BURNOUT IN COLLEGE RESIDENT ASSISTANTS: INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION, DEPERSONALIZATION, AND PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT

by

Dustin DuBose

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Resident assistants (RAs) are vital members of the student affairs divisions of colleges and universities across the United States. As peer leaders, they are responsible for performing many duties; they must, for example, complete administrative tasks, counsel students, mediate conflict, serve as role models, assimilate students, facilitate groups, and much more. Furthermore, RAs are expected to be available for their students at all times of the day and night, responding to any situation when needed. These responsibilities come on top of their own work and academic responsibilities as college students. These varied roles and responsibilities, along with the 24-hour nature of the role, create an environment where burnout can occur. Research into RA burnout reached its peak in the 1980s with sporadic research being conducted since. Additionally, information uncovered in research articles has been inconsistent, often with one study finding one factor significant, with another finding results in direct conflict. This nonexperimental, causal-comparative study examined the role that specific factors have on burnout in RAs at a large private university in the southeastern United States. Biological sex, grade point average, and program type were the independent variables, while scores from the Maslach Burnout Inventory subscales of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment were the dependent variables. The data was analyzed through three separate multivariate analysis of variance tests. No significant differences in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment were found based on biological sex, grade point average, or program type.

Keywords: Resident assistants, peer leadership, burnout
Dedication

This work is dedicated to our residence life students and staff. May you always remember two things. First, “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world… it’s the only thing that ever has (Sorkin, Gerken, & Sperling, 2003).” Secondly, and most importantly, the way we change the world is through the foundational belief that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is sufficient to change lives.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not exist without the support, encouragement, and love of many people. Naming them all would take another dissertation in and of itself, but I will do my best. This first deserving recognition and honor is God. James 1:5 tells us to ask God for wisdom if we lack it. There have been innumerable times I have asked for that wisdom in this process and it has come each time.

My parents, parents-in-law, brother, brothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law offered unwavering encouragement and support through this process; for that, I am grateful. My colleagues and friends provided a never-ending stream of support, reassurance, and motivation. For every time they asked me how it was going, listened to me talk about what I was currently working on, watched me walk around the office to take a break, and listened to me think out loud, I say a huge “thank you!” Dr. Mark Hine’s graciousness to allow me to focus on this dissertation as needed will be something I will never forget.

Lindsey White, who was my editor, made this a better dissertation. For her efforts, she has my unending appreciation; I may even try to stop double spacing after a period now! My dissertation committee provided immeasurable help and direction through this entire process. Dr. Foster, my committee chair, guided me through this marathon from start to finish. Her encouragement to “write for 10 minutes every day” was some of the best advice I received. Dr. Wu’s comments and feedback were always thought-provoking and prompted me to see other facets I had not yet considered. I am grateful for both of them.

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encouragement, inspiration, help, confidant, counselor, cheerleader, and friend than all others combined. It was, more than anything else, her belief in my ability to do this well that spurred me on. Words cannot express the depth of my gratitude and love for her. At this point, I have been in school for our entire eleven-year marriage; I think I will stop now.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Resident assistants (RAs) serve a vital role on college and university campuses across the country. The varied and often conflicting responsibilities they are expected to perform, and the 24-hour nature of the job are primary reasons RAs are susceptible to burnout (Paladino, Murray, Newgent, & Gohn, 2005). While some research has been done on what indicators may exist for RAs who are susceptible to burnout, the information is often conflicting (Stoner, 2017). Therefore, this study will seek to determine what factors exist that could indicate which RAs are more likely to burn out. This chapter will provide a brief background of existing literature and theories on burnout, peer leadership, and RAs. Furthermore, this chapter provides the problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, and research question, and concludes with definitions of key terms.

Background

Students have been helping each other in the pursuit of their college degrees for hundreds of years (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). In fact, research has demonstrated that the most impactful aspect of the college experience is not the professors or academic coursework but is instead the peer group around a student (Astin, 1993). Those a student chooses to surround themselves with can, and do, play a vital role in the growth and maturation of the individual. Consequently, colleges and universities have formalized the role of peer leader in many areas.

While formal roles for peer leaders first appeared in residence halls and orientation programs, there are many different areas they are employed today (Bunting & Williams, 2017). For example, peer leaders can be found in classrooms, tutoring programs, campus activities, and more (Skipper & Keup, 2017). Yet, whatever the distinct role of the peer leader, they are often
placed for a similar purpose. Peer leaders are expected to model the expectations of the institution, help students transition and assimilate into the campus culture, and build connections among students (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). These duties, shared by all peer leaders, are a major focus of the RA position, which remains a peer leader responsibility that is prevalent on many college and university campuses today.

In fact, the RA position is considered to be the foundational role in housing departments and central to the enhancement of student learning and development (Boone, 2018). This is demonstrated in a shift of focus the role has seen over the years, from that of a supervisor in absence of a parent to one of an educator and developer (Healea & Hale, 2016). This alteration, while necessary and beneficial, has caused problems and issues to arise that need to be addressed. The RA role today is markedly different than previous decades. Earlier, the primary functions of the RA were “to enforce university policies, monitor visitation, and assist students who needed help” (Bliming, 2010, p. 33). This role could be summed up by the simple word “disciplinarian”; an RA would be mostly concerned with ensuring that the students on their floors were following school policy and issuing the appropriate discipline for those who were found in violation (Arvidson, 2003). While these responsibilities still exist, the role has expanded and advanced over the years.

The primary catalyst for the restructuring of the RA role was the end of legally sanctioned *in loco parentis* that occurred in the late 1960s (Arvidson, 2003). This change in national policy prompted residence life officials to reevaluate the objectives of the RA position (Arvidson, 2003). Through the intervening years the position began to be seen more as an educator and community developer (Healea & Hale, 2016). These functions play an important role in determining what an RA does and for what they are responsible.
Today, RAs must perform many roles and responsibilities. They must counsel students, serve as role models, and assimilate students into the campus community (Manata, DeAngelis, Paik, & Miller, 2017). They must also be able to mediate conflict, enforce school policy, and facilitate groups (Bliming, 2010). Additionally, there is an increasing expectation that RAs be equipped to recognize risk behaviors in students and refer them to appropriate campus resources (Stoner & Zhang, 2017). All of this is on top of the administrative role that comes with supervising a residence hall on a college campus (Bliming, 2010).

All of these roles and responsibilities demonstrate the reality that the RA is a significant contributor to a school’s residence hall programs and student affairs as a whole (Arvidson, 2003; Berg & Stoner, 2016; Denzine & Anderson, 1999; Schuh et al., 1982). This is an incredible amount of responsibility to entrust to college-aged students. Yet, those who accept these responsibilities are also continuing to progress in their own academic course work and educational goals (Bliming, 2010). Thus, today’s RAs are accountable for several different, and often competing, obligations and priorities. Considering these varied responsibilities of RAs, along with their own academic lives, it is no surprise that RAs are particularly susceptible to the phenomenon of burnout (Paladino et al., 2005).

Burnout appeared as a concept in the 1970s when, independently, Freudenberger (1974) and Maslach (1976) came across the term’s use by individuals working with illicit drug users in New York and with human service workers in California (Muheim, 2013). Both of these pioneers used the term to describe the gradual depletion of emotional energy of those who were working with clients or patients (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). In the time since its first articulation, the concept has grown from one seen as primarily an issue for the human services
sector to one identified in all types of work. At the same time, the focus of research has moved from pragmatic applications to theoretical understanding.

The first phase of burnout research, taking place largely from the late 1970s to the 1980s, is often called the pioneer phase (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017; Muheim, 2013). During this phase, most of the research was focused on identifying, describing, and naming the phenomenon; additionally, much work was done to demonstrate that the issue was not a problem experienced by a low number of people, but was more common (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017). Qualitative research undertaken at this time demonstrated vivid pictures of people losing their energy and sense of value in the responsibilities they were performing (Schaufeli et al., 2009). This period of burnout research, focused on description, is characterized with a significant lack of empirical evaluation of the concept (Muheim, 2013). This reality arose from the fact that practitioners were more interested in burnout than scholars at the time (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017).

After the early days of burnout research, the field moved to a more empirical phase in the 1980s, resulting in work that was more quantitative in nature and which eventually brought about theoretical and methodological contributions (Muheim, 2013). This period was characterized by the development of standardized measures of burnout, such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Tedium Measure (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017). These developments led to an increase in published scholarly work on the subject due to the more systematic research that occurred (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017).

The empirical phase of the development of burnout research was also when the primary focus on human service occupations began to expand to include other areas of occupation and even the nonwork life (i.e. sports, political activism, and family) of individuals (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017). Additionally, research transitioned from looking solely at job factors that
contribute to burnout to including individual factors, especially in longitudinal studies (Muheim, 2013).

