop strong leadership qualities is to focus on authenticity. According to Shamir and Eilam (2005), having a clear personal story helps leaders strengthen their sense of self or self-concept. Other researchers focus on creativity and problem solving as skills to be developed (Carmeli, Gelbard, & Reiter-Palmon, 2013). Mentoring has also been shown to have a positive impact on gaining skills needed to lead (Carmeli et al., 2013). Lastly, the development of soft skills is viewed by some as more important than developing the technical skills required of a particular employer (Selingo, 2016).

Higher education is one place where leadership development is important (Abusham, 2018; Hanson, Drumheller, & Gerlich, 2019; Nguyen, 2016). In some ways Higher Education needs the same leadership skills required in the business world. Universities have borrowed from industry in using a 360-degree evaluation process, which allows people who are above, below, and at the same level as the staff member to evaluate individuals in a leadership position (Tugend, 2019). In other ways Higher Education is doing a better job of training student leaders with regard to issues such as racial-equity (Brown, 2018). Greenwald (2010) has challenged universities to continue working on better ways to develop student leaders through various forms of training. Greenwald is an advocate for lifelong learning so that leaders stay current with the latest trend.

Colleges and universities have unique ways of providing opportunities for students to develop leadership skills. Students have access to various clubs and student organizations such as ROTC, student government, religious organizations, or intramural sports teams. Each of these opportunities provide chances for students to step into roles where they work with a team and help collectively reach a common goal, all the while having each individual get a chance to grow. Some mission and vision statements for various student organizations include developmental words such as: officers of character, transparent leadership, empower, and motivate ("U.S. Army Cadet Command", 2019; "About SGA", 2019; "About", 2019)

One particular method to develop leadership skills is by becoming a Resident Assistant (RA). Resident assistants are students who live on a floor with fellow students in a residence hall, and these resident assistants are there to help guide and mentor their community in addition to other daily tasks (Blimling, 2010). Early on in the history of the resident assistant position, these students were viewed more as disciplinarians. Eventually in the 1970s, RAs began to take

on advising and counseling type roles (Arvidson, 2003). Toward the end of the 20th century, RA responsibilities began to increase further with obligations to report things in a timely manner required by the Clery Act responsibilities and they also were given access to information that was protected by FERPA (Boone, Bauman, & Davidson, 2016). Though these are mere highlights of the tasks and responsibilities resident assistants have, it does provide a better picture of what their role entails. As a result, RA's have some of the most transferable leadership skills a college graduate may learn (Myslicki, 2016).

The resident assistant performs many tasks that help them further develop their leadership skills. There have been studies regarding various positive factors for resident assistants impacting the student's leadership skills. Such factors included having a quality mentor, developing transferable skills, problem-solving skills, collaboration/teamwork, and others (Boone, 2018; DeLaPorte, 2014; Early, 2014; Stoner & Zhang, 2017).

These positive factors of the position may strengthen a resident assistant's perceived self-efficacy (Benjamin & Davis, 2016; Brandt, 2013; Stoner, 2017). Unfortunately, there are also aspects or challenges of the RA position that may also have a potential negative impact on one's perceived self-efficacy. Such factors could include stress, lack of information/training on addressing a situation, or overall burnout from the resident assistant role (Benjamin & Davis, 2016; Brandt, 2013; Stoner, 2017). Because of the potential impact of the RA position on self-efficacy, it is important to understand more about this phenomenon.

Albert Bandura (1997) began his research on self-efficacy back in the 1970s, but his definition of the concept was updated in 1997. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as, "…beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). In his research, Bandura discussed four sources of self-efficacy. The

two sources of self-efficacy this research will focus on are mastery experiences and vicarious experiences, and how these sources are seen in the development of resident assistants.

By studying the various factors of the resident assistant job and their potential impact on their self-efficacy, student affairs professionals can better grasp why resident assistants struggle with varying tasks and what can bolster our students' self-efficacy when handling the resident assistant role.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to analyze the interplay of the resident assistant (RA) performance tasks and self-efficacy. These factors/tasks were based on position expectations defined at a mid-sized Midwestern Institution. The secondary purpose of this study was examining any mitigating factors in the relationship between RA performance and self-efficacy, such as the impostor phenomenon. Impostor phenomenon is when individuals doubt their qualifications for a given job/task, even though they are qualified (Clance & Imes, 1978). The findings of this study could provide professionals in housing a better understanding of why resident assistants may not feel confident in their role and direct the professionals to find ways to make their student staff feel more efficacious. By understanding what could impact a resident assistant's self-efficacy, resident assistants would also be able to know what areas they struggle with and can work on to improve, hopefully increasing retention and lowering job mistakes.

Research Questions

The research focused on what ways are self-efficacy events part of the RA experience.

1. How do performance tasks occur in the RA experience?

2. What is the interplay between RA performance tasks and levels of self-efficacy?

3. What are the mitigating factors in the relationship between performance tasks and self-efficacy?

Significance of the Study

Though there are various studies that highlight the concept of self-efficacy and its relation to college students (Gençoğlu, Ertuğrul, & Nursel, 2018; Joo, Lim, & Kim, 2013; Trigwell, Ashwin, & Millan, 2013), there are not many that talk about the ties between self-efficacy and its potential impact on the resident assistant position. If a Resident Assistants have a low self-efficacy rating, then there is a concern that they will not be able to properly address a situation when needed and/or could be more likely to leave their position. Either of these situations can negatively impact a residential community.

Limitations of the Study

Because this study was qualitative in nature, it will encounter the limitations that typical qualitative research faces. These limitations include the lack of generalizability, a smaller sample size due to the time qualitative data gathering takes, and the ability of the researcher to build rapport with the participant to gather information (Yin, 2011). Another source of limitations was the actual research site. Research was conducted at a small Midwest institution. The institution also is a predominately white institution so there was a lack of a diverse population. There were also a limited number of returning resident assistants to choose from who also do not come into consistent contact with the researcher, which could have led to potential biases or lack of information shared.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms and their definitions will be fundamental to understanding the research in this study.

Impostor Phenomenon. "…an internal experience of intellectual phoniness…" (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 241).

Resident Assistant. A student staff member who lives in a residence hall community and provides resources, programming, guidance, and support for the residents of that community in addition to maintaining a balanced personal life.

Self-Efficacy. "… beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3).

Summary

To better understand what impacts a resident assistant's self-efficacy rating, this study utilized a qualitative interview. The topic is paramount because one's self-efficacy, or confidence, can impact one's handling of a variety of resident assistant tasks. Chapter two provides literature that highlights the concept of self-efficacy, the role and history of the resident assistant, a background on impostor phenomenon, and previous studies looking at the impact of self-efficacy on college students. The methods discussion occurs in chapter three.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This chapter focuses on the concept of self-efficacy, a holistic description of what the role of a resident assistant entails, and the theoretical framework behind self-efficacy. Through an examination of these topics, a sense of context is created for the proposed study.

Self-Efficacy in Research

Since the turn of the century, there has been an increase in the amount of research done on self-efficacy (Bartimote-Aufflick, Bridgeman, Walker, Sharma, & Smith, 2016). Although self-efficacy research has covered a variety of topics, the focus of this literature review was on studies involving college students and situations they could encounter. It is important to note that self-efficacy research was not just restricted to college students in the United States (Gençoğlu et al., 2018; Padmaja,Tiamongla, Rana, Vanlalhruaii, & Mohapatra, 2015; Yu & Luo, 2018). By looking at variety of factors impacted by self-efficacy and/or self-efficacy is impacted by, a better sense of self-efficacy research is understood.

Associated factors with self-efficacy. It is noted that over 60 articles have been published regarding self-efficacy and its impact on student learning (Bartimote-Aufflick et al., 2016). Though the focus of this literature review is focused on the resident assistant position, it is important to note how college students learn because there is inherent learning done while being a resident assistant. Examples of factors that share an association with self-efficacy in college/university students include: pleasant emotions (Putwain, Sander, & Larkin, 2013); satisfaction (Joo et al., 2013); persistence (Joo et al., 2013); perceived appropriate workload (Trigwell et al., 2013); and state anxiety (Diaz, Glass, Arnkoff, & Tanofsky-Kraff, 2001).

Putwain et al. (2013) focused their research on how emotions can impact academic self-efficacy. Bivariate correlations showed that higher studying self-efficacy showed a significant relationship with positive learning related emotions ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) as well as a greater sense of studying self-efficacy positively correlated with grade based self-efficacy ($\beta = .57$, $p < .01$) (Putwain et al., 2013). The important aspect recognized is that when students have a greater sense of self-efficacy in their independent study capability, they tend to have more pleasant emotions going into the following semester (Putwain et al., 2013).

Joo et al. (2013) completed a study focusing on South Korean students and their predictors of learner satisfaction, achievement, and persistence. One of the predictors noted in the study was the students' self-efficacy. Through some bivariate correlation analyses, two significant relationships between self-efficacy and learner satisfaction ($\beta = .06$, $p < .05$) as well as self-efficacy with achievement ($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$) were found. Self-efficacy was also found to be an indirect influencer on the students' persistence. Joo et al. (2013) noted the importance of utilizing positive feedback and allowing students to succeed in order to further boost their self-efficacy, and in turn benefit their learner satisfaction and achievement.

Trigwell et al. (2013) conducted a study to see if different factors, such as self-efficacy, had any impact on a student's academic achievement. This study was the first to investigate motivation and self-efficacy regarding its impact on learning. The study found that self-efficacy and motivation are directly related to a student's academic achievement with self-efficacy and motivation having a moderate, significant correlation ($r = .42$, $p < .001$) (Trigwell et al., 2013). Essentially, the more student the believes they can handle an academic requirement and finds a value in the academics they are working on, they tend to have a higher sense of achievement.

Another study on self-efficacy focused on state anxiety regarding first year law students (Diaz et al., 2001). Through a significant, inverse correlation, the study found that self-efficacy and state anxiety are related ($r = -.36$, $r = -.33$, & $r = -.35$) (Diaz et al., 2001). So as someone faced lower anxiety states, they tended to have a higher self-efficacy score based on the results gathered. These relationships were particularly noted in regard to written portion of the LSAT that the participants were taking, so those who were more self-efficacious about their performance on the exam tended to feel less anxious while taking the LSAT (Diaz et al., 2001).

Another study showed a relationship between self-efficacy and situations college students may encounter and focused on the relationship of self-efficacy and the student's sense of well-being and optimism (Yu & Luo, 2018). Yu and Luo (2018) found that there was a significant positive correlation regarding self-efficacy and a college student's dispositional optimism ($r = .285$, $p < .01$). The study also found a significant strong positive correlation regarding students' self-efficacy in relation to their sense of well-being ($r = .528$, $p < .01$).

Though research is not as extensive on factors that negatively impact a college student's self-efficacy, completed research exists (Gençoğlu et al., 2018; Ghaderi & Rangaiah, 2011; Mukhtar & Hashim, 2010; Padmaja et al., 2015). Some of these factors included were depression, stress, and anxiety (Gençoğlu et al., 2018), and psychological adjustment to a new environment (Abdullah, 2014). Other researchers focused on how a person's place of living and their gender impacts their self-efficacy (Padmaja et al., 2015).