Through the decades, burnout has grown from a field studied principally in the United States to a global concern (Schaufeli et al., 2009). After starting in the United States, the globalization of burnout began in the early 1980s in Canada and Great Britain (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017). Later, researchers in Holland, Belgium, Germany, Scandinavia, Finland, and Israel began work in the area (Schaufeli et al., 2009). The 1990s saw burnout investigated in the rest of Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand, with research also spreading to Africa, China, and the Indian subcontinent in the 2000s (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Today, the MBI is often translated into the native language of the subjects being studied (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). This attests to the truly global nature of the concept of burnout, as well as interest in its research.

The roots of burnout can be traced to occupations where the individual is in close contact with other humans for the purpose of caregiving and service (Muheim, 2013). Thus, the definition of burnout remains closely tied with these human service occupations. Today, the most widely accepted definition of burnout states: “Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind” (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017, p. 14). Yet, it is understood that the phenomenon can be found in a wide range of work settings and populations (Maslach et al., 1996). Hence, the aspects of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment must be the focus of the definition.
Problem Statement

The problem of burnout in RAs is significant because burnout can cause harm to those with whom a person is tasked to work (Maslach et al., 1996). Research has shown that many RAs apply for the job because of their desire to help people (Boone, 2018). However, burnout can cause an unhealthy level of depersonalization, wherein an individual may display an indifferent, negative attitude towards those for whom they are responsible (Maslach et al., 1996). Thus, the RA who experiences burnout may experience distress related to one of the primary reasons that they signed up for the job in the first place. In addition, burnout has been seen to affect turnover rates in other fields, such as nursing and education (Spence Laschinger, Leiter, Day, & Gilin, 2009; Stoner, 2017). This reality has also been seen in RAs, as those who experience burnout are more likely to choose not to continue in the job (Stoner, 2017). Therefore, burnout in RAs can have a detrimental effect to the organization, possibly causing the college to spend significantly more time and resources to recruit, hire, and train additional RAs than if burnout were not present. Therefore, it is important that burnout in RAs is understood, particularly regarding what factors may lead to an increased likelihood of burnout occurring.

The problem of burnout in RAs has received some attention in research literature, but that attention has been sporadic overall. Research on RA burnout began and reached its peak in the 1980s, with few research projects occurring since then (Stoner, 2017). In fact, since the pinnacle of research on RA burnout, each decade has only produced a handful of research studies on the issue. That being the case, the literature as a whole needs updating.

In addition, the research conducted to date has offered varying results on what factors of an RA’s life might lead to burnout (Stoner, 2017). The most common factor studied is gender. This research on the link between gender and burnout has often articulated back and forth
between conflicting conclusions (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Heatherington, Oliver, & Phelps, 1989; Paladino, Murray, Newgent & Gohn, 2005; Stoner, 2017). For example, one study may find that females are more susceptible to burnout (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Heatherington et al., 1989). Another may find that males are more susceptible (Paladino et al., 2005). And a further study may find that there is no difference at all in burnout scores based on gender (Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Stoner, 2017). Thus, additional research is needed in this area to continue to expand the literature.

Research has also been conducted to investigate how community makeup affects RA burnout with regularity (Stoner, 2017). Every campus has a variety of buildings and hall types, creating different arrangements of students that RAs work among. However, the research in this area has, again, yielded inconclusive results due to the varying nature of the findings of the different research projects (Benedict & Mondloch, 1989; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Paladino, Murray, Newgent, & Gohn, 2005; Stoner, 2017).

Other factors such as job performance, job satisfaction and intent to return, race, and college or university size have all been investigated by researchers in connection with RA burnout (Nowack & Hanson, 1983; Paladino et al., 2005; Stoner, 2017). Yet, there remain aspects of an RA’s role and life that have not received proper attention regarding potential connections to burnout, such as grade point average and program type. It is essential that these factors be investigated to determine if they play a role in RA burnout.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this causal-comparative study was to determine if there is a difference in burnout among RAs based on biological sex, grade point average, and program type. The dependent variables in the study were emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal
accomplishment. Each of the dependent variables was measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES; Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986). The independent variables were biological sex, grade point average, and program type.

The target population for the study was 248 resident assistants at a large private university in the southeastern United States. These RAs serve a campus of 8,000 beds divided between 140 residence halls, each of which is served by one or two RAs. The subjects were asked to respond to a survey comprised of the MBI-ES, and demographic data was used to break the respondents into categories for the independent variables. Data regarding the independent variables was requested via the university’s data and analytics team and was later analyzed using several multivariate analysis of variance tests.

**Significance of the Study**

There are several reasons why this study is relevant to the field of education. RAs experience the feeling of always being on the job, due in large part to the fact that their home is also their work environment (Stoner, 2017). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that RAs assume the role because of their desire to help other students (Boone, 2018). In the one of the first articles on burnout, Freudenberger (1975) noted that over-commitment and the need to be consistently available are contributing factors to burnout. Thus, the natural makeup of the job, as well as the reasons why students become RAs at all, creates an environment which is ripe for burnout from the very start. Therefore, it is essential that other factors that may lead to burnout in RAs are understood. Every RA will be in an environment where burnout is likely. Student affairs staff must understand what other factors need to be monitored to help prevent burnout in RAs before it becomes a real problem. When supervisors know which RAs may be more likely to
experience burnout, they are better able to train and work with each of them to prevent burnout in the first place.

Understanding which aspects of an RA’s life may lead to burnout can also help to inform training for both the entire team and specific subgroups. It has been suggested that incorporating training on stress and burnout for RAs can help to minimize and prevent RA burnout (Nowack & Hanson, 1983). Thus, it is important that training on this topic be directed specifically at what factors can lead to burnout. If an RA with a GPA that indicates a greater chance of burnout is aware of that information from the outset, he or she may be able to recognize red flags and make the necessary adjustments before progressing further on the burnout path. The evidence on what factors may increase an RA’s chance for burnout can also help to provide specific training to help inform RAs of their likelihood of burnout from their initial training.

Empirically, this study provides another sample of RAs where burnout research has occurred. Research literature into burnout in RAs has provided inconsistent results, especially in the area of gender (Stoner, 2017). Some research has found that a difference among gender exists, while other research has found no such difference; therefore, it remains unclear whether there is a difference in burnout based on this variable (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Heatherington et al., 1989; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Paladino et al., 2005; Stoner, 2017). So, adding another sample to the literature available will provide further information as to how various factors may affect burnout in RAs. This information can also help increase the theoretical knowledge of burnout and what factors contribute to it in different populations.
Research Question

RQ: Is there a difference in burnout as evidenced in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between resident assistants based on biological sex, cumulative GPA, and program type?

Definitions

1. **Burnout** - The protracted depletion of an individual’s energies characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lower personal accomplishment (Bahrer-Kohler, 2013).

2. **Emotional exhaustion** - Feelings of being emotionally strained and fatigued by one’s work (Maslach et al., 1996).

3. **Depersonalization** - A distancing of feelings and impersonal responses toward students (Maslach et al., 1996).

4. **Personal accomplishment** - Feelings of competence and achievement in one’s work with students (Maslach et al., 1996).

5. **Peer leadership** - Students who have been selected, trained, and designated by a campus authority to offer educational services to their peers (Newton & Ender, 2010).

6. **Resident assistant** - A student position employed by many university housing operations whose focus is to monitor living standards in the residence halls and promote student development of those living in the residence halls (Manata et al., 2017).

7. **Gender** - The attitude, feelings, and behaviors associated, by a culture, with a person’s biological sex (APA, 2012). All previous research found has used the term “gender” in connection with burnout.
8. **Biological sex** - The biological status of a person, typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (APA, 2012). This study is investigating the difference in burnout between males and females; thus, the term “biological sex” is being given preference over that of “gender.”

9. **Grade Point Average (GPA)** - A measurement of the level of academic achievement a student has obtained in all prior coursework at a particular level, combined (Seibert, Bauer, May, & Fincham, 2017). This measurement was categorized according to letter grade as follows: A, 3.7 to 4.0; B+, 3.3 to 3.6; B, 3.0 to 3.2; B-, 2.7 to 2.9; C+, 2.3 to 2.6; C, 2.0 to 2.2; C-, 1.7 to 1.9; D+, 1.3 to 1.6; D, 1.0 to 1.2; D-, 0.7 to 0.9; F, < 0.7 (J. Byrd, personal communication, November 1, 2019; Grading Numerology, *n.d.*; How to Convert Your GPA to a 4.0 Scale, 2019).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A thorough review of the research was conducted to identify studies that investigate what indicators may predict burnout in college and university resident assistants (RAs). This chapter will provide an overview on the literature currently available regarding this topic. The first section will discuss the foundational theories utilized as a framework and how they relate to the topic. The second section will provide an explanation of the function and importance of the RA role and what research has shown about burnout indicators. Upon this review, a gap in the literature will emerge and provide a specific direction for this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the theory of burnout as theorized by Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996). The term “burnout” was pioneered in the 1970s with the work of Freudenberger (1974) and Maslach (1976). Both of these researchers noticed, independently, that those with whom they were interacting experienced a gradual depletion of emotional energies (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017). This was characterized by a person’s inability to maintain intense participation that contributed to a meaningful impact in their work (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). This phenomenon was labeled as “burnout,” and efforts to understand the problem began in earnest.