Gençoğlu et al. (2018) found significant negative correlations with self-efficacy in relation to depression, anxiety, and stress. Self-efficacy and depression scores were weak ($r = -.24$, $p < .001$), self-efficacy and anxiety scores were also weakly correlated ($r = -.17$, $p < .001$), and self-efficacy and depression had a weak correlation ($r = -.22$, $p < .001$) (Gençoğlu et al.,

2018). Essentially these results meant that as self-efficacy was higher in students, lower instances of anxiety and depression were found. Padmaja et al. (2015) found a strong correlation between the environment individuals find themselves in and their general self-efficacy ($r = .74$, $p < .01$) and that the male gender noticed this in particular ($r = .68$, $p < .01$). Essentially the location a male lives in at college has a strong, positive relationship in regard to his self-efficacy.

Sources of Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1997) has stated that there are four sources that contribute to one's overall self-efficacy. The four sources are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional and physiological states (Bandura, 1997). Maddux (2002), agreed with Bandura's four sources, but also postulated that there is a fifth source, called imaginal experiences. Mastery experiences rely on a person doing a task multiple times to develop a sense of mastery (Bandura, 1997). Vicarious experiences are when a person learns through seeing others handle a task in a proper manner. Verbal persuasion has a person develop self-efficacy based on others' views of their competence. Physiological and affective states impact a person's self-efficacy by having their personality impact their view of competence and strength for a task (Bandura, 1997). The following studies analyzed sources of self-efficacy and shared which ones may or may not have a significant impact on college students.

A recent study looked at Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy based on gender, race, and school subject area, and their impact on someone's rating of a self-efficacy source (Byars-Winston, Diestelmann, Savoy, & Hoyt, 2017). The study renamed the sources Bandura discussed and referred to them as performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and affective arousal (Byars-Winston et al., 2017). Significant correlations were found between self-efficacy and the following sources: performance accomplishments ($r = .51$,

$p < .001$), vicarious learning ($r = .30$, $p < .001$), and social persuasion ($r = .37$, $p < .001$) (Byars-Winston et al., 2017). These sources related closest too Bandura's in terms of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion. The research suggested that school counselors/advisors, both precollege and during college, should find ways to better facilitate mastery experiences for their students to bolster their impact on a student's self-efficacy (Byars-Winston et al., 2017).

A study conducted by Fong and Krause (2014) sought to understand the sources' that impact on underachieving students' views of their self-efficacy. The responses of the underachieving students were compared to a group of achieving students to see the relationship between different sources of self-efficacy and what similarities/dissimilarities existed (Fong & Krause, 2014). Through an analysis of the journal entries submitted by the underachieving students, mastery experiences and social persuasions were the most salient sources to how the students viewed their self-efficacy (Fong & Krause, 2014). Both Fong and Krause (2014) noted that mastery experiences were the most impactful for underachieving and achieving students. Suggestions to further bolster one's self-efficacy, based on the sources of mastery experiences and social persuasions, included more positive affirmation from instructors, growth charts to show how the students are improving, and whether-or-not the students have a source of social support (Fong & Krause, 2014).

Research conducted in China looked at undergraduate students and how their sources of self-efficacy differ based on sibling status, achievement, and their fear of failure (Lin, Fong, & Wang, 2017). Through a questionnaire response, it was found that mastery experiences were the most reported source of a student's self-efficacy, regardless of whether it made them more or less confident (Lin et al., 2017). Cultural differences were found in the study regarding Chinese

culture versus Western culture. These differences included how the Chinese students found more benefit/detriment to their self-efficacy through the source of social comparison, as well as only children in China had a greater impact from their self-regulation on their overall self-efficacy (Lin et al., 2017). This research connects well with Fong and Krause's (2014) research and Byars-Winston et al.'s (2017) research in that professionals have a better idea of what direction to take their support systems to bolster students' self-efficacy.

Resident Assistants

As various studies show, resident assistants encounter a wide array of tasks and duties during their time in the position (Boone, Bauman, & Davidson, 2016; Kacvisnky & Moreno, 2014; Longwell-Grice & Kerr, 2013; Porter & Newman, 2016; Thombs, Osborn, Rossheim, & Suzuki, 2014). No single day is the exact same for an individual resident assistant, let alone multiple resident assistants in a residence hall. The duties and tasks rarely stay stagnant with the resident assistant role, and student affairs professionals need to be able to adapt and recognize the youth of the resident assistant position. Though the overall current concept of today's resident assistant is still young, it is important to understand the history and development of the position.

History and need. The role of the resident assistant on paper seems simple, but due to the changing student body being a constant, the position has developed many contingency plans (Boone et al., 2016). In the early days of Colonial America, the university adopted the model held at Oxford, but the staff would modify the role of faculty and would have them act as disciplinarians in addition to the role of educator (Palmer, Broido, & Campbell, 2008). As time progressed, colleges began to enter into the era of *in loco parentis* (Melear, 2003). Colleges relied on older adults to help maintain residence halls, but towards the beginning of the 1960s

some of the first iterations of the present resident assistant were hired to supplement the adult

staff (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). During this time the RA role was viewed predominately from a

disciplinary perspective, but since 1970 the position began to include counseling and advising in

addition to policy enforcement (Arvidson, 2003). The role began to change relatively rapidly in

the next few decades with the introduction of FERPA, the need for overnight duty, the Clery Act,

and responses to various crises (Boone et al., 2016). Because college is the first time for many

students experiencing independence from their parents/legal guardians it is pivotal that we have

student staff members around who can help their peers navigate early adulthood. Still a greater

understanding for the need of resident assistants becomes more evident when looking at the tasks

and duties they hold.

   Resident assistant roles and duties. While not one RA will have the exact same

experience as another, there are a wide variety of similar roles, tasks, and factors they will

encounter. One adopted piece of literature by many student affairs practitioners list 10 major

roles resident assistants will fill and they are: student, role model, problem solver, conflict

mediator, campus resource, trained observer, community builder, group facilitator, counselor,

and administrator (Blimling, 2010). While many of those terms are broad in nature, there is

literature to help share examples of what some of those roles will look like.

   In terms of the student role, Boone et al. (2016) stated that professionals sometimes

forget that RAs are students too. As students and staff, a resident assistant needs to balance

academics, their job, and their social life/extracurriculars. With the advent of technology and

social media, this can bring its own fair share of challenges. Resident assistants have to weigh

the options of adding their residents on social media, such as Facebook, because it plays a factor

into the boundaries between friend, fellow student, and university paraprofessional (Kacvinsky & Moreno, 2014).

As Blimling (2010) mentioned, it is part of the RA's role to build community and social media can help facilitate that process. Though with that community builder role, it is also important to consider the perception of the resident assistant. Longwell-Grice and Kerr (2013) noted that resident assistants ascribe different metaphors to their job and some see themselves as counselors while others view themselves as cops. Residents' views of their RA also have an impact on the RA's ability to build community (Porter & Newman, 2016). Resident assistants face both positive perceptions (lively, friendly, positive) and negative perceptions (lazy people seeking free room and board, inflexible, fun-killers) that can impact the RA's perception of the job (Porter & Newman, 2016). Because of the perceptions held by others toward the resident assistant role, Porter and Newman (2016) noticed a correlation ($r = .32$) showing there is at least a moderate relationship between the perception of RAs and the likelihood of pursuing the job. Taking all of the information into account, an RA has a lot to juggle when developing and maintaining their strong community.

The other roles that go hand-in-hand with community building are the trained observer and problem solver roles. Resident assistants encounter a wide variety of situations ranging from mental health, drugs, alcohol, etc. that could impact the community they are a part of (Thombs et al., 2014). Because of the array of incidents resident assistants could encounter, it is important they get training both before starting the job as well as while on the job (Thombs et al., 2014). Because Porter and Newman (2016) noted that students can have an unfavorable perception of RAs as fun-killers and uptight, Thombs et al. (2014) recommend that staff receives progressive training on how to address alcohol and drug related incidents could bode for better self-efficacy

and less of a negative perception to spread in that RA's community. Thinking about these challenges that RAs face, it becomes an even bigger challenge for students who enter the role right after their freshman year.

A study conducted by Brandt-Brecheisen (2015) focused on sophomore resident assistants and the factors that impacted their transition both in the resident assistant role as well as their transition from freshman to sophomore. The researcher utilized the ACUHO-I/EBI Resident Assistant survey and noted factors highlighted by over 1443 sophomore resident assistants (Brandt-Brecheisen, 2015). Through multiple forms of analysis, such as a MANOVA, among different categories, Brandt-Brecheisen (2015) discovered that the positive factors impacting resident assistants included their training, their hall director, and the resident assistant's self-efficacy. This information provided another example of the impact self-efficacy had on resident assistants and provided potential factors for the resident assistants that participated in the study.

Further research conducted by DeLaPorte (2014) referenced both positive factors and negative factors associated with the resident assistant job and their impact on students retained in that position. A questionnaire made up of Likert scale questions, open-ended questions, and demographic based questions, provided the structure for the study and included a pool of 107 students from schools in Iowa and South Dakota (DeLaPorte, 2014). Through an analysis of the responses, positive factors noted included their supervisor, transferable skills learned, and the compensation packages received by the resident assistants (DeLaPorte, 2014). These factors were important to note because they reinforce the hall director piece from Brandt-Brecheisen's study and the transferable skills learned from Benjamin and Davis's study.

Stoner and Zhang (2017) conducted a study focusing on a resident assistant's sense of significance and the impact it has on their perception of the resident assistant role. The study focused on the size, in addition to the style (apartment or traditional style) of hall the resident assistant worked at during the time of the study (Stoner & Zhang, 2017). Through a quantitative analysis, the researchers found that the community size a resident assistant served had a positive effect on (mattering) when the community was small, but a negative effect when the community was large (Stoner & Zhang, 2017).

Brandt (2013) conducted a phenomenological study analyzing the impact occupational stress and burnout played in resident assistants. There were six participants in the study and they answered a survey and then followed up with an interview with the Principal Investigator (Brandt, 2013). Various factors caused burnout and stress with the resident assistants, such as handling crisis situations, schoolwork in addition to job related tasks, and conflict with residents or fellow staff members (Brandt, 2013).

DeLaPorte (2014) conducted a study that highlighted both positive and negative factors that impact resident assistants and their desire to return to the position. Negative factors that appeared in the participants' responses included their hall location, their school status (i.e. sophomore or junior), and the training the staff member received (DeLaPorte, 2014). These factors tie well with the stressors noted by Brandt in their 2013 study in terms of the impact training had on both sets of participants.

Recent research on resident assistants and self-efficacy. In a recent study conducted by Benjamin and Davis (2016), the researchers looked at resident assistants at a university over the span of two years to see what all they had learned from their time in the role. One of the most salient categories RAs noted learning from was their self-efficacy. Participants noticed a

change in their self-efficacy in different ways whether it was being able to recognize that it is

okay to ask others for help or recognizing that their residents and peers truly valued what they

had to say and looked up to them. Benjamin and Davis's (2016) study helped show that there are

things to be learned from the resident assistant position in addition to one's sense of self-efficacy

such as problem-solving skills and teamwork. These results were all pulled qualitatively from

questionnaires that the study participants completed (Benjamin & Davis, 2016).

Impostor Phenomenon

College students, as well as the general adult population, are susceptible to encountering

the impostor phenomenon. Different studies have looked at the impact the impostor

phenomenon can have on adults and college aged students (Lane, 2015; McDowell, Grubb III, &

Geho, 2015; Parkman, 2016; Vergauwe, Wille, Feys, De Fruyt, & Anseel, 2015). These studies

are merely just the recent ones, but the imposter phenomenon has been studied since the late

1970s (Clance & Imes, 1978). Still, before looking into how the past studies' impacts can be

analyzed and understood, one must know the origin and meaning of the term impostor

phenomenon.