History of Burnout

The newness of this concept in the 1970s required that work be done to evaluate the issue, determine its pervasiveness, and describe it for understanding. Therefore, much of these early days of burnout research was focused on investigating the phenomenon (Muheim, 2013). In this time, the literature on burnout was focused on the areas of education, social services,
medicine, religion, mental health, and other fields with work that is heavily involved with people (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017). Researchers noticed that burnout occurred where people were deeply invested in caring for other individuals and helping them grow and develop.

The initial phase in burnout literature can also be characterized by a significant lack of empirical research, a problem that began to be remedied in the 1980s (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017). This shift brought more focus to quantitative research and, consequently, saw the development of several tools for measurement of burnout (Muheim, 2013). The work continued to focus on human service occupations, though more emphasis started to be given to variety in the types of occupations investigated (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017).

Presently, burnout has expanded from a singular focus on the human services field and is now researched in conjunction with other professions. The concept has grown to a general workplace hazard, rather than one that is observed only in a single type of occupation (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Computer scientists, the armed forces, managers, and clerics are all occupational areas that have now been studied in connection to burnout (Muheim, 2013). Furthermore, research on burnout has expanded from a concern in the United States to one investigated around the globe (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009; Muheim, 2013). These developments have led to an ever-expanding knowledge base regarding the subject of burnout. In 2009, Schaufeli et al. estimated that there were over 6,000 books, chapters, dissertations, and journal articles related to burnout in existence. That number has continued to grow over the years.

**Definition of Burnout**

Burnout represents an attrition in values, dignity, spirit, and will; it occurs over time and sends individuals into a downward spiral from which they may not be able to climb out (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). It has been described as an emotional and physical exhaustion that is often
connected to a significant feeling of failure and frustration (Wardle & Mayorga, 2016). This underscores the importance of understanding the concept and illustrates the overall process whereby one’s energy is depleted. But what is specifically meant by the term “burnout”? Over time, the concept has developed from a general notion as a psychological syndrome resulting from chronic job stress, as in Freudenberger’s (1974) original definition, to one of a specific reality characterized by three main components (Nuallaong, 2013). Burnout is often defined, today, as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017, p. 14).

**Emotional exhaustion.** The first component of burnout in individuals is emotional exhaustion, which is the feeling of being overextended and overly tired from one’s work (Maslach et al., 1996). This is characterized by a feeling of being drained, empty, and unable to relax and recover from the workday (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Individuals have worked hard and are subsequently tired but find that they are unable to replenish their emotional energy at the end of the day in preparation for the next.

Emotional exhaustion is the most apparent of the three components of burnout and individuals who are facing this aspect may experience a variety of symptoms (Nuallaong, 2013). They may be unable to feel compassion for those they are charged to care for or work within various settings (Smullens, 2015). They may find that they are unable to sleep well, resulting in continued tiredness (Nuallaong, 2013). Most importantly, a person experiencing emotional exhaustion may find that they can no longer devote themselves to their work or those they work with as much as they once could (Maslach et al., 1996). Thus, the work continues to exhaust them and a downward spiral in emotional energy ensues, leading to additional complications.
**Depersonalization.** Depersonalization refers to the inability to feel a connection with others, along with an impersonal response toward people (Maslach et al., 1996). Put another way, depersonalization is described as an adverse attitude toward affiliations in a workplace (Nuallong, 2013). This amounts to a level of cynicism wherein individuals act with a cold and distant attitude toward their work or the people with whom they are working (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Furthermore, depersonalization is a detachment from the feelings of a person’s clients (Smullens, 2015). In depersonalization, the individual consistently and deliberately avoids connecting with the individuals they are working with, in order to protect what emotional energy they have remaining.

Individuals struggling with depersonalization may find that they minimize their engagement at their workplace; moreover, they may discover that they are no longer as invested in the reason they joined the organization in the first place (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Others around them may see an increase in negligence in workplace responsibilities (Nuallong, 2013). Individuals in the human service sectors who are experiencing depersonalization may begin to refer to their clients or students with derogatory labels and may distance themselves physically from those individuals (Maslach et al., 1996). All in all, depersonalization causes the person who should be connected to those with whom they work to instead withdraw and disconnect from those very people.

**Personal accomplishment.** The third component of burnout is that of reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Shaufeli, 2017). Personal accomplishment is defined as the feeling of competence and successful achievement from one’s activities at work (Maslach et al., 1996). People experiencing burnout will see their efforts as ineffective, which can result in a sense of inadequacy (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). This is a significant distortion of thinking and is, in
essence, an inappropriate and overly critical self-evaluation (Nuallong, 2013; Smullens, 2015). Ultimately, reduced personal accomplishment results in a feeling that the work an individual was once excited about is no longer fulfilling or worth the effort.

Those experiencing this particular aspect of burnout will experience several symptoms. The largest result of reduced personal accomplishment is a profound sense of disappointment (Maslach et al., 1996). They may feel that every new project or task they are given is overwhelming and that everyone around them is conspiring to keep them from accomplishing anything (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Through all of these symptoms, an individual’s confidence may be damaged. He or she may no longer feel that they are capable of making a difference in their chosen profession.

**Variables Affecting Burnout**

Burnout is a major point of concern for individuals as it can have drastic effects not only on the individual, but also those around them—both at home and at work. It can be detrimental to the physical and emotional health of the individual and can lead to a substantial deterioration in job performance (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Because of these significant issues that occur when someone experiences burnout, research has been conducted to attempt to determine what variables may be involved.

This research has occurred among several groups that are closely related to RAs. These groups—college students (as a whole and particular subsets), nurses and mental health professionals, and teachers—all have certain features about their responsibilities and expectations that create similarities with the RA role. College students, like RAs, must balance their coursework and other responsibilities that occur both on and off campus (Lynch, 2017). Because RAs are college students themselves, research regarding burnout in this demographic
can be particularly helpful in understanding RA burnout. Furthermore, nurses, mental health professionals, and teachers all share fundamental similarities to the RA position, as well (Stoner, 2017). In each case, there is a service provider—for example, the teacher or nurse—and a service recipient—for example, a student or patient (Stoner, 2017). Thus, the research conducted with each of these groups can be instructive in understanding RA burnout. In this research there have been two main areas of exploration: factors relating to the individual and factors relating to the work environment.

**Individual factors.** There are many factors related to the individual that researchers have investigated in connection with burnout. Specifically, gender, degree attainment, academic hours enrolled and earned, grade point average, and years of experience have been examined.

**Gender.** The first of these variables, which has been explored often, is that of gender. While the information to be gained from research into this variable is still inconclusive, many studies have indicated that women are more likely to experience burnout than men, across several disciplines (Kumar & Mellsop, 2013; Smullens, 2015). Women were found to be more susceptible to burnout in one investigation involving student-athletes (Dubuc-Charbonneau, Durand-Bush, & Forneris, 2014). Similarly, a gender difference was found in a study investigating professional chaplains: Galek, Flannelly, Greene, and Kudler (2011) found that women were more likely to exhibit burnout than their male colleagues.

A difference in burnout among teachers has also been detected with gender as the variable. Specifically, descriptive analysis in one research article showed that female special education teachers were more prone to emotional exhaustion than males (Williams & Dikes, 2015). In another study, it was found that high school teachers and staff who were white and female reported higher levels of burnout (O’Brennan, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2017).
However, there remain some inconsistencies in the variable of gender. In one research project investigating burnout among undergraduate business students who work, females were found to have higher levels of academic burnout but correspondingly lower levels of work-related burnout (Galbraith & Merrill, 2012). In addition, Williams and Dikes (2015) found that male special education teachers were more likely to experience higher depersonalization than their female counterparts. Finally, a study on burnout in professional counselors found that gender alone did not relate to burnout, though gender combined with other variables did contribute to higher burnout in certain groups of females (Lent & Schwartz, 2012).

All things considered, it appears likely that females experience higher burnout, to some extent, than males, although this may not specifically be the case in all instances. There may be many reasons that this is the case and there may be other factors that interact with gender to cause women to experience higher emotional exhaustion (Kumar & Mellsop, 2013). Therefore, further research is needed into the effect gender may have on burnout.

**Degree attained.** A second variable that has been investigated is the level of education as person has attained. Some research has indicated that the higher the level of education an individual has obtained, the more likely that person is to experience burnout (Smullens, 2015). Yet other research has not been consistent in that finding. In fact, one research project connected lower personal accomplishment with lower educational status (Nuallong, 2013).

For teachers, conclusions are similarly inconsistent. For example, one research article has demonstrated that special education teachers with a higher degree may experience more burnout than special education teachers with a lower degree (Williams & Dikes, 2015). In another study, while the self-efficacy of special education teachers was affected by educational degree attained, burnout was not affected (Nuri, Demirok, & Direktor, 2017). However, Nuri et al. (2017) do
report that burnout was affected by a special education teacher’s years of experience, with depersonalization increasing over time.

So, degree attained is an inconsistent indicator of burnout in special education teachers, and the same is true for those who do counseling of some kind. Educational level, for mental health professionals, has been shown to be related to higher levels of emotional exhaustion (Lim, Kim, Kim, Yang, & Lee, 2010). Yet, in chaplains, degree attainment did not have significant effect on symptoms of burnout (Galek et al., 2011). It may be that the level of counseling conducted by pastoral counselors is different than that conducted by mental health professionals, but the findings in these research projects remain consistent with what is seen in teachers, where educational level may or may not be an indicator of those who are likely to burnout. Outcomes have been similar with social workers, where one study will show that higher educational levels increases burnout, only to be refuted by later studies (Hamama, 2012).

**Academic year and hours enrolled.** Among students, it is harder to study the burnout variable against educational level. However, some research has attempted to determine how current education exploits affect burnout in college student groups. One such variable examined is the academic year of a student. One study found that academic year or program had no effect on burnout in student-athletes (Dubuc-Charbonneau, et al., 2014). This supported a similar, earlier, investigation into academic year effects on burnout in undergraduate students at a private university in the Midwest (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003).

Another factor, closely related to a student’s academic year, is the number of academic hours in which they are currently enrolled. Jacobs and Dodd (2003) investigated whether academic hours enrolled affected burnout in students and found that there was no significant correlation between this variable and burnout scores. However, classes are a large part of a
college student’s life, along with outside work and extracurricular activities. Consequently, these variables should continue to be investigated.

**Grade point average.** Another academic variable that has been reviewed is grade point average. In one study, investigating undergraduate business students, lower grade point average was shown to have a negative effect on burnout (Galbraith & Merrill, 2012). In another, an association between grades and increased burnout was found among medical students (Boudreau, Santen, Hemphill, & Dobson, 2004). Thus, it is possible that a student’s academic performance may have an impact on their likelihood for burnout.

While it cannot be definitively stated that various educational variables contribute to burnout, it is clear that there is an effect, at times. When it does, it could be a result of the perception of the individual; where they believe they are more qualified to perform than their current duties require, they may not receive the same level of satisfaction in completing their tasks and responsibilities, thus making them susceptible to burnout. On the other hand, it is possible that where burnout may occur, the person with a higher degree may feel more equipped to appropriately handle their responsibilities and roles, ultimately preventing burnout. At the very least, educational factors need additional investigation in their relation to burnout.

**Years in current position.** Among teachers and counselors, another factor that has been investigated is the length of time that a person has been in their current role or at their current school or practice. In one study of factors related to burnout among high school teachers and staff, individuals who had been at their school for less than three years reported less burnout than those who had been there for four years or more (O’Brennan et al., 2007). Accordingly, as the experience level of the individual increased, so did their burnout levels. These findings are similar to research conducted by Galek et al. (2011), who found that the number of years a
person was in their current position predicted burnout; the more time they had spent in their current position, the higher their reported burnout.

It should be noted that the number of years a person is in their current position does not equate to their total years of experience. While Galek et al. (2011) found significance change in burnout related to the number of years a person was in their position, they did not find the same thing in relation to the total years of experience a person has attained. Similar results were found in a study of mental health professionals, where years of experience, alone, did not indicate higher rates of burnout (Lent & Schwartz, 2012). Perhaps changes in job or job location, or lack thereof, contributes to increased burnout in individuals while overall years of experience helps to reduce burnout? However, the interaction works, it is interesting to note that it is years in current position or situation, and not overall years of experience, that contributes to the burnout levels of an individual.

**Workplace factors.** In addition to individual factors, other factors that have been investigated in connection with burnout are those associated with the actual workplace environment or experience. Burnout issues at work can influence turnover, as those who feel burnout at work tend to have a higher intention to leave their place of employment (Spence Laschinger, Leiter, Day, & Gilin, 2009). Thus, further exploration of burnout-related factors in the workplace is an important line of inquiry.

**Workload management and time allotment.** A major avenue of investigation has been in workload management and time allotment (Aydemir & Icelli, 2013). Work today is taking more and more time; the gains made over decades by unions advocating for shorter workweeks are eroding as people work longer hours to get their responsibilities accomplished (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). More and more employees are working longer hours but are still not able to keep
up with the demands of their responsibilities (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). This reality creates an imbalance of demand over resources; workers now need to expend more energy, utilizing more time, to accomplish objectives which reduces their opportunities to rest and regenerate their energy (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). Thus, time spent working becomes a potential factor related to the chances an individual will experience burnout. In a world that is constantly demanding time, it can be difficult for employees to balance the needs of their workplace with their various personal needs and responsibilities.

Research has shown that an individual’s workload can contribute to levels of burnout. Burnout in college students has been observed when their level of subjective workload, their view of the amount of work they have at any given moment, is higher; students with higher subjective workloads have reported higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). Additionally, while depersonalization was not linked to higher workload, it was linked to a lower number of hours spent in extracurricular activities (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). Therefore, higher workloads, connected with lower amounts of extracurricular activities, equated to higher burnout across all three burnout subscales. College students working in volunteer capacities also reported similar results. Where the student volunteer perceived a higher workload, they reported greater levels of burnout (Kao, 2009).

The same has been found to be true regarding teachers and counselors, as well. Where workload increases, taking time from personal activities, emotional exhaustion also increases (Karapinar, Camgoz, & Ekmekci, 2016). For counselors, caseload and burnout were found to be positively related in a study regarding professional quality of life (Laverdiere et al, 2019). That being the case, it is highly probable that workload and burnout are interrelated; where an individual feels like they are overworked, they are likely to experience burnout.
Locus of control. The amount of control a person holds in reference to the tasks and responsibilities they perform has also been connected to burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2005). Where there is a lack of control for the individual, there is a higher chance that burnout will be experienced; on the other hand (Aydemir & Icelli, 2013). For example, one research project has demonstrated that a “heavy on-call duty” was related to burnout and poor mental health (Aydemir & Icelli, 2013). On-call duty often throws tasks upon an employee that were not planned for or expected even though the individual knows that they are on call. In this way, being on call can add interruptions to person’s days at any given time, reducing their personal ability to plan and control their day and activities. In this, the continual loss of control can be a problem that contributes to burnout.

Yet, it is not only on-call employees that are a concern for burnout due to a privation of control. Both a lack employee empowerment—how much control an individual feels they have over their own work—and burnout have been linked to higher intent to leave their workplaces in the nursing field (Spence Laschinger et al., 2009). Furthermore, workplace empowerment has been directly linked to lower burnout in nurses and in various service providers, including doctors, nurses, and teachers (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Spence Laschinger, Wong, & Greco, 2006). Therefore, one predictor of burnout is likely how much control is given to an individual and whether their work is interrupted by aspects of their job that are not within their ability to control.

Workplace environment. Workplace environment can also have an effect on burnout in individuals. It is important to note that workplace environment can refer to the physical or psychological dimensions of a workplace (Hamama, 2012). This distinction is interesting, as one study has demonstrated that mental health practitioners in community mental health inpatient

settings experience more burnout than their colleagues in private practices (Lent & Schwartz, 2012). While the physical attributes of these locations may be similar, or could be altered to be similar, the emotional and psychological elements are likely more extreme in community inpatient settings, causing the increased burnout (Lent & Schwartz, 2012).

Other research has demonstrated similar findings. Hamama (2012) found that social workers’ burnout levels were lower in work environments with better physical and psychological dimensions. On the psychological aspect, it has been found that high school teachers and staff report lower burnout in an environment where they feel connected to their leaders, school, and community; this is consistent with research that demonstrates that the learning environment is more than the physical structure, but is also about the relationships within the building (O’Brennan et al., 2017).

Finally, undergraduate women in STEM fields were found to experience higher burnout when they perceived a “chilly climate,” described as that which is “unwelcoming or hostile to women” (Jensen & Deemer, 2012, p. 98). Thus, when the environment of the workplace—including the culture created—is not healthy, individuals experience a higher level of burnout. Moreover, creating a healthy workplace environment, both physically and psychologically, is an important aspect of preventing burnout in the first place.

Overall, there are many factors that have been investigated in relation to burnout. The drive to understand this concept, what causes it, and how it affects individuals will continue to move forward. For this study, it is also important to understand the role of peer leaders on the college or university campus. Hence, an additional aspect of the theoretical framework being used is that of peer leadership, as theorized by Astin (1999).
Peer Leadership

Although informal peer support began in the early days of higher education in the United States, it was not until recently that formal roles for peer leaders began appearing (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). These formal roles emerged in residence life and orientation programs, and remain an important feature in those areas today (Shook & Keup, 2012). Thus, what began as a basic role that helped early students has now evolved into a deliberate academic enterprise designed to further develop students both in and beyond the classroom.