Clance and Imes (1978) were the original researchers to come up with the concept of the

imposter phenomenon. The research focused on 150 highly successful females, but despite their

success they did not feel successful on the inside. Clance and Imes (1978) defined the term

impostor phenomenon as "… an internal experience of intellectual phoniness…" (p. 241).

Essentially this means a person encountering this phenomenon can have the necessary

qualifications or external factors (i.e. a Ph D or a respected professional in their field), but do not

feel internally that those qualifications are earned. The research also shows that there are

typically four factors that contribute to this idea of the impostor phenomenon and they are:

diligence/hard work, a sense of phoniness, using charm to win the praise of superiors, and the negative consequences for being a confident woman in society (Clance & Imes, 1978). The context of the original research is necessary to understand what impostor phenomenon has involved into today.

One particularly common relationship found is the impact one's self-efficacy can have in relation to encountering the impostor phenomenon. Recent studies have shown that there was an inverse relationship between one's self-efficacy and their likelihood of encountering the impostor phenomenon (Dahvlig, 2013; Ives, 2010; McDowell, Grubb III, & Geho, 2015; Royse-Roskowski 2010; Vergauwe et al., 2014). These studies show a variety of significant correlations on differing adult populations, especially post average undergraduate age. The next few paragraphs looked at these studies and their findings.

Dahlvig (2013) conducted a three-year narrative study of women leaders at Christian colleges and universities to note different themes for an underrepresented population in those populations. One of the most common themes to show up in the leaders' narratives was an exposure to the impostor phenomenon (Dahlvig, 2013). The study highlighted how a few of its participants would deflect their successes in an effort to remain humble and that it is not uncommon for a lower sense of self-efficacy to accompany the chance someone encounters the impostor phenomenon (Dahlvig, 2013). One participant in Dahlvig's study (2013), adopted some positive psychology practices, such as resiliency and improving their self-efficacy, to offset the negative impacts of the impostor phenomenon they encountered.

Ives (2010) analyzed the impact an online orientation program can have on a student's self-efficacy and their chances of encountering the impostor phenomenon. Through the study, Ives (2010) found an inverse relationship between the students' encounters with the impostor

phenomenon and their self-efficacy ($r = -.42$, $p < .01$ pretest; $r = -.44$, $p < .01$ posttest). Ives (2010) suggested that higher education administrators and staff could make efforts to design orientation programs to better assist students with lower self-efficacy be less prone to being anxious and/or encountering the impostor phenomenon. The study also believes that by adjusting the orientation program at their research site, could lead to greater retention and orientation completion rates (Ives, 2010).

McDowell et al. (2015) analyzed the behaviors of people in their workplace and the relationship self-efficacy has with the participants' handling of the impostor phenomenon. Through the study, it was found that there was a significant, negative relationship between one's self efficacy and the appearance of the impostor phenomenon ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$) (McDowell et al., 2015). The authors note that this correlation is not as strong as the one found in Ives's 2010 study, but that they also utilized different populations and attribute the difference to that factor (McDowell et al., 2015). Though their research was helpful, it did not help us better understand why the impostor phenomenon exists in the first place, and the overall conclusion that those who suffer from impostor phenomenon and low self-efficacy can cause additional challenges in the workplace (McDowell et al.2015).

A further study noted that self-efficacy is the most important predictor of if someone could encounter the impostor phenomenon in a work-related setting (Vergauwe et al., 2014). The study focused on white-collar workers who rated themselves on various traits and self-evaluation characteristics. The study found a strong, significant, negative correlation between self-efficacy and the impostor phenomenon ($r = -.71$, $p < .01$). Because of the data collected, it is believed that a low self-efficacy rating is the main determinant for someone encountering the impostor phenomenon (Vergauwe et al., 2014).

Theoretical Framework

As previously stated, the resident assistant job has a multitude of factors and tasks that can impact a student staff member's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, as defined by Albert Bandura, is, "… beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p.3). A simpler way of viewing that definition is that self-efficacy is the belief a person has on whether or not they can accomplish a designated task. Perry's Moral Development theory also plays a role in the development of these student leaders and assisted in the basis of this study's theoretical framework. By understanding what self-efficacy is and how it relates to the resident assistant position, student affairs professionals would have a better tool kit to assist this population.

There a few things to note about self-efficacy in general before noting how one's efficacy can impact their resident assistant role. One pivotal issue for student affairs professionals to understand is that self-efficacy and self-esteem or not interchangeable terms. Bandura (1997) clarified this statement by saying self-esteem focuses how someone values themselves while self-efficacy is concerned with idea of can I do this task. Self-efficacy is also not the sole determinant for whether someone can/will do a given task, but it does play a role. Mental capacities such as one's thought process and sense of motivation are impacted by their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Dependent on a person's self-efficacy, tasks could be embraced as a puzzle or they could be viewed as an insurmountable mountain to climb. For example, a resident assistant could be handling a complex incident involving other residents and they could navigate the situation and find the root of concern, or they could be stuck and unsure of what to do and rely on their supervisor to help them out in the situation.

Bandura's Sources of Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is not something that just improves or lowers itself on its own merit, but has four key sources of information impacting it. According to Bandura (1997) these four sources are enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. To simplify these sources and their definitions, an active mastery experience relates to an experience an individual encountered before and succeeded or failed. Vicarious experiences are similar to enactive mastery experiences, but instead focuses on a person's efficacy through comparing their experiences with someone else's. Verbal persuasion impacts a person's self-efficacy because it accounts for the view others have of one's capability, both positive and negative. And lastly, physiological and affective states refer to one's physical and emotional states and their impact on one's self-efficacy.

College is a hectic time for many students and their development, but especially for resident assistants since they are taking on extra tasks and roles to help their fellow students. As student affairs professionals, it is important to note what Bandura (1997) states about the goal of formal education, "The major goal of formal education should be to equip students with the intellectual tools, efficacy beliefs, and intrinsic interests needed to educate themselves in a variety of pursuits throughout their lifetime."

Self-efficacy and Occupation. While the resident assistant job may not be a student's permanent occupation, student staff members do go through a lot of similar tasks that could impact their self-efficacy. There are a multitude of factors individuals need to account for when entering a new job and the potential impact on their self-efficacy. These factors include technical skills for doing the job, how to manage the different tasks and deadlines of a job, how to work with others on a team, and what is generally expected of an employee (Bandura, 1997).

From a resident assistant's lens, these factors would be going through various training cycles in an academic year, handing in purchase orders or meeting with this resident by a deadline, bonding with my fellow staff members, and what else a hall director may need a staff member to do. Due to these various tasks, self-efficacy can be bolstered or hindered and can tie into job stress or dysfunction.

Bandura (1997) highlights a few factors that can impact a person's self-efficacy and their overall coping capability. These factors include a poor work life balance, limited efforts in allowing personal development to occur, and heavy workloads during a busy time (Bandura, 1997). Resident assistants can encounter these very factors, though they make look different. For example, resident assistants juggle their social life, academics, and their student staff role, some staff's do not have supervisors that work on their holistic development, and a resident assistant may have to talk with every resident in their community about how midterms are going when the staff member has midterms of their own.

William Perry's Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development. Perry (1999) discussed a model of how individuals develop their morals, ethics, and intellectual thought process. Perry believed students go through four stages which were, dualism, multiplicity, relativism, and commitment. Dualism tends to start around the early ages of individuals, especially students and relies on the view that processes, thoughts, etc. are right or wrong (Perry, 1999). This dualistic thought process relies a lot on the student viewing individuals as authorities and that those authorities are always the ones who are right. The multiplicity stage has students recognizing that there could be multiple answers to various challenges, processes, etc. (Perry, 1999). The third stage of relativism allows students to recognize that concepts are not always concrete and there is a morally grey area dependent on the situation (Perry, 1999).

Lastly, Perry (1999) discussed how students handle commitment and that life will have uncertainty, but that is okay. This student development theory provides a perspective to how students view different performance tasks and their interplay/mitigating factors with self-efficacy.

Summary

Numerous studies regarding college students and their self-efficacy have been conducted, as well as different studies focusing on aspects of the resident assistant role, very few to no studies have focused on a resident assistant's self-efficacy. The research has shown that a college student's self-efficacy is correlated with different mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, or the opportunities of encountering the impostor phenomenon. Being that resident assistants are also college students, and these student staff members can have a variety of mitigating factors with their job that can impact, or be impacted by, their self-efficacy, this research gained further insight to what student affairs professionals can do to help by hearing directly from some current resident assistants and their experiences with the position.

CHAPTER III

Methods

This study used qualitative methods to create an understanding of what modern resident assistants do in terms of performance tasks. The study also looked to see how the performance tasks impact the resident assistants' self-efficacy and their potential encounters with impostor phenomenon. By hearing the resident assistants' stories, one should also be able to garner what types of support a housing department can offer their staff.

Design of the Study

The research used a qualitative method grounded in interviews and was based on the methods outlined by Yin (2011). The goal with using a qualitative method is to get a deeper understanding of what all is involved with the resident assistant position and its overall impact on their self-efficacy. In addition to qualitative research, Bandura's (1997) work on self-efficacy was used as a theoretical framework to understand the responses of the resident assistants.

Resident assistants were selected from a midsized, Midwestern institution and participated in a qualitative interview. The interview occurred in a recordable area on campus and lasted between 30 to 50 minutes. The spaces were private, and the resident assistants were able to openly share their experiences with the resident assistant position without worrying about others finding out what they shared or the information being traceable back to them. The interview consisted of open-ended questions regarding performance tasks the RAs encounter like duty and administrative work, but also gave the interviewer a chance to probe further based on responses from the participants.

Research Site

Participants will be gathered from a mid-sized university in the rural Midwest. The university reports an enrollment of 7,400 student and 67% of the student population identifies as White.

Participants

Participants included five resident assistants that are returning RAs and fit different demographic characteristics like race and gender. Only five returning RAs were looked at due to having a limited population to draw from because there are only 20 returning RAs at the research site (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Purposeful sampling of returning RAs helped alleviate the aspect of the job being new to the student and focused more about how the experiences of the job impacted them and their self-efficacy. Resident assistants were contacted via email based on knowledge of them being returners to the position.

Participant 1: Emily is a Latinx female who is a senior in college majoring in psychology. She works in a single gender residence hall and had one year of RA experience prior to her interview.

Participant 2: Eric is a White male who is a senior in college majoring in communication studies. He works in a coed residence hall and had one year of RA experience prior to his interview.

Participant 3: Jen is an African American female who is a senior in college majoring in business management and sociology. She works in a coed residence hall and had one year of RA experience prior to her interview.

Participant 4: Tina is a White female who is a junior in college majoring in elementary education. She works in a coed residence hall with single gender floors and had one year of RA experience prior to her interview.

Participant 5: Ben is a White male who is a senior in college majoring in English. He works in a coed residence hall with single gender floors and had one year of RA experience prior to his interview.

Instrument

Yin (2011) noted that qualitative interviews are not as scripted as a structured interview and follows a more conversational style. The interviews operated in a semi-structured style based on the work of Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Interviews had structured questions, but were adjusted based on the information shared by participants to get a better image of their narrative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This type of interview helped put the participants at ease and allowed them to feel more comfortable sharing information with the researcher and relied more on open-ended questions. The researcher also used follow-up questions to get elaboration from participants if their answers were less developed.

Data Collection

Participants received an informed consent form (Appendix A) and were allowed to leave the interview at any point. Interviews took place in a private room in a residence hall since that is a natural environment for the RAs (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Those who were interviewed were recorded via audio and video so that the researcher can complete transcriptions of each interview. The recordings were done via video camera. Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 50 minutes.

Treatment of Data

Once the interviews occurred, the researcher transcribed the audio and video. Names of the participants were omitted in order to ensure confidentiality. This effort was also applied to any names of others mentioned by those interviewed (i.e. other hall directors or staff in the department). Recordings were stored on a USB flash drive that will only be accessible to the researcher and their research head.

Data Analysis

The data was transcribed and analyzed utilizing the five-phased cycle described by Yin (2011). First the data will be compiled into individual transcriptions and this is a strong focus on setting up an organized system to benefit the researcher. Upon completion of the first step, data will then be disassembled. Disassembling is where the coding of transcriptions began. Following the coding process, data analysis went into the third step of reassembling the data. Here is where the coded data was interpreted for different themes and theoretical concepts. The next step is where data was interpreted. The data should have an interpretation as complete as possible and address other alternative interpretations where necessary. Finally, the data analysis concluded with the fifth step of concluding. The conclusion utilized the information gathered and analyzed in the previous steps to provide overarching findings that can be applied to broader topics and/or be highly specific (Yin, 2011). Through a careful utilization of Yin's five-step process, the data was analyzed.

Summary

Through the utilization of a qualitative interview, the researcher gathered data from second year resident assistants. The interviews were coded and analyzed through a lens of self-

efficacy. Themes were gathered and organized to provide feedback to better understand resident

assistants and the impact their performance tasks have on their self-efficacy.

CHAPTER IV

This chapter focuses on thematic material that emerged from this qualitative study. By sharing these themes, participants perceptions of Resident Assistant tasks and self-efficacy are noted. The chapter is organized according to each research question.

Research Question 1

As stated previously, research question one asks, "How do performance tasks occur in the RA experience?" After speaking with five different Resident Assistants with different demographic qualities and who worked in different residence halls, four major themes appeared. Essentially, RA performance tasks fall under the themes of administrative duties, safety/security, mentoring residents, and building community. The following paragraphs share insight to what these themes actually encompass from the data collected by the researcher.

Administrative tasks. This theme was highlighted by three out of the five participants in the study. Others mentioned tasks that were administrative in nature, but they fit better under other themes. Participant 2 shared some administrative tasks which include, "… issuing out RCRs [room condition reports] and checking people in and out of rooms properly… submitting duty logs." Participant 4 discussed the administrative aspect of program planning: "… I have to do two active programs. One can be a tap in, but one needs to be planned by myself. And then a passive per month… I have to have a complex program this semester…" Participant 5 shared he does not care for this aspect of the job and said, "I am not a big fan of paperwork, so that's my big hindrance on the job is getting those forms done". While there are certainly more administrative tasks RAs handle, they were not clearly identified through the interviews. Administrative tasks are part of the job, but the participants did not focus on that aspect.

Safety/security tasks. The next theme focused on the resident assistants' evening

commitments and the experiences they encounter while on-call. Performance tasks that fit this

theme include security rounds for the interior and exterior of the building, enforcing policy when

infractions are encountered, documentation that occurs if a policy is being violated, and

developing some community standards when the residents first move-in. Four of the five

participants mentioned this aspect of being on-call, or as they put it "duty" as being one of the

major parts of their job.

This theme was also one of the areas with the richest information because the RAs were

able to describe in detail their rounds process while on-call, and what all they look for while

trying to keep their residents and building safe. Participant 1 shared some of the behaviors RAs

look for on rounds such as "… making sure that everyone's safe again, so fire hazards, making

sure no one is passed out anywhere… if I see people cooking, I go back to make sure that they

turned off the stove…". Ultimately, as Participant 1 put it, the main goal with safety/security is,

"…making sure everyone's safety is accounted for." Participant 2 shared the focus of being on-

call,

> …you're the contact person for anything that happens with the hall during that evening.
>
> On, the weekdays you go on three sets of founds and you go walk on all the floors, the
>
> basement common areas, just to make sure everything's okay…
>
> Participant 3 discussed how students can reach RAs during on-call,
>
> … go to the front desk if they don't have the [RAs'] phone numbers or they can come
>
> knock on the door. And if that's not the case, every RA has a duty phone and they
>
> [students] can contact them.

Participant 5 also reiterated what the focus of rounds are while being on-call, "… doing a scope of the building and making sure that everything is falling into place as it should be."

Others highlighted different aspects of the policy enforcement aspect of safety/security. Participant 2 discussed how safety/security regarding policy enforcement is, "… the one part of the job that I think about the least…". This previous statement reflected a community with a low amount of policy infractions while Participant 4's building was different and she shared, "… everything they warn us about in training, I handled last year within the first semester of school." Regardless of the community differences, the participants all showed this was a prominent task in their job.

Mentoring tasks. The RAs each brought up the concept of mentoring and/or role modeling for their residents as a key aspect of their job. Participant 2 shared that,

> … the biggest thing for being a resource agent and role model is, you have to gain the trust of your residents first… I'm a student just like you. I've been here a few more years than you have and I just want to be here to help you out with whatever you need.

Participant 4 encapsulated the importance of mentoring residents when she said,

> I feel you have to want to watch people succeed and then you can help aid in their growth. So, you're not the soil that they are planting their seed in, but you can be the fertilizer to help them grow and I think that's important.

The concept of being in a fishbowl was also shared to describe what it is like being a role model and mentoring as a RA. Participant 5 described this as,

> So, and housing, I've heard the phrase we live in a fishbowl a hundred times. So it's this idea that someone's going to see every move you make, you know, so you kind of always have to watch what you're doing and make sure that you're behaving in a way that if

someone were like, 'Oh, that's an RA at [research site],' that would be a good representation of the university. So just making sure you're staying on top of your own work and staying on top of your own life. You're not skipping class, you're not turning in assignments late because if you do things like that, then your residents are going to see that and reflect on that and be like, 'Oh well if my RA is doing that and he's doing just fine, why can't I you know.

Participant 3 shared that part of her mentoring is shown by,

…studying habits or if they have questions about what classes they need to take or what is the process of going to the job fair or going to career services. I have those experiences now I can help them with those experiences and help them getting involved in certain things.

Mentoring was their favorite task and most rewarding part of the position for the participants.

Building community tasks. Building community was the other most prominent theme shared among all participants. Each participant shared different ways they build community and the importance of building community. Participant 1 shared they build community by, "… bulletin boards, programming, all that good stuff and [through] conversation, emails, and GroupMe." Participant 2 discussed how they have to get their residents' trust to best build community and said,

… you have to gain the trust of your residents… [it] can be really difficult because a lot of people have this perception of what a Resident Assistant is, is if it's some sort of cop… I had that discussion with my residents on my first floor meeting… I'm not a cop, I'm a student just like you.

Participant 3 highlighted the root of why RAs build community and the sense of belonging a community can help create and that was stated as,

> … community is so important because you want residents to value their community and make it feel like it's their home because they are spending the majority of the year there. So it's important to build a community because then they'll most likely stay in college and thrive too. Because if you don't feel like there's not a home there, you're not going to want to be there.

This sense of belonging does not need to be restricted to their floor, but it could go with their belonging to the building and/or the overall campus. Participant 3 also noted, "… I got so many sticky notes from my residents…" and she was thanked for listening to them and always being there when needed. Participant 4 shared great detail of how she builds community and said,

> … [I] help make sure everybody's making friends or that you don't see one resident always be by themselves. And if you do, you at least talk to them to see if maybe that's just how they are in nature or if their people just haven't come yet. Sometimes you make friends with people who aren't here yet… I do things that the girls want… if they want a little healthy competition, we'll let them have it… I just like helping aid in the community process and everybody knows that they belong at least on [RA's floor] if they live there. And even if they don't live there, they can belong there too.

Participant 5's main way of building community is by being, "… a face for the residents to see and come to when they have their own problems." Each RA goes about building community in different ways and through different tasks, but it is a very prominent task for all of them.

Though these themes are not all encompassing of the resident assistant position, they do provide a strong description of role. These tasks and themes are seen daily in the student staff

position and guide a lot of the work the participants do. Knowing that these tasks are

implemented daily by staff, it is important to then understand what sort of interplay they have

with the RA's self-efficacy.

Research question 2

The next research question asked, "What is the interplay between RA performance tasks

and levels of self-efficacy?" The focus of this question was to see which performance tasks had

a directional interplay for the different participants. Depending on the participant, certain tasks

had a positive element for them, while others had a negative interplay.

Positive interplay. Participant 1 discussed that a lot of their administrative tasks and

building community tasks had a positive interplay with their self-efficacy as an RA.

Communication skills are one of the things that best helped Participant 1 have a positive

interplay with their self-efficacy and said, "… it's that communication, like just making sure that

everyone knows that they're able to talk to me, but that also comes on my part. I had to be open

to having that kind of conversation." The administrative tasks also had a positive interplay for

Participant 1 and said,

> … if you know yourself and you're able to understand that, then you're definitely able to
>
> tackle that organization part because you definitely can't be well organized if you're not
>
> taking care of yourself because let's say like you're doing something and then all of a
>
> sudden you don't put that time for yourself… my organization just keeps improving and I
>
> keep getting better…

Participant 2 has had a very positive interplay with community building tasks due to the

experiences he had with his community his first year. Participant 2 shared, "… I made it a point

for myself to make myself visible in the hall and to let people know that I'm available for them."

Participant 2 took pride in his work and said,

> … I'm someone who's like really bad with names. I would really make sure that I would
> get to know peoples' names and make them feel like they're comfortable in their home…
> it would go much beyond that. I would ask them how they were doing and I would
> follow up.

The most positive impact from Participant 2's residents came in this story about a tradition he

started,

> What ended up happening was we started having this tradition called blanket parties…
> People would come in with their pajamas and their blankets and I had a lot of seating in
> my room… I would put a video of a fireplace on YouTube on my tv and we would just
> talk. I think it was really important for first-year men to have a space where they could
> just talk about how they were feeling without feeling socially pressured to like hold
> things in… I found out that another person on the floor was inviting people into their
> room for the same purpose when I wasn't able to.

These experiences had a positive interplay for Participant 2, and he shared even more about how

his community building impacted him and his self-efficacy.

Participant 3 noted the RA task of building community shared the most interplay with her

self-efficacy, though she also said how the job in general had various connections to their self-

efficacy. Participant 3 stated how their community building plays out,

> I'm a listening ear, I always check up on my residents and then they start ranting and I
> just listen and they [say Jen], 'Thank you so much for just listening.' I just try to keep
> my door open so they feel like they can pop in my room and just talk to me whenever.

Participant 3 gained a positive interplay also due to feedback and conversations with her supervisor and said,

> I remember my [supervisor] last year [said], 'You need to have more confidence. You second guess yourself.'… I was like 'Oh is that right? Is that right?' [I need to] have more confidence in myself. It makes me look back and see how I'm doing and let me try to fix it.