History of peer leadership. Students have been helping each other academically since the 1700s (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Consequently, for much of higher education in the United States, the peer leader position was informal and unstructured. However, as higher education evolved, colleges and universities adapted and began utilizing students more formally in two primary areas: orientation and residence life (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012).

Peer roles in orientation programs emerged in the middle of the twentieth century as precollege programs and small group discussions grew in popularity (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). Research has often shown that peer relationships play a vital role in the retention and persistence of college students (Harmon, 2006). As the importance of ensuring students effectively transitioned to college and persisted grew, so too did the role that these peer leaders played in orientation programs. Today, they, too, play a vital role in helping new students successfully transition to college life at the institution in which they enroll (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). Peer leaders are expected to communicate and model the expectations of the institution, set the tone of campus culture, and build community among students (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). They are charged with the task of fostering an environment where students can connect and get comfortable on campus.
Peer leadership roles in the residence halls began to formalize after the end of World War II, when residence halls sizes and student populations increased (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). At roughly the same time, there was a professionalization of the roles within student services, creating the opportunity for paraprofessional roles for students within the residence halls (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). This role has grown over time from one of simple oversight to a specific role with various duties, especially that of education and development of students in the residence halls. Thus, while students have been involved in residence halls from the early days of American higher education, the RA position has been formulated and further defined in duties and objectives relatively recently.

Universities have also created additional peer leadership roles in the area of academics. Seeking new and varied ways of educating students—beyond the traditional classroom—colleges have turned to students themselves to create and lead learning communities (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). These peer tutors provide a lower-level student aid in learning and working through the material being taught in the classroom (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). These students assist others in their academic pursuit and function as a partner who is there to not only help them with the material, but also to encourage them to continue working hard. These types of relationships can play an important role in a student’s retention and persistence (Harmon, 2006). As a result, colleges and universities have sought more areas where they can deploy this type of model.

While peer leaders find their origin in residence life and orientation programs, there are a host of other areas where peer leaders are utilized today (Bunting & Williams, 2017). Emphasis continues to be given to the power of peer relationships as a vital means for supporting students and helping them outside of the classroom (Harmon, 2006). Today, students are serving in peer leadership roles in judicial affairs, student activities, counseling centers, advising programs,
student organizations, and others (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Skipper & Keup, 2017). Additionally, data indicates an increasing number of institutions are using peer leaders in academic contexts, especially where tutoring and advising are present (Bunting & Williams, 2017). The prevalence of these roles on college campuses has sparked research on what exactly a peer leader is and what benefits come from serving in this role.

**Definition of peer leadership.** It is widely documented that peers can have an incredible effect on human development, especially in education, and most student development theories emphasize the impact of peers in the maturation process (Shook & Keup, 2012). The importance of this understanding has led to colleges and universities leveraging peers to further the educational development of other students. Peer leaders are defined as “students who have been selected, trained and designated by a campus authority to offer educational services to their peers” (Newton & Ender, 2010, p. 6). These educational services are intentionally designed to help the student achieve their own educational goals as well as the institution’s (Newton & Ender, 2010).

Peer leadership is built upon the theory of involvement developed by Astin (1999) (Wooten, Hunt, LeDuc, & Poskus, 2012). Student involvement is “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1999, p. 518). Thus, the student who spends a large amount of time studying, remaining on campus, and participating in extracurricular activities is more highly involved than the student who studies infrequently, only comes to campus for classes, and does not participate in extracurricular activities. The theory postulates that the more a student is involved in various aspects of campus life, the greater the likelihood of educational growth and persistence (Astin, 1999). Therefore,
the student leader, by virtue of their involvement on campus, has a high likelihood of growth and persistence.

Furthermore, Astin (1993) asserts that a student’s involvement with peers is vital to the educational process. In fact, evidence demonstrates that the single greatest impact on a student in their college years is not their professors or academic material, but their peer group (Astin 1993). This supports the notion that the more a student is involved, the higher their chance of experiencing growth. For if a student is involved in extracurriculars or campus life in general, they are likely going to find peers with whom they form strong relationships. Those relationships connect them to campus, increasing their chance at persistence.

These elements of the theory of involvement play out in a couple of ways with peer leaders. First, research shows that students desire personal support from mentors who are one to three years older than themselves, rather than students their own age or faculty and staff (Harmon, 2006). Pairing this with the theory of involvement, it is clear that there is a significant benefit to the peer leader role on college campuses. These roles connect students to themselves and other students, thereby increasing their involvement on campus and the probability of growth and persistence. Secondly, because the peer leader is serving on the campus, and is therefore connected, the peer leader himself or herself also has a greater chance of growth and persistence.

**Benefits of peer leadership.** The current proliferation of peer leadership programs demonstrates the importance of the role on college and university campuses today (Skipper & Keup, 2017). Consequently, there must be benefits to the institution, at the very least. Yet, it can also be expected that there are benefits to the student being served and the peer leader.

**Benefits to the institution.** There are several benefits that peer leaders provide to the institution. The first major benefit comes in the financial realm. Looking for alternative
approaches or methods to educate and develop students is a task most colleges and universities are consistently engaging in, especially as budgets have been reduced and student populations have grown (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Accordingly, one primary benefit administrators look for in utilizing peer leaders is budget relief. By utilizing students as peer leaders to meet the demands of a larger institution or budget cuts in staffing, colleges and universities hope to keep their expenses lower than they could otherwise have managed (Shook & Keup, 2012). Student paraprofessionals provide a cost-efficient way for institutions to serve their students and maintain a high quality for the program; with peer leaders, faculty and staff are more able to implement broad interventions and conduct large events without needing to hire additional full-time employees (Shook & Keup, 2012). Thus, the budget efficiencies that peer leaders provide is an important benefit provided for the colleges and universities that employ them.

Peer leaders are useful to institutions in providing academic support and strengthening academic programs (Firth, May, & Pocklington, 2017). Peer leadership programs help to create quality learning environments for everyone; for example, as college campuses continue to diversify, peer leadership programs are able encourage differentiation and individualization between students (Topping, Buchs, Duran, & van Keer, 2017). They can do this by ensuring that peer leaders are paired with people that are from a different background than those they are working with. Peer learning programs view diversity and differences between students as an opportunity to learn (Topping et al., 2017). So, the institution can leverage the benefit of diversity to increase the quality of the education that they are able to give to students.

Another benefit that institutions gain from employing peer leaders is that of communication; peer leaders are perfectly placed to both disseminate information to students and relay feedback to the offices providing student support (Shook & Keup, 2012). Having an
intermediary for communication can provide a substantial benefit to institutions, as it allows them to get information out quickly. In addition, student leaders can be used to receive feedback in a less formal manner than scheduling specific assessment sessions allow. This is possible because of the peer leader’s relative proximity to students, typically strong communication skills, and positions as role models (Russell & Skinkle, 1990). So, utilizing student leaders provides a robust communication structure that institutions would otherwise lack.

Increased persistence and completion are additional benefits that institutions gain from employing peer leaders (Shook & Keup, 2012). And this occurs with both the student leader and the students that they serve; being a peer leader connects students with others in the program and with other students on campus (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). As mentioned above, connections to campus and engagement in campus activities are large factors in student involvement that leads to increased student persistence (Astin, 1999). The same is also true in the reverse; the student-to-student interaction associated with peer leadership connects the non-leader to the campus and increases their likelihood of persistence as well (Shook & Keup, 2012). Thus, the peer leadership program benefits the institution by increasing the retention for both the peer leader and the traditional student.

A final benefit to the institution from peer leader programs is more engaged alumni and financial contributors in the future (Shook & Keup, 2012). The responsibilities that peer leaders are given allow them to practice their leadership skills and further understand the complexities of the world for which they are preparing (Wooten et al., 2012). These skills peer leaders develop as part of the program lead to a deeper knowledge of themselves, causing them to be more prepared for the work force (Harmon, 2006; Shook & Keup, 2012). All of this works together to create an alumnus who is more likely to be engaged with the campus after graduation through
service and financial support (Shook & Keup, 2012). So, the benefits to the institution are both present for the short-term and long-term.

**Benefits to the residential student.** The vital purpose of peer leadership roles is to provide support and services to other students on the campus; due to this, the students that peer leaders work with should be the primary recipient of benefits associated with employing the positions (Shook & Keup, 2012). Yet, little research has evaluated the benefits received by the students being led. There are, however, two major benefits that have been uncovered by the research conducted thus far.

At its most basic level, the role of peer leader represents formal, informed, and experienced students as agents to help their peers in the socialization process (Russel & Skinkle, 1990). Consequently, the first major benefit for the student is that of community (Shook & Keup, 2012). One of the primary reasons that students sign up to serve as peer leaders is their desire to help provide other students experiences similar to those that the peer leader received (Starbuck & Bell, 2017). The peer leader connects with the individuals they work with and provide support, often helping them connect with other students in the process. While this occurs in a very broad and general way on the college campus, it also occurs within more specific groups.

Peer leadership provides an important opportunity for connection and relationship development among specific groups in the college community, especially those among underrepresented or high-risk populations (Shook & Keup, 2012). For example, Davis (2010) found that a student’s peers, predominantly those of their role models, played a unique role in the transition and success of first-generation college students. Yet, this benefit is not just prevalent in first-generation students. In one study, first-year nursing students reported that their peer leaders were instrumental in helping them transition to college and discover what they were capable of—
both as a nursing student and as a college student in general (Miller et al, 2019). Subsequently, the community benefits to the students who are mentored or led by their peers are of significant value in these programs.

Another aspect to community and relationships that are developed as a result of peer leadership programs is the advice and guidance that mentees often receive. Schmidt and Faber (2016) report that this guidance was a major benefit that students receiving mentorship reported, stating it was important to them to be able to discuss their issues in a space that was created for that purpose. This guidance creates a role model relationship, where the student is able to process their circumstances and seek guidance from their peer leader (Miller et al, 2019). Giving students a place to voice their concerns and aspirations with someone who is close to their own situation only further cements the community created in these programs. Additionally, peer leaders help students develop skills that they need to succeed; skills such as time management, goal setting, and action planning are all skills that can be built in the student with the aid of a peer leader (Firth et al., 2017).

A further benefit of peer leadership programs is the resourcing and referring that peer leaders offer to the students with whom they are involved (Shook & Keup, 2012). In both positive and negative situations, the peer leader can help to connect the student to various resources, opportunities, and university personnel (Miller et al, 2019). On the positive side, a student can be connected with opportunities that will expand their educational growth and development.

On the negative side, a student who experiences a crisis may be adversely affected in their college journey; the crisis can lead to emotional or physical damage and may result in a student choosing to leave the college or university (Shook & Keup, 2012). Thus, peer leaders are
beneficial as resourcing agents because of their training, knowledge, accessibility, and proximity to the student (Newton & Ender, 2010). Because of these factors, the referral process is often more intuitive and proactive among peers because the peer leaders are on the front lines and may see problems in other students well before faculty or staff (Sharkin, Plageman, & Mangold, 2003). When a problematic behavior or attitude is seen by a peer leader, they are in a prime position to refer and resource the student to the appropriate place on campus. This shortens the time it takes for a student to get the help they need to whether the crisis they are experiencing. This role provides the student with essential assistance when they may need it the most.

Additionally, students being led often see other tangible benefits in the assistance that they receive from the peer leader; for example, research has shown higher rates of obtaining external research funding, publication rates, and retention for those being mentored by other students (Schmidt & Faber, 2016). All of these benefits demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of peer leadership programs and the advantages they provide to those being led.

**Benefits to the peer leader.** While there are benefits from peer leader programs gained by the institution and the student being served, there are also benefits that gained by the peer leaders themselves. These benefits can be summarized in four main outcome areas: undergraduate experiences, skills development, employability, and academic performance (van der Meer, Skalicky, & Speed, 2019).

In the area of undergraduate experiences, several of the benefits to the peer leader are not unlike those experienced by the students that are being served. In one study, peer leaders indicated that a benefit they received was developing friendships themselves (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Student leaders, by virtue of their role working with students, develop new relationships with those students, further connecting them to the college campus. Another study demonstrated
that peer leaders experience gains in their knowledge of campus resources, connection to the university, desire to persist, and other areas (Shook & Keup, 2012; van der Meer et al., 2019). Increased interaction with faculty and staff is another benefit that student leaders gain from their service (Young, Hoffman, & Reinhardt, 2019).

Skills development represents another major area of benefit for the peer leader. Peer leaders report increases in skills related to time management, study habits, planning, and organization (Harmon, 2006; Shook & Keup, 2012; Skipper & Keup, 2017; van der Meer et al., 2019). Furthermore, development of communication skills is often highlighted as a benefit to peer leadership programs (Firth et al., 2017; Young et al., 2019). The expectations of peer leaders, their busy schedule, and their experiences all play a role in the development of these various skills, creating a tangible benefit for the student leaders.

Employability is a third area of benefit for those who serve as peer leaders. One study found that building professional relationships at work, creating innovative approaches to a task, analyzing a problem from a new perspective, and other skills were specific occupational proficiencies that are developed in peer leaders (van der Meer et al., 2019). Another study found that students gained experience in event planning and coordination (Walters & Kanak, 2016). In addition, peer leaders have reported that they learned valuable career-related leadership skills from serving as a peer leader (Harmon, 2006). For example, working with a team is a skill developed as a peer leader that is helpful for individuals’ careers (Firth et al., 2017). Being a peer leader adds a level of complexity to a college student’s life. An individual who works to continue to be a successful student and peer leader gains valuable experience and occupational skills that will help them in the workplace. Overall, research clearly indicates the benefits to the employability skill set that peer leader gains through their service.
A fourth benefit for student leaders is academic confidence, not to be confused with academic performance. While research has consistently shown that academic performance is a benefit experienced, it typically ranks far below all other areas of benefit (van der Meer et al., 2019; Shook & Keup, 2012). However, the research has often focused on the academic skills gained—such as writing, critical thinking, and study skills—and not on actual measures of performance (Young et al., 2019; Skipper & Keup, 2017). Largely, while students see the skills developed as peer leader contributing to their academic success, research has shown that peer leadership roles have no bearing on actual academic performance measures (Skipper & Keup, 2017). Yet, research has also shown that students’ experiences in leadership roles provide a greater sense of self-confidence or self-efficacy; in other words, they are more confident in their identify as a member of the academic community who is able to achieve their goals (Young et al., 2019). Thus, while academic performance measures may not specifically be impacted, the skills related to academics and the confidence of the student are increased by their service as a peer educator.

The last benefit does not fit into the main four benefits seen but is still worth mentioning. Research has also shown that spiritual growth is a benefit of peer leadership programs, when the programs are faith based (Starbuck et al., 2017). This is characterized by an increased reliance on God and an increased motivation to pray (Starbuck et al., 2017). This could be due a feeling of inadequacy a student leader may feel as they seek to help other people navigate their challenges. The experiences of students in these programs create a shift that causes growth in many areas and skills—even in academics, and spiritual life.

**Risks of peer leadership.** While there are many benefits associated with peer leadership, there are a couple of risks that emerge, as well. The first risk is that of over commitment; there is
a careful balance that must be attained between a student’s own personal tasks and their role as a student leader (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). It is important for faculty and staff working with peer leaders to be aware of this risk, as peer leaders have reported that their primary role as a student sometimes gets lost (Connolly, 2017). As a result, the risk is that they will be seen only for their benefit to the institution or the mentee, which can lead to a perceived imbalance in their responsibilities.

Another risk seen in peer leadership programs is overdependence of the student toward the student leader; essentially, students can progress in the relationship with their mentor to the unhealthy point where they cannot accomplish anything without the mentor (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). These two risks underscore the possibility of burnout for the student leader. As they are pressed for time or feel overextended by their commitment, it is possible that burnout begins to become a factor in their lives. Furthermore, while the student’s role is predominately academic, some research has demonstrated that serving as a peer leader may actually have a negative effect on a student’s grade point average (van der Meer et al., 2019). Thus, while there are many benefits gained by the institution, student, and peer leader, there are also risks that must be considered.

**Related Literature**

The following section will present a review of literature related to the importance of the RA role, benefits and risks to that role, and indicators of RA burnout.

**The Resident Assistant Role**

Resident assistants (RAs) are among the first students to arrive on campus at the beginning of every semester and are among the last to leave at the end of the semester (Bliming, 2010). This fact underscores the importance of the role on today’s college and university
campuses: RAs are expected to be connected to the students on their floors, often serving as a first point of contact for a student with a question or in distress. This close connection, along with the wide range of responsibilities for the role, lends the position to “being one of the most comprehensive roles across student affairs divisions in colleges and universities” (Stoner & Zhang, 2017, p. 30). The very nature of the position brings to mind the question of whether student affairs divisions of schools could adequately function if they no longer employed RAs.

**The duties of resident assistants.** Although housing and residence life professionals have been utilizing RAs for several decades, the role has changed tremendously over the years (Boone, 2018; Jaeger & Caison, 2006). The challenges the world faces regarding drug use, mental health issues, and diversity have only served to further add complexity to the responsibilities asked of students who serve in these roles (Boone, 2018). These responsibilities create many roles that RAs must fulfill simultaneously.