The positive interactions Participant 3 had with her supervisor even impacted her future endeavors, "… maybe I can go into this as a career. Now I want to go into Student Affairs… I'm recognizing, 'You're actually doing good at this." The various conversations and feedback Participant 3 had with their residents and supervisor showed the positive interplay the RA role had with their self-efficacy.

For Participant 4, administrative duties are one of the areas that has the most positive interplay for this participant. Participant 4 was asked to share their administrative skills with the new staff member during the spring semester and said, "… sometimes [Linda] will be like, 'Hey can you go show them how to do something. It's knowing that you've mastered a task well…'" Supervisor feedback also had a positive interplay for Participant 4 and was described as,

> … when I try to handle the situation and it doesn't go well for me, it upsets me. I usually need like a pep talk. I get pretty down on myself and I get pretty upset with myself. When they do go well, usually [Linda] would be like, 'Good job.' Even [Kevin] has reached out a couple of times and say, 'Wow! I saw your [incident report] last night, good job.'

Aspects of mastery experience, as discussed by Bandura (1997), showed up during this research question's portion because Participant 4 recognized how she has written incident reports about

"… everything under the sun" and that the more she has done certain tasks, the better she has gotten at doing them. Participant 4 also recognized through all of the RA tasks that, "It's okay to make mistakes as long as you don't repeat the mistakes," showing a good amount of self-awareness and overall self-efficacy in her role as a Resident Assistant.

Participant 5, as with many of the other RA participants, shared building community had a very positive interplay with his self-efficacy in the RA role. Participant 5 noted that he takes a lot of pride being known as the social RA and said,

> I'm that person everyone comes to even if they're not on my floor and they're like, 'Hey can you help me with this problem?' I guess I'm approachable… I definitely think I'm the face that's in the lobby a lot… he's like the cool RA.

The other task that has a positive interplay for Participant 5 is when he addresses concerns with residents. Participant 5 said,

> I think once the conversation gets going they're like, 'Thank you so much for talking to me.' That's when I feel the most useful as an RA. Knowing that the residents have been able to come to me and count on me and I've been able to help them is a thousand times more important to me than, 'You put on a successful program tonight.'… having that close relationship with them where they do feel comfortable coming to me. That makes me feel I'm doing my job well.

Still not everything always went well for the participants during their first year as a Resident Assistant.

Negative interplay. Participant 1 The participant shared that they received some feedback in a survey that they do not appear to be very approachable, and it has to deal with physical appearance which they cannot change. Participant 1 explained,

… it was definitely a little bit difficult to hear because that's just something that I've been

dealing with in terms of my face. The fact I worked so hard to smile, to change my

appearance… they were all like, 'Oh well you have an intimidating face,' but I can't

change my face. Some people were like you can wear more makeup… there's just some

certain stuff that I wish that could have been left out.

Participant 1 took that feedback and acknowledged its impact, but she also went out of her way

to start introducing herself to all residents to put more effort into addressing the feedback.

Though the initial feedback lowered the Participant 1's self-efficacy, they took it as a challenge

and used it to adjust their RA practice and work to be a stronger RA.

Participant 2 had tasks regarding safety/security and administrative duties negatively

interplaying with their self-efficacy. Participant 2 stated, "I think my lowest competencies

would probably be in policy enforcement and administrative skills. I think it's different because

with policy enforcement, I feel not strongly about it because I haven't had to deal with anything

severe." Participant 2 also encountered some challenges with administrative tasks and said, "… I

would say it's probably my lowest competency because I haven't dealt very much with

administrative skills. I'm technologically competent. It's just a matter of getting things turned

in on time." He also shared how those challenges followed him into his current year and said, "I

don't know what happened. I got a text before this [interview] saying, 'Hey could you make

sure to submit your duty log from last night.' I completely forgot to do that."

Participant 3 discussed how she struggled with her confidence during her first year as a

RA due to some challenges with residents. These residents shutting out Participant 3 had a

negative interplay with her self-efficacy, and she said,

… when they shut you out and just don't talk to you… you try so hard to get them to talk

to you… [It felt] like they did not like me. That's when that doubt creeps up… they

might go to another RA. I'm your RA. What about me? Am I doing the right thing, I

could have said something different should I reach out to them more…

Eventually though the students would come around to Participant 3 and she described that

moment as, "…a beacon of light happens."

Participant 4 explained how their first semester had a negative interplay with their self-

efficacy. Participant 4 noted,

It was very stressful, and I found myself not being able to mentally handle all of the hard

situations I was dealing with and also being available constantly for my residents to

respond and boundary setting was also hard because I hadn't had to do it before.

This first semester impacted Participant 4 to the level where they were feeling burnout and she

shared,

It was really hard to show them independence because you can't just tell somebody,

'Leave me alone.' It's in my job title to help you… you need to take time for self-care. I

think the first year… self-care... they say the words, but they don't check to make sure

you're doing it. That's where burnout occurs. I was burnt out by Christmas Break last

year.

Participant 4 also wanted to be a high achiever and shared that she was harder on herself than her

supervisor was on her. Participant 4 made this apparent by saying,

In evaluations I tend to find I get really nervous for my evals even though I know I'm

fine. I do my job to the best of my ability. I find that I am a lot harder on myself than my

supervisors are. I'm just naturally very like driven and I get frustrated myself easily if I can't do something or if I don't do something right.

This previous statement ties into Participant 4's view of themselves and how it had a negative interplay with their self-efficacy.

Participant 5 acknowledges that he should put more time into the administrative duty task for the RA roles. Participant 5 said, "My weakest area is absolutely filling out paperwork, keeping up with forms and everything. I'm not super creative either. When it comes to floor decorating and door decs, I get pretty bland there." Participant 5 went on to describe why they do not like those administrative tasks and shared, "I look at the forms as their own separate task and having the energy to do those. Sometimes it's kind of daunting. I think sometimes it can be confusing. I feel like they ask the same question twice." Participant 5 found those tasks trivial in a way and stated,

I think I'm more of a big picture thinker… getting into the tedious parts is where I start to [question], 'Do I really need to fill out these forms?'… It kind of feels like homework… I enjoy making it [programs] happen and planning it, but as far as the practical, smaller things to make it happen is what I get caught up on.

These tasks had a negative interplay with their self-efficacy, but Participant 5 did not let the interplay stop him.

As stated before, each of the participants highlighted different RA tasks and how they interplayed with their self-efficacy. Still it is important to note that the tasks are not the only thing that can impact a RA's view of self-efficacy. Other factors mitigate someone's self-efficacy in the RA role and that is shown in research question three.

Research question 3

The last research question I addressed regarded the mitigating factors in the relationship between performance tasks and a RA's self-efficacy. This research question was rooted more in how the Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy are mitigating factors with the participants and their self-efficacy. Through talking to the participants, Bandura's four sources (mastery experience, verbal persuasion, physiological/affective state, and vicarious experiences) showed through their answers, but staff dynamic was also a consistent mitigating factor with each of the participants (Bandura, 1997). Participants also shared information about how staff dynamic impacted their self-efficacy, though that was not a source originally discussed by Bandura. The staff dynamic typically had a negative impact during their first year, but the majority have shared how the dynamic shifted during their second year in the role. Verbal persuasion and mastery experiences were also consistent mitigating factors impacting the participants' self-efficacy, with quite a few noting that mastery experience and getting used to the role was their biggest enhancer. The participants also would gauge their job competence based on the feedback received, thus making verbal persuasion the other prevalent mitigating factor.

Mastery experiences. A small amount of mastery experience showed with Participant 1, but it was due more to the experiences she had in her home life before becoming a resident assistant rather than experiencing difficult situations while in the role. Participant 1 shared,

I have experience with dealing with different situations just from my life experiences... I have had to deal with people who have been suicidal or anything of that nature. Because I've had experience with that and even alcohol and people in my life just having that

hardship… it wasn't big… it wasn't something that was too impactful on my part. I have

not had to deal with a situation that has shaken me up.

These past experiences shaped Participant 1's view of the job and even noted, "I feel like that's

why I got the job because I have experience dealing with difficult situations." Those experiences

had an impact on Participant 1's self-efficacy.

Participant 2 also became more self-efficacious in his role as he mastered working with

students who are neurodiverse. Participant 2 was very open with the situation and said,

… I had never interacted on an interpersonal level with people with mental disabilities at

all. I was very concerned that I was not going to do a good job because from the training

that I had and the people talking to me, it was very clear to me they [the students] got into

college with the same requirement that everyone else did. They needed a little bit more

assistance and I'm the one that is in charge of the place that they are being housed. It was

important for me to make sure that they felt safe and they felt included in all of that.

Participant 2 shared a proud moment with these students when a neurodiverse student wanted to

get a roommate and Participant 2 explained,

… the students [neurodiverse] normally don't have roommates. I helped them through

that process. It ended up very successful. Their roommate was not a [neurodiverse]

student, not an honors student, just a student. It went totally fine. They're still

roommates now.

Participant 2 learned through his time working with their residents how to meet their needs and

those experiences gave him a sense of mastery.

Participant 3's main way she developed her self-efficacy, as well as her confidence, was

through handling RA tasks in a holistic sense. Participant 3 discussed,

…I definitely built confidence. … some certain situations like roommate problems. I know how to for the most part deal with roommate problems. [I developed] a template and [knew] what to go back to. … You know what you're doing because you've done it already.

Each time she handled one of these conflicts, she felt better prepared to handle the next one. One situation Participant 3 solidified her competence and she shared,

… this problem with two girls… they were neighbors and used to be friends… one started dating the other girl's ex-boyfriend. It got really messy really quickly. Dealing with that, I tried to be as [un]biased as I possibly could… they'd come to me at 2 o'clock in the morning… that was a lot. … I was happy they were able to come to me and tell me…

Having experienced different situations during her first year, Participant 3 said the role was, "like second nature [and] I automatically know certain things I know to do." These experiences lent themselves to the positive mitigating factor of mastery experiences.

Participant 4 shared a great example of how they mastered the mentoring and building community tasks of being a RA. She discussed a resident who was not very active the first semester and shared,

… she finally started talking to me second semester… She was our floor rep, but she was designated [as] floor rep, not volunteered. … once she got the confidence from there, I was like, 'You should apply to be a [desk worker].' … She didn't get any response back at all… she was very upset. She was crying. … I reached out to [my supervisor] … and was able to help aid her and [she's] started working there this fall.

Participant 4 is very proud of this resident and the experience she shared with the resident and helped solidify her competence as a RA.

Participant 5 worked on his mastery experiences through handling different "can we talk" scenarios with residents in his community. Participant 5 described the scenarios by saying,

> During it, especially towards the beginning [of the year], my heart rate was always banging out of my chest because you don't know what exactly they were going to say. There's not really a script for those kinds of things. As much as you prepare, you can never really know how they're going to react and what kind of response they want and need.

Participant 5 later shared how handling his first scenario helped him master a RA task

> The first one was the most nerve wracking because that was my first experience. Luckily that one was someone reporting something else that they weren't involved with. That was a lot lower pressure, which was a great way to start off having those conversations. … It has gotten easier over time… my anxiety is not what it used to be when it comes to having those conversations, but there is still that little nudge of being anxious. Kinda like how they say if you're a performer, you always get a little nervous when you're on stage. … the more conversations I have, the quicker I can get a feel for each conversation.

Since Participant 5 has been exposed to challenging conversations multiple times, he built up his self-efficacy with that task through mastering it.