RAs must counsel and connect students to university services, act as role models, and help them assimilate into the campus community (Manata, DeAngelis, Paik, & Miller, 2017). They must function as problem solver, conflict mediator, group facilitator, and administrator (Bliming, 2010). And additionally, RAs must, at times, identify students at risk and refer them to the appropriate campus resources (Stoner & Zhang, 2017). The myriad of responsibilities and roles comprising the RA position make it one of vital importance. Yet, the weight of these responsibilities also creating stress for these students who are simultaneously trying to progress through their own degrees.

**Successful resident assistants.** The many different responsibilities of RAs, which are often in conflict with one another, can lead to role ambiguity and negative performance (Berg & Stoner, 2016). RAs can be overwhelmed by the various hats they are asked to wear and can find
it confusing when one of their roles comes into direct conflict with another. For example, RAs are asked to be both a role model and a policy enforcer (Manata et al., 2017). What, then, does a RA feel when they must enforce a campus or residence hall policy with a student whom they have developed a relationship with as a role model and friend? There is a difference between modeling a behavior to others and actively confronting and issuing discipline to a peer. This is a primary reason that the RA position is one that requires intentional development and execution to be successful.

One might expect that grade point average (GPA) is connected with performance; the assumption being that the effective RA, who manages their time well and meets expectations, keeps enough time set aside to complete their schoolwork. Yet, GPA has not been shown to have a predictive relationship with outstanding performance of RA responsibilities (Jaeger & Caison, 2006). Thus, the successful RA is not necessarily the one with a higher GPA.

Success in the position is built upon a few different facets. Successful RAs are ones that effectively manage their time, communicate well, get to know their residents, plan effective programs, appropriately enforce policies and procedures, manage conflict, and remain successful students themselves (Berg & Stoner, 2016). With all these factors affecting performance, it can be difficult to find one overarching quality that demonstrates or predicts performance. However, research has shown that emotional intelligence is closely related to the performance of RAs (Wu & Stemler, 2008). RAs with a higher emotional intelligence are more equipped to handle the situations and concerns of the position and are more likely to be rated well by their students (Wu & Stemler, 2008).
Benefits and Risks to the Resident Assistant Role

As one type of peer leader often employed on college campuses, RAs can expect to attain many of the benefits that are associated with those roles (Shook & Keup, 2012). The undergraduate experience, employability skills, and academic skills gained by these student leaders are also experienced by RAs and are legitimate outcomes of serving in the RA role (van der Meer et al., 2019). It can be argued that these benefits give the RA an advantage in entering the workforce after graduation. However, research has shown that RAs are least likely of all peer leaders to experience gains in academic measurements and could even experience a negative effect on academic success (Shook & Keup, 2017). Of the benefits seen by peer leaders, the least significant is in the realm of academics, with a noteworthy number of peer leaders claiming that they saw a negative impact in their GPA due to their peer leadership service (van der Meer et al., 2019). Furthermore, Skipper and Keup (2017) indicated that a negative impact on academic performances was mentioned more often by RAs than other peer leaders.

Of particular concern is the possibility that RAs can lose their identity as a student (Connolly, 2017). The RA role requires a lot of balancing and ensuring adequate time for their own studies is vital. Yet, this risk can also be turned into an advantage as RAs learn to prioritize their time and make appropriate adjustments (Connolly, 2017). While the potential for negative impacts of the peer leadership role is a concern for RAs, there are certainly some substantial benefits.

Indicators of Resident Assistant Burnout

The RA position has the potential for incredible value for every student who serves in the role. The leadership experience gained provides “on the job” training that is hard to replicate; however, the role can be challenging for the student (Lynch, 2017). Unfortunately, the literature
available is scarce on how the role affects the student and what can be done to monitor and prevent unhealthy situations (Lynch, 2017).

Yet, it cannot be disputed that many RAs battle burnout from time to time. The varied responsibilities and expectations of the position demand that the RA is “on duty” consistently and nearly always ready to step in and serve their students and the institution for which they perform their duties. This level of availability and potentially consistent lack of control can create an environment where burnout can emerge. The RA must be available to their students at all times, and their plans for each day may quickly be negated as they encounter a variety of situations. The high demands of the responsibilities given to RAs make these particular students prone to the burnout phenomenon (Paladino, Murray, Newgent, & Gohn, 2005). Thus, research into burnout in RAs is vital.

Research on RA burnout reached its zenith in the 1980s, but precious little in this phenomenon has been done since that time (Stoner, 2017). Additionally, the work in this realm over the years has often offered conflicting results and findings (Lynch, 2017). Where one study finds one result, another finds results in direct contradiction. It is vital that research continue to discover what indicators may be used in anticipating which RAs may experience burnout. Many of the aspects of individual RAs, along with their placement, have been investigated as potential indicators of burnout, but research still does not provide a solid roadmap to predicting its likelihood.

**Gender.** Up to this point, as with burnout as a general concept, the most investigated indicator of burnout in RAs has been gender (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Heatherington, Oliver, & Phelps, 1989; Stoner, 2017). There are likely several reasons for this reality. First, gender is perhaps the easiest factor that can be used to separate RAs into
groups for independent variables. Second, most colleges and universities are coed and will have both genders serving as RAs. However, it is interesting to note that although many studies have looked at this factor, almost all of them have found conflicting results with one another (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Heatherington et al., 1989; Stoner, 2017).

Some of the earliest research undertaken to determine differences in burnout levels by gender was done by Fuehrer and McGonagle (1988) and Heatherington et al. (1989). Both of these early studies reported results that women were more likely to experience burnout than men (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Heatherington et al., 1989). Yet, just ten years later Hardy and Dodd (1998) were unsuccessful in replicating the results achieved by the two previous endeavors. Much can change over a ten-year period, but the fact that conflicting results were found brings doubt to the idea that women are more susceptible to burnout.

A further study seven years later once again showed that there was a difference in burnout by gender (Paladino et al., 2005). Yet the finding of this research demonstrated that males were the ones that were more likely to experience one of the areas of burnout (Paladino et al., 2005). This was in conflict not only with the previous research that stated gender did not play a role in burnout, but also in the research that showed that females were more likely to experience burnout than males. Another ten years had passed when Stoner (2017) set out to update the information available regarding burnout in RAs. His research demonstrated, once again, that there was no difference in any of the burnout dimensions between male and female RAs (Stoner, 2017).

Nearly thirty years of research into the effect a RA’s gender has on burnout has led to wildly inconclusive results. At various times each gender has been demonstrated to be more susceptible to burnout, while at others no difference was seen. There can be many reasons that
this discrepancy exists, but no decisive reasons have been discovered (Stoner, 2017). What is clear is that further research needs to be completed to determine the connection between gender and RA burnout.

**Job Performance.** When someone is burnt out, there are many affects that state has upon their life. It is possible that that the job performance of RAs who are experiencing a tough situation in life or are burnt out is negatively affected. Recognizing this, Nowack & Hanson (1983), sought to investigate whether a job performance rating and being in a state of burnout were connected. They discovered that RAs who were rated lower by their residents experienced the greatest amount of burnout (Nowack & Hanson, 1983). However, the researchers note that no causal relationship can be established from their evidence (Nowack & Hanson, 1983). Thus, while the information obtained through this particular study is interesting and helpful on a basic level, more research is necessary.

**Community size and makeup.** Another factor that has been frequently studied as an indicator of burnout is community size and makeup. There are many different ways that colleges and universities can structure their residence halls. Each type of residence hall structure used will bring its own unique challenges and problems to navigate (Benedict & Monloch, 1989). It is possible that the environment of the residence hall, along with the number of residents on the floor, could potentially cause differing levels of burnout among RAs.

Among the first researchers to evaluate this idea were Benedict and Monloch (1989), who investigated the differences between RAs in single-sex freshmen housing, single-sex upperclassmen housing, and coed upperclassmen housing. The results of their study found that RAs in freshmen-only housing experienced a higher rate of emotional exhaustion than the RAs in other locations (Benedict & Monloch, 1989). Nearly ten years later, Hardy & Dodd (1998)
reported similar findings when they, too, determined that RAs on freshmen floors reported higher emotional exhaustion and higher depersonalization scores for burnout.

Almost ten years after that, researchers found that RAs who serve on traditional residence halls were more likely to experience emotional exhaustion when compared to RAs in suite-style residence halls (Paladino, Muarry, Newgent, & Gohn, 2005). While this particular study viewed community makeup as more closely related to the building setup than the residents within them, they do note that the residents on traditional-style halls were typically first- and second-year students (Paladino et al., 2005).

Stoner (2017), seeking to update the literature on this subject, investigated burnout related to community makeup as well and found that there were no significant differences in depersonalization or emotional exhaustion between the types of residence halls RAs supervised. Yet, there was as statistically significant difference in the personal accomplishment subscale: RAs who served in balanced communities, halls with new students and upperclassmen, reported higher levels of personal accomplishment than RAs working in mostly freshmen halls (Stoner, 2017).