Verbal persuasions. Participant 2 spent a lot of time working with various aspects of recognition, which is just one facet of verbal persuasion. Participant 2 provided their experience and said,

… I have served on a lot of different roles in formal and informal capacities that relate to recognition. I understand why it's so important because a lot of times we do things and it's not that we do things to get things or get recognized, but it really does feel great when someone says you've been doing a good job.

A moment of verbal persuasion that had an impact on Participant 2 resulted in a gift from their residents. Participant 2 described the situation as,

You build really strong relationships with your residents and sometimes that manifests itself in really unique ways. I am a really huge fan of *The Legend of Zelda* series and I had a lot of nerds on my floor and they made a joke once [and said], 'Name all the Zelda games in chronological order or you're a fake fan.'… I was having a rough week and they came back from a trip and they had bought me the game [I forgot] from a secondhand store and that was really amazing to me… it made me be like, 'Wow! I have been a pretty good RA. If I was a crappy RA, they wouldn't have done that for me.'

The Zelda situation certainly made Participant 2 feel competent in their role as a Resident Assistant.

Participant 3 was very open about how she would constantly seek feedback and approval from her supervisor when it came to various tasks in the RA job. Participant 3 talked about when they first started and shared, "… I definitely questioned myself. I used to call my [supervisor] a lot and asked, 'Did I do this right?'… I tell them what I do and [they say], 'Yeah, do exactly that. … I definitely built confidence.' This verbal persuasion was very helpful to Participant 3 because she wanted to make sure she was doing the job right and best assisting her residents.

Participant 4 was also another individual who really sought out guidance and input from their direct supervisor to accomplish RA tasks. She relied heavily on her supervisor's input and shared, "Usually when an incident would be messed up or something would go wrong, I would literally be in [my supervisor's] office at some point the next day. I knew I messed up." This need for verbal persuasion from someone else was affirmed later by Participant 4 when she said, "I do need positive reinforcement to feel good. Just by getting the positive reinforcement… and feeling I had to step up just triggered something in me. I was more confident in the role…" The feedback and talks with others had a noticeable impact for Participant 4 and her self-efficacy.

Participant 5 also grew from the feedback he has received from fellow staff members and residents. Participant 5 was able to hold himself accountable, but shared how feedback from others impacted him and said, "… whenever I noticed myself and whenever other people noticed me not turning forms in on time, especially my supervisor, that was enough for me to say it's time to kick it into gear." He then followed that up by saying,

> … on the flip side of the forms and less competent side of that, I think people's reaction made me want to do better and made me want to try to get all that turned in on time… I [don't want] to be the one on the staff that was holding everyone else back…"

Participant 5's residents also helped build his self-efficacy and he shared,

> I think all of the positive feedback was very reassuring. I'm definitely someone who very much appreciates words of affirmation… hearing residents [say]'Hey [Participant 5], I'm really glad you're my RA.' Or when they bring their friends and [say], 'This is the best RA on-campus.'

The verbal persuasions Participant 5 received mitigated with the other factors impacting his self-efficacy as a RA.

Staff dynamic. Participant 1 shared often about their relationship with their fellow RAs and how it made them feel as a RA. An impact on their staff dynamic and self-efficacy came from Participant 1's past and said,

> I come from a family that doesn't have that much money. Depending on the situation my family was in, sometimes we had money and sometimes we didn't. I couldn't do a lot of stuff with the RAs. Like when they're like, 'Let's do group bonding. Let's go to Starbucks' I [said] I have to sit this one out because I'm saving money. I can't afford it. Some people would [offer] to buy it for me, but that gets very awkward real quick.

Though the offer was appreciated, it made Participant 1 feel awkward. Participant 1 would also question where she stood with the staff and shared,

> … I don't know if my staff likes me or I don't know if we're not bonding enough. I don't want to bother them with a question I have, but I'll still ask a question because I'm the person who asks questions.

That being said things were mended with Participant 1's staff. Participant 1 explained,

> I mean, there's always that respect for coworkers… I feel that's where the struggle with a RA comes in if you don't have that support system. I eventually spoke with my [supervisor's boss] and said, 'Hey I'm having trouble kind of bonding with this person. Do you have any tips?' With that communication, we figured it out.

Having that supportive staff really helped Participant 1, especially when they questioned if they should return to the RA role. Participant 1 noted, "If I could get through my academics, if I felt I was in a good place mentally and if I felt my staff was there for me, I felt like I was able to do

this again." Participant 1 grew throughout her first year, and the staff dynamic helped her self-efficacy develop.

One of the biggest issues Participant 2 shared was how he struggled with fitting in with his staff during his first year. Participant 2 explained,

> … Last year I had a conflict of character with another RA. I am someone that I prefer to live my most authentic self. I don't try to pretend to be someone different to different people. There was an individual on staff who I noticed liked to tell a good story. By that I mean they liked to lie, which really bugs me… We didn't really get along the whole year and they started to tell lies about my relationship with someone and that really made me upset and I had to sit down and talk with my supervisor about it… I felt the other staff member did not get any sort of punishment, which didn't make me feel great… it started getting to my residents and they started talking to me about it and I don't want that. It stopped after that…

Participant 2 had some challenges connecting with his fellow RAs during his first year, but did find a better staff dynamic elsewhere. Participant 2 connected more with professional staff at the research site, and he said, "I think I have always had a positive relationship with professional staff members in the role… I think it helps that I want to go into a career in higher education so I can relate to pro staff…" The other staff dynamic piece Participant 2 discussed was related to incongruent messages shared between RAs and how the job is done. Participant 2 described this as

> … much of this role is in this king of gray zone. What does this count as? Is this active or passive… who do I call first? Do I call anyone at all? …. I think that's been a discussion a lot with the RAs as well. I think sometimes that tension causes uncertainty

in my role as an RA. I think it just adds a little bit of stress… I think what I've learned is that everyone does the RA job a little bit different.

This gray area Participant 2 discussed can impact RAs in different ways.

Participant 3 also faced some challenges with her staff's dynamic during her first year in the RA role. The experiences she faced were mainly due to differing opinions on the staff and Participant 3 explained,

Everybody has different opinions. … there were two of us who were more easy going and then there were two who were very opinionated. … sometimes we came to a halt cause the majority [wanted one thing] and that one person definitely had a problem, but [we] still tried to fit that person [in] so they feel like they're not being excluded or feel like they're getting left out because majority rules…

This dynamic caused challenges for Participant 3, but she learned from that staff dynamic and said, "It's a learning experience. So now I learned how to adapt to a new [supervisor]. I learned how to adapt to a new team and getting to know them and knowing what they liked, what they don't like." The staff dynamic did not negatively mitigate Participant 3 as it did for some of the other participants.

The staff dynamic impact on Participant 4 was initially negative. She explained the situation by saying,

I had an RA in my building first semester that I didn't necessarily personality wise get along with. When I was handling situations, if they were on the floor, they always felt like they had to be there too, even if they weren't on-call or anything that night. That kind of helped aid in [my] 'You shouldn't return,' [thoughts] because they couldn't trust

[me] to do what [I'm] supposed to be doing… I had a lot of conflict with the person, that

person just made me feel bad about myself.

Participant 4 questioned her own competence in the job because of the staff dynamic she shared

with this other RA. Participant 4 was also frustrated with how her fellow staff members were

messing up tasks and shared, "… if they can't get paperwork done… that was frustrating. … We

should not be spending time on this." Participant 4 did not want their new staff member to have

the same challenges she had her first semester and stated, "I felt like I had to step up for the new

hire because we hired somebody in and we have an RA who was a returner and they still didn't

have paperwork down." These dynamics challenged Participant 4 quite a bit, but she stuck

around to be a RA for another year.

Less prevalent factors. Participant 1 shared some information about her personality and

background that impacted her self-efficacy and competence in the RA role. Participant 1 would

target certain demographics with her programming because of her past and explained,

I sometimes talked to my [supervisor] and their [boss] about how I had hardships… at

times I was very poor, and I was living on the streets. That's why programming for

students, when I see them struggling with food insecurity, that's a big one for me because

that hits home.

Participant 1 also expects a lot out of herself and shared,

I definitely do have a tendency to be very hard on myself and I feel most people do most

of the time… that's where you have to really think and [ask], 'Am I doing enough?' I

can do better… with the resources I have right now, I'm doing the best that I can.

Participant 1 has had a lot of life experiences and personality traits that have impacted their RA

self-efficacy and that has made the job easier for them overall.

Participant 2 shared how his personality and development really impacted his self-efficacy. Participant 2 informed the researcher,

> … I am someone who is constantly struggling with understanding who I am and being an RA is a big part of my identity. … I think most people have an understanding of me that I am socially competent, so they think that I'm extroverted. I don't think I'm extroverted or introverted. … I'm someone who's very analytical… from a community building standpoint I can notice trends.

These personality traits described by Participant 2 have helped them with their RA self-efficacy.

Participant 4 had two different returning staff members they could interact with for guidance and show her ways to do the RA job, but one was certainly stronger than the other. Participant 4 described their experience with the strong returner as,

> … she was very strong. She knew what she was doing. … When I got hired and got added to the group chat, she immediately reached out to me and [said], 'Hey I've done this before if you need help with anything.' I hadn't started floor decorations or anything, but [the returner said], 'I've got you.'… [She] made me feel confident that I could do what I was doing.

Participant 4 was able to learn tasks from this returner, thus yielding a vicarious experience. The other returner Participant 4 worked with did not provide the best examples for the participant and she shared,

> I had another returner who he was there [one semester], but he was newly there so he was considered a returner, but still went through [behind closed doors] with all of us. He acted like he was confident in what he was doing. That was very frustrating because I'm relying on you as a returner and you don't know what the heck you're doing.

Participant 4's experience with this returner was more of a case of what not to do so the vicarious experiences with that returner were not helpful.

Participant 5 saw other RAs and his supervisor handle tasks with the RA job which provided him with vicarious experiences he could apply to the RA role. A way Participant 5 got this practice was during a staff meeting and he explained,

> … we had mock [resident academic situations] last year during one of our staff meetings. Being able to see how each person responded to different things and gear the conversation one way versus that way… I felt a lot more comfortable going into it. Being able to put all of those styles of conversation together into something that I thought would work for me.

Participant 5 would commonly seek out advice from staff members and then mold their methods to his style and he shared,

> … I would text [a returner] for the first weeks when things would [happen]… she had the background and I would let her lead the situation until I felt comfortable doing it. … but going on from there, once I've seen how it's done, I definitely feel more comfortable doing it myself. [It] was kind of like adopting what I felt worked [and] what I felt didn't work.

The examples shared by his fellow staff members helped give Participant 5 the tools to feel more equipped to handle the RA role and positively impact his self-efficacy.

Summary

Resident assistants at the research site have a variety of tasks that are integral to their job. These tasks can impact the interplay of their self-efficacy regarding the resident assistant role. The tasks are also not the only thing affecting a participant's self-efficacy, but have other sources

discussed as by Bandura and the additional mitigating factor of the staff dynamic. Through looking at the different participants' responses, a greater understanding of how the resident assistant role impacts a student's self-efficacy is attained.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This qualitative study examined the various factors that impact and interplay with resident assistants' self-efficacy. This chapter focuses on the discussion of the study's results, suggestions to influence future student affairs practice, and ideas for future research on this topic.

This discussion focuses on three research questions: How do performance tasks occur in the RA experience; what is the interplay between RA performance tasks and levels of self-efficacy; and what are the mitigating factors in the relationship between performance tasks and self-efficacy? A set of protocol questions were utilized to elicit answers for the three research questions. Participants were allowed to speak to their experiences during their first year as a resident assistant.

Performance tasks

The role of a resident assistant has seen many changes through the years, and each institution has differences in their tasks for the role (Arvidson, 2003; Blimling, 2010; Brandt, 2013). Participants shared about what they specifically do as RAs at the research site. These tasks were then grouped based on the nature of the overall task and were categorized as administrative tasks, safety/security tasks, mentoring tasks, and building community tasks. A more detailed explanation of each task is shown below.

Administrative tasks. Participants shared their administrative tasks consisted of duties such as completing lockout paperwork, room condition reports, or filling out logs for other tasks completed. This particular task was one the participants focused on the least, and Participant 5 shared, "Sometimes it's kind of daunting." The other reason participants chose to focus less on

this task could be in line with a previous study conducted by Brandt (2013) that shared administrative tasks can be a stressor for RAs.

Safety/security tasks. The importance of safety and security has grown in the RA role, especially since the 1970s (Arvidson, 2003). Institutions began to move away from in loco parentis and toward student staff members, such as RAs, who took on some of the workload to maintain student safety (Melear, 2003). Participants described how they focus on safety and security tasks for their halls by explaining the importance of being on-call, addressing policy violations, and what rounds look like in their work locations. Participant 1 stated, "… we're making sure everyone's safety is accounted for." Participant 2 also discussed some challenges with this task and shared, "… a lot of people have this perception of what a resident assistant is, is if it's some sort of cop…" RAs in other studies have noted challenges with the view that RAs are seen as a disciplinarian or authority figure (Cousineau & Chambers, 2015; Longwell-Grice & Kerr, 2013; Porter & Newman, 2016). With college campuses constantly evolving, RAs, and others, will need to continue to adapt to different safety and security concerns which will cause this task to adapt in the future.

Mentoring tasks. One study has shown the impact a well mentored RA can have, but this task focused more on how does an RA mentor others (Early, 2014). A literature review conducted by Arvidson (2003) also shared how many RA job descriptions mention mentoring or role modeling as a key aspect of the position. Participants discussed various tasks that went along with mentoring their residents. Mentoring/role modeling is also listed as one of the 10 major roles resident assistants fill (Blimling, 2010). Some of these tasks included prepping residents for interviews, connecting them to resources on campus, and navigating interpersonal conflicts such as roommate issues. Participant 3 mentors by, "…[answering] questions about

what classes they need to take or what is the process of going to the job fair or going to career services." Participant 4 provided an analogy for how they mentor, "… you're not the soil that they are planting their seed in, but you can be the fertilizer to help them grow and I think that's important." This mentorship not only benefitted the residents the RAs served, but also provided RAs with a sense of purpose and development for their residents.

Building community tasks. Multiple sources have shown that as the RA role has evolved, building community has become a bigger focus for the role (Arvidson, 2003; Blimling; 2010; Kacvinsky & Moreno, 2014). Participants had a plethora of examples to share how they built their community through programming, conversations, and being a presence in their hall. Participant 2 talked started building his community by stating, "… you have to gain the trust of your residents…". Participant 5 built community through acting as, "… a face for the residents to see and come to when they have their own problems." Many research studies have confirmed that building community is a prevalent task for RAs and/or impacts their sense of mattering (Blimling, 2010; Porter & Newman, 2016; Stoner & Zhang, 2017).

Task interplay

Once the participants explained their various tasks in the RA job, it was then time to figure out how do these different tasks interplay with their self-efficacy. Participants were allowed to share experiences where they felt successful and competent, but also were asked about times that they faced challenges and what they did to build that competence for the future. The participants' answers provided both positive and negative interplay with each person's self-efficacy.

Positive interplay. Participants shared a variety of tasks that made them feel more self-efficacious. Participant 1 described how administrative tasks and self-awareness interplayed,

"… if you know yourself and you're able to understand that, then you're definitely able to tackle that organization part…". This example shows that not every RA finds administrative tasks stressful, though many contained in Brandt's study (2013) did find them stressful. Participant 4 also found positivity in their administrative tasks regarding safety/security because she quickly adapted to writing incident reports and wrote ones about "… everything under the sun". Participants 2, 3, and 5 shared examples of how examples of their community building tasks making them feel like strong RAs for different reasons. Participant 5 noted, "I'm that person everyone comes to even if they're not on my floor…". Bandura's (1997) mastery experience source is seen through the examples shared by the participants as well as verbal persuasions based on feedback from the participants' residents.

Negative interplay. Though the participants certainly had positive interplay with various tasks of the RA job, some tasks did not make them feel self-efficacious. Participants 2 and 5 shared how administrative tasks is where they felt the least competent in the RA job. Whether it was handing in paperwork late, filling it out incorrectly, or just simply not grasping the purpose behind those tasks, Participants 2 and 5 focused on other aspects of the job more and Participant 2 shared, "… I would say it's probably my lowest competency because I haven't dealt very much with administrative skills."

Participants 1 and 3 tended to feel less self-efficacious due to different reactions/feedback from their residents. Participant 1 was impacted by feedback received from a resident evaluation and said, "The fact I worked so hard to smile, to change my appearance… they were all like, 'Oh well you have an intimidating face,' but I can't change my face.". Participant 3 talked about the non-explicit feedback and said, "… when they shut you out and just don't talk to you… you try so hard to get them to talk to you… [It felt] like they did not like me. That's when that doubt

creeps up." Participant 4 faced negative interplay, and even the burnout Brandt (2013) studied with RAs, and explained, "It was very stressful, and I found myself not being able to mentally handle all of the hard situations I was dealing with…". As shown above, the negative interplay and positive interplay for resident assistants and their self-efficacy is person dependent but does have some patterns. The positive interplay tended to benefit from times where participants felt they had mastered the task or got positive feedback. The negative interplay stemmed more from the tasks that did not go well for the participant or receiving feedback that made them feel incompetent.

Mitigating factors

Bandura's research on self-efficacy stated there are four mitigating factors that determine one's self-efficacy. Those factors are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasions, and physiological/affective states (Bandura, 1997). Participants did encounter those different factors, but the majority of participants were impacted by mastery experiences and verbal persuasions. The other mitigating factor, which was discussed by every participant, was the impact staff dynamic had on their self-efficacy. Staff dynamic has not been discussed as a self-efficacy factor in previous research but has been shown to have an impact on a RA's chance to encounter burnout (Brandt, 2013). Below are how the different mitigating factors impacted the participants' self-efficacy.

Mastery experiences. Each participant mastered different aspects of the RA job through interacting with job tasks and their community. Participant 1's mastery experience impact was more due to past experiences she had before entering the RA role and how that allowed her to further develop her skills helping students encountering challenges with alcohol or other concerns. Participant 2 developed his sense of mastery by learning to work with students who

are neurodiverse. Participant 2 shared that he has not worked with the neurodiverse population before and he said, "I was very concerned that I was not going to do a good job…" that caused concerns for him early on, but he was able to adapt by seeking out information from professionals familiar with that population.

Participant 3 and 5 both shared examples of how handling resident concerns developed their mastery and self-efficacy with the RA job. Addressing resident concerns started to become natural for the two of them and further spontaneous chats with residents became less nerve-wracking and Participant 3 said, "…I definitely built confidence. … some certain situations like roommate problems. I know how to for the most part deal with roommate problems. [I developed] a template and [knew] what to go back to."

Participant 4 gained a sense of mastery, and stronger self-efficacy, from assisting a resident and shared,

> She was our floor rep, but she was designated [as] floor rep, not volunteered. … once she got the confidence from there, I was like, 'You should apply to be a [desk worker].' … She didn't get any response back at all… she was very upset. She was crying. … I reached out to [my supervisor] … and was able to help aid her and [she's] started working there this fall.

Verbal persuasions. The majority of participants shared different ways feedback and/or recognition from others impacted their self-efficacy. Participant 2 discussed how one form of verbal persuasion he received was from his residents and their knowing of his interests. Participant 2 explained,

> I am a really huge fan of *The Legend of Zelda* series and I had a lot of nerds on my floor and they made a joke once [and said], 'Name all the Zelda games in chronological order

or you're a fake fan.'… I was having a rough week and they came back from a trip and they had bought me the game

This moment provided Participant 2 with the sense that he is doing something right and it positively impacted his self-efficacy.

Participant 3 and 4 relied on verbal persuasion from their supervisors more than others. Participant 3 shared how she struggled with her confidence in the RA role and would always double check with her supervisor if she was doing things right. Participant 4 received supervisor pep talks and stated, "Just by getting the positive reinforcement… and feeling I had to step up just triggered something in me. I was more confident in the role…" These talks with her supervisor helped her competence in the RA role. Participants that relied on the feedback of being right from their Big A authority were still in the earlier stages of Perry's (1999) ethical and intellectual development.

Participant 5's self-efficacy was mitigated more by the verbal persuasions received and shared, "I think all of the positive feedback was very reassuring. I'm definitely someone who very much appreciates words of affirmation…". This feedback helped Participant 5 feel more self-efficacious during his first year in the job. Lastly, the participants discussed the perceived impact staff dynamic had on them during their first year as a Resident Assistant.

Staff dynamic. Each participant was impacted by staff dynamics in their first year as an RA and, unfortunately the mitigation was negative for the majority. Participant 1 discussed, "I come from a family that doesn't have that much money. Depending on the situation my family was in, sometimes we had money and sometimes we didn't. I couldn't do a lot of stuff with the RAs." This dynamic caused a disconnect with Participant 1 and her staff, leading to awkward moments with the staff and made the participant feel less supported and competent in the role.

Participant 2 had almost a semester long disagreement with a staff member that really hurt his character and he explained, "… I mean they liked to lie, which really bugs me… We didn't really get along the whole year and they started to tell lies about my relationship with someone and that really made me upset…". Participant 2 thought there was a lack of consequence for that person and it made him question his job capability.

Participant 3 had to learn how to work with staff members with differing opinions and making sure they did not feel excluded, which initially perceptually impacted her self-efficacy in a negative way, but eventually showed her how she could do things differently when she returned to the role. Participant 3 said, "It's a learning experience. So now I learned how to adapt to a new [supervisor]. I learned how to adapt to a new team and getting to know them and knowing what they liked, what they don't like." Participant 3's staff dynamic also assisted them developing a sense of mastery when working with different people. Participant 4 had a returner and a fellow new RA that made her question if she was doing things right and shared,

> I had an RA in my building first semester that I didn't necessarily personality wise get along with. When I was handling situations, if they were on the floor, they always felt like they had to be there too, even if they weren't on-call or anything that night. That kind of helped aid in [my] 'You shouldn't return,' [thoughts]…

This questioning did not assist Participant 4's self-efficacy growth.

Lastly, Participant 5 received a lot of positive growth in his self-efficacy because he knew he could be vulnerable with his staff and explained,

> Whenever I was able to step out of my comfort zone and [say], 'Hey, I need some help with the situation.'… our theme for the staff was vulnerability. I feel like I was accomplishing something whenever I was able to step out and [say], 'Hey guys, I'm not

quite sure how to handle this. Can you guys help me?' Then they would give me

feedback…

The comradery, as well as some verbal persuasions from fellow staff members, helped

Participant 5 develop his self-efficacy. These three mitigating factors impacted the participants

in different ways and were not so much focused on job tasks, but other aspects of the RA job.

Bandura's (1997) other factors of vicarious experiences and physiological/affective states were

not shared as much by the participants, but what was shared is shown in the following paragraph.

Less prevalent factors. Participants encountered Bandura's other factors of vicarious

experiences and physiological/affective states, though they were not shared by the majority of

participants. Participants 1 and 2 shared elements of how their physiological/affective state

impacted their self-efficacy in the RA job. Participant 1 explained, "…at times I was very poor,

and I was living on the streets. That's why programming for students, when I see them

struggling with food insecurity, that's a big one for me because that hits home." Participant 1's

interests really helped guide her to implement tasks in the RA job, especially building

community. Participant 2 shared how his identity development impacted his self-efficacy,

I am someone who is constantly struggling with understanding who I am and being an

RA is a big part of my identity. … I think most people have an understanding of me that

I am socially competent, so they think that I'm extroverted. I don't think I'm extroverted

or introverted

These personality traits of Participant 2 can impact self-efficacy due to growing self-awareness.

Participants 4 and 5 perceived development in their self-efficacy through some vicarious

experiences with fellow staff members. Participant 4 received help from a returner and shared,

… she was very strong. She knew what she was doing. … When I got hired and got

added to the group chat, she immediately reached out to me and [said], 'Hey I've done

this before if you need help with anything.'

This returner reaching out and helping Participant 4 with tasks helped grow their self-efficacy,

especially at an early stage. Participant 5 relied on a returner and fellow new RA experiences to

develop self-efficacy. Participant 5 shared,

… we had mock [resident academic situations] last year during one of our staff meetings.

Being able to see how each person responded to different things and gear the

conversation one way versus that way… I felt a lot more comfortable going into it.

The simple act of seeing how others would do activities benefitted Participant 5's self-efficacy.

Looking at all of these results and some previous research, suggestions will follow for what

student affairs professionals can do to help RAs in the future.

Implications for Student Affairs Professionals

A variety of concerns and challenges were brought up by the participants during this

study, and these should be noted by student affairs professionals, especially those in housing.

Some of these factors fall in line with previous research, but some new sources of self-efficacy

and certain RA tasks could be improved to better help develop a positive self-efficacy in future

resident assistants. Having analyzed the participants responses, the following recommendations

could help resident assistants develop more positive self-efficacy in the future.

Address student staff dynamic from different angles. Every participant talked about

the perceived impact their staff had on them during their first year in the role. Fellow RAs and

supervisors are a major support system for these student staff members, and staff dynamics can

potentially impact one's self-efficacy. Staffs need professionals who can address concerns

abouta staff's dynamic both when selecting new staff members and developing a staff throughout the academic year.

The RA role can be very demanding for folks and if they cannot rely on their staff for support or relief, their self-efficacy can lessen, and students may consider leaving the position. Address concerns as they show up and remain proactive rather than waiting on the dynamic to naturally shift. Make sure you are selecting staff members not just based on whether they would work well with the hall director, but how they would fit in with the returning staff members and the population of the residence hall. Facilitate bonding activities so RAs are better connected, and make sure the bonding is inclusive (i.e. not financially or physically based activities).

Develop the why and how behind RA job tasks. Some tasks can be deemed less important or trivial by RAs if they do not know the why or how behind the task. Some participants shared how they would rather focus on the big picture of programming rather than fill out some paperwork before doing the event. The paperwork is a necessity, but if that is not conveyed to the student staff, questions arise. Housing professionals should make sure student staff members get the chance to master this paperwork and know how to do it. This training should allow for a stronger self-efficacy and remove the tedium of some administrative tasks.

Housing professionals should also take the time to reevaluate some of the tasks student staff members are given at an institution to see why they are done in the first place. Utilize assessment practices so when a RA questions why one fills out a room condition report, data is ready to show its impact. Make sure certain tasks are done universally. Doing this idea should alleviate RAs' questioning if they are doing things right because another supervisor/hall does the task a different way. These questions can hinder one's self-efficacy and make them question who or what to trust. Participant 2 shared that fellow RAs are frustrated about things not being

consistent in the department and this change could help mitigate some of those frustrations for the student staff.

The implication is where a lot of reflection on Perry's (1999) theory will assist a professional's practice. The participants in this study were perceived to still be in the early stages of dualism and potentially multiplicity based on how they discussed things being right or wrong (Perry, 1999). The utilization of this theory can lay the groundwork for restructuring the why behind performance tasks in the RA job and potentially allow student staff members to get over their developmental hurdle.

Recognize the work and challenges RAs face their first year. The RA job is a rewarding, but physically and emotionally taxing position. For some student staff members, this is their first job and do not have other skills to base their capability on and rely on feedback from others to build their self-efficacy. The participants all valued different forms of feedback received during their first year as a RA. Make sure the feedback is provided consistently and productively throughout the year. Scan through the feedback residents provide for RAs to make sure it will be beneficial to the RA because sometimes the feedback is not productive and can lower one's self-efficacy. Be intentional with positive feedback because some individuals need that to know they are doing things correctly and seek out that validation.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further research regarding resident assistants and their self-efficacy is recommended based on the study's findings. This study was a qualitative semi-structured interview so it will not necessarily apply to the whole population. The study was also limited to only returning RAs at a predominantly white institution in the rural Midwest. The researcher was also at the

supervisory level at the research site which could have led to a bias in information shared by the participants, though none of them were directly supervised by the researcher.

Look into Impostor Phenomenon impact. The literature review shared information about how Impostor Phenomenon impacts various college students, but the data did not reflect that impact. The lack of reflection is partially due to the lack of direct questioning regarding Impostor Phenomenon and its relation to the RA role. Only Participant 2 explicitly mentioned Impostor Phenomenon but said the RA role was not impacted, based on his perception, and felt like an impostor in a different area. Further research could indicate another factor potentially impacting RA self-efficacy and an area a professional staff member can develop students in to help increase self-efficacy.

How does training and selection before starting the role impact RAs. Each participant perceived an impact through their staff's dynamic. Selection is the first way the staff dynamic can change and potentially impact a RA and further research could help professionals figure out how to build a more cohesive staff at this step. Training is another area that can really set the tone for staff dynamic and research could be done to see how professionals develop a positive staff atmosphere during training, so all staff members feel supported. The training could also be a great time to give staff members a greater sense of mastery, so they feel more self-efficacious as they start the resident assistant job.

The impact of recognition on RAs and/or professionals. Feedback is a critical piece to any employee. The participants shared they receive feedback in a variety of ways and how that has affected their self-efficacy, but further research could focus on recognition feedback specifically. Participants shared that the positive reinforcement has made them feel better about themselves in the job and it is nice to be told they are doing things right, especially early on in

their job. However, what can be done if the recognition is not consistent for these RAs? Does

their self-efficacy begin to lower? Does the same happen for professionals in the field of student

affairs if they are not recognized?

Impact of returning staff on new staff members. Further research should be done

regarding the retention of student staff members and the potential impact of retaining those staff

members and their potential impact on newly selected resident assistants. Returning staff

members can either be a help or hindrance for new resident assistants depending on the attitude

of the returner and/or their supervisor. Are these attitudes due to previous experiences with other

staff members or supervisors, possible burnout depending on how long the retained staff member

has been working, or some other factor that has not been considered?

Replicate the study. Further research can be done with this particular study at other

institutions with different demographics. Different institutions may have different tasks that RAs

are required to complete, which could yield different interplay with self-efficacy and allow other

sources of self-efficacy to appear. The findings at another institution with a different sampling

of students could yield new findings which can further benefit the field of student affairs.

Conclusion

This qualitative study examined the perspectives of Resident Assistants' (RAs) in terms

of job responsibilities, the interplay between job tasks and self-efficacy, and mitigating factors

that impact the RAs self-efficacy. Mastery experiences, verbal persuasions, and staff dynamic

were perceived as the primary mitigating factors that positively and negatively impact a Resident

Assistant's self-efficacy. Although not shared by all the participants, other migrating factors

included vicarious experiences and physiological/affective states. Student affairs professionals

should focus on the impact of staff dynamic, the why and how tasks are completed, and placing a

greater emphasis on recognizing the work of resident assistants. It is important to put more attention into supporting Resident Assistants and enhancing their self-efficacy as the role becomes more complex and demanding at institutions of higher learning.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate in Research

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Self-Efficacy and Resident Assistants

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Zachary King and Dr. Richard Roberts (faculty sponsor) from the Counseling and Student Development department at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you identify as a resident assistant with one more years of experience in the role.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The primary purpose of this study will be to analyze the interplay of the Resident Assistant (RA) performance tasks and self-efficacy. These factors/tasks will be based on position expectations defined at a mid-sized Midwestern Institution. The secondary purpose of this study will examine any mitigating factors in the relationship between RA performance and self-efficacy, such as the impostor phenomenon. Impostor phenomenon is when individuals doubt their qualifications for a given job/task, even though they are qualified (Clance & Imes, 1978).

- **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher that will last approximately one hour. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your RA experiences and your perceptions of your self-efficacy. Your interview will be audio and video recorded and stored on the researcher's computer.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts that will arise from participating in this study.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Participants may benefit from being able to reflect on their resident assistant experiences and what they have learned from having the position.

This study may also benefit universities and housing departments; data collected from the study may give these institutions more insight on the experiences and thoughts of resident assistants and the experiences they encounter in the role that impact the resident assistants overall.

- **INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION**

Participants in this study will be entered in a drawing for a $20 bookstore gift card. One participant will win the gift card. The gift card will be distributed after all interviews have been completed. The researcher will contact the winner via email and have them pick up the gift cards at his office.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by removing identifying information, particularly names, from the interview transcripts. Participant names will not be present on any transcript materials, nor will they be in the final research report. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to transcripts and recorded interviews. The audio recording files of the interviews will be kept for 3 years and then destroyed, as required by the IRB.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Zachary King, Principal Investigator

217-581-5553

zsking@eiu.edu

Dr. Richard Roberts, Faculty Advisor

217-581-2400

rlroberts@eiu.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board

Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Ave.

Charleston, IL   61920

Telephone: (217) 581-8576

E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

_____

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX B

Demographic Questions for Participants

1. Age and year in school?

2. Major/minor?

3. Race?

4. Gender?

5. Residential Community Type (Single Gender or Coed)?

6. First Gen Student?

7. Do you have a mentor?

8. Years of RA experience?

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Research Question 1: How do performance tasks occur in the RA experience?
1. What are typical job responsibilities you have as an RA?
2. What are some tasks/duties that you think you are competent in as an RA? Why? What are some tasks/duties that you do not think you are competent in? Why?
3. In what ways are your job duties measured? How do these measurements impact your view of the job and yourself in the job?

Research Question 2: What is the interplay between RA performance tasks and levels of self-efficacy?
1. How did the tasks that you are good at influence your sense of competence?
2. How did the tasks you are not good at influence your sense of competence?
3. When you complete a task (successfully or unsuccessfully), how does it influence your sense of competence?

Research Question 3: What are the mitigating factors in the relationship between performance tasks and self-efficacy?
1. Think of a challenging situation you have handled as an RA. How did you feel during the situation? After?
2. What impact, if any, does staff dynamic (fellow RAs and Prostaff) have on you in the RA role?
3. Does being praised/recognized help you sense of competence?
   Does watching someone do a task successfully help your sense of competence?
   How do your personality traits impact your sense of competence?