From these studies, it is apparent that residence hall makeup has some effect on burnout in RAs. However, it is difficult to use these results to determine a definite indicator of burnout for two major reasons. First, while some of the research is related directly to the students being supervised (e.g., freshmen-only halls), other research was focused on the building features (e.g., traditional versus suite-style). Secondly, several of the studies reported effects of these features on the emotional exhaustion subscale, while another reported differences on the personal accomplishment scale. Overall, it is difficult to interpret the differences between the results in
these studies because of these varying definitions of the residence hall makeups (Stoner, 2017). This proves to be problematic in using community makeup as an indicator of burnout in RAs.

**Job satisfaction and intent to return.** Job satisfaction and intent to return are two more factors that have been studied in relation to burnout in RAs on college and university campuses. RAs often sign up for a full year of service and may stay for multiple years; thus, understanding burnout’s relationship with job satisfaction and intent to return is vital (Stoner, 2017). This research found that RAs who intended to return the next year reported higher levels of personal accomplishment and lower levels of depersonalization (Stoner, 2017). In other words, RAs who intended to return were less burnt out than RAs who intended to leave the position. Furthermore, RAs who reported higher levels of job satisfaction also reported lower levels of burnout for each subscale (Stoner, 2017). Yet, as Stoner (2017) points out, these findings do not suggest causality (Stoner, 2017).

**Race.** From a review of the literature, one study that evaluated burnout in relation to the race of the RA demonstrated that there was a significant difference for non-Caucasians in the depersonalization subscale, experiencing more depersonalization than Caucasians (Paladino et al., 2005). In this study, Caucasians students were the predominate race in both the RA sample and the population of the school; because of this, it stands to reason that RAs of different races “may feel more isolated and alienated from residence hall students, RA staff, and university environment” (Paladino, Murray, Newgent, & Gohn, 2005, p. 24). Keeping this in mind in similar settings would provide beneficial to practitioners in similar situations.

**College or university size.** Finally, school size has also received attention in the past as a potential indicator of RA burnout. One study revealed that RAs at a mid-sized university in the South experienced more depersonalization than RAs at a large university in the southeastern
United States (Paladino et al., 2005). The researchers postulate that this could be due to the fact that the larger university had another level of supervision between the RAs and resident directors, providing more support for the RA (Paladino et al., 2005).

**Summary**

Burnout is a destructive state for individuals; it is characterized by a continual depletion of emotional energy, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The growth of research in this area has produced many studies that demonstrate the realities of burnout in individuals, often investigating factors related to the individual and workplace. Gender, level of education, grade point average, number of years in current position, workload, loss of control, and workplace environment have all been investigated as variables affecting burnout to some degree. Many of these factors are present and affect many groups and individuals, including RAs.

RAs play an important role on today’s college and university campuses. This role, with its 24-hour nature, leaves little real escape for the student to decompress and relax. This situation makes burnout a real concern in the life of an RA. While research was conducted on this issue in the 1980s, the topic has seen little further interest until recently. Additionally, the findings of the research, regarding what indicators there are for burnout, have been inconclusive and often at odds with each other. This reality continues with recent research contradicting, again, what has been seen in the past.

Several different studies—examining a variety of factors—have all, at one point or another, identified factors that seem to have influenced burnout in the population under investigation, or at the very least existed concurrently with burnout. Yet, those factors have varied widely from study to study, with little continuity. Thus, a gap in the literature exists.
Research into gender continues to produce mixed results. Grade point average (GPA) has not been investigated in connection with RA burnout, although a minimum GPA remains a requirement of the position at many institutions (Paladino et al., 2005). Furthermore, some evidence demonstrates the higher an individual’s level of education, the higher their chance of burnout. Again, no research has been done on whether RAs in undergraduate programs are less likely or more likely to burn out than RAs in graduate programs. Therefore, this study sought to bring clarification to the varying results on indicators of burnout by investigating whether biological sex, GPA, and program type affect RA burnout.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Resident assistants (RAs) serve important functions in the housing operations of college and university campuses, and the stress of the responsibilities they are asked to perform can—and often do—lead to burnout (Stoner, 2017). Yet, there is conflicting evidence regarding which RAs are more susceptible to burnout. Some studies have shown a difference based on gender, while others have detected no such difference. Additionally, no research has been performed that seeks to determine differences in chances of burnout between RAs based on grade point average (GPA) or enrollment in an undergraduate or graduate program. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether there is a difference in burnout rates between RAs based on biological sex, GPA, and program type. Understanding what factors may contribute to burnout in RAs is vital. For if colleges and universities are able to predict which RAs are more likely to experience burnout, training on avoiding burnout can be more directed, and perhaps prevent it from happening in the first place. This could, in the end, result in RAs who are healthier and persist in the responsibilities for a longer period of time. This chapter will cover the design of the study, detailing the research question and hypotheses, as well as the participants and setting, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis to be conducted.

Design

The design of this quantitative research was a nonexperimental causal-comparative between-subjects study. Quantitative research relies on the collection of data from samples and populations for statistical analysis and study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). This design was appropriate as this study collected data regarding RA burnout and conducted analysis on the
information. Furthermore, a nonexperimental design was chosen as no treatment or manipulation of the variables occurred (Warner, 2013).

The causal-comparative design chosen was appropriate because it seeks to investigate potential causes or consequences of the differences between two different groups or individuals (Rovai, Baker, & Ponton, 2014). This requires a between-subjects methodology, which was employed, seeking to identify differences between groups based on characteristics that are already present in the groups (Warner, 2013).

**Research Question**

**RQ:** Is there a difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between RAs based on biological sex, cumulative GPA, and program type?

**Hypotheses**

**H₀₁:** There is no statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between RAs based on biological sex.

**H₀₂:** There is no statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between RAs based on cumulative GPA.

**H₀₃:** There is no statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between RAs based on program type (undergraduate or graduate).

**Participants and Setting**

The participants of this study were gathered from the RAs at a large private university in the southeastern United States during the 2019-2020 academic year. The campus of the institution has a capacity of nearly 8,000 beds, 7,700 of which were occupied. There are 50 residence buildings, which are broken down into specific “residence halls” on the campus. There
are a variety of residence hall offerings on the campus: traditional-style housing with communal bathrooms, apartment-style housing, and individual-style housing options are all available. Each residence hall is supervised by one or two RAs.

RAs at the university are tasked with many different responsibilities. Administratively, they are asked to monitor the cleanliness and safety standards of the residence halls through weekly inspections, enforce and report violations of the university honor code, verify attendance at a biweekly university assembly, fill out various reports related to the administrative aspects of management of the residence halls, and conduct nightly curfew checks. However, their most important functions are those related to student development. They are asked to have intentional interactions with several residents a week, seeking help them grow and develop in one of six areas. Furthermore, they are responsible for residence hall events that promote community and growth and are asked to connect students to appropriate campus resources. Finally, they are the first point of contact for any student who is experiencing a crisis of any kind and are responsible for alerting professional staff or campus police in those situations.

Serving the students who live on the residence halls, there were a total of 248 RAs, 54% being female and 46% being male. The ethnic makeup of the team was 72% White, 3% African American, 5% Hispanic, 12% unreported, and 8% others. In this population, there were 95 RAs who had a cumulative GPA between 3.7 and 4.0, 70 RAs who had a cumulative GPA between 3.3 and 3.6, 38 RAs who had a cumulative GPA between 3.0 and 3.2, 17 RAs who had a cumulative GPA between 2.7 and 2.9, and eight RAs who had a cumulative GPA between 2.3 and 2.6. There were 14 sophomores, 41 juniors, 154 seniors, and 38 graduate students.
Table 3.1

Demographics of Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Sophomore</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Senior</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bio. Sex</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unreported</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>3.7-4.0</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3-3.6</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.0-3.2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.7-2.9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3-2.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RAs are selected in February of each year, for the following academic year. For example, RAs chosen to serve for the 2019-2020 academic year were chosen in February 2019. The sample was a convenience sample which was readily available to the researcher (Warner, 2013).

The sample size was comprised of all the RAs who responded to a survey sent to measure their burnout and submitted completed data. According to Warner (2013), the desired sample size for this study, for the multivariate analysis of variance, is 42-54 per group for a medium effect size with a statistical power of 0.7 at the 0.05 alpha level. A total of 139 RAs began the survey. 15 individuals did not complete the survey and the data for those entries was removed. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 124 total participants.
The sample was broken down into several groups, based on the criteria for the independent variables. The first grouping was based on biological sex. Male RAs numbered 49, and females 75.

The sample was also broken down according to their current cumulative GPAs. To determine the category ranges, GPAs were equated to the letter grade scale. Since A is the top grade available, the top range was be 3.7 to 4.0. From there, each category covered a full one point of GPA scores for each letter grade, in three categories; for example, B+, B, and B-. So, the categories for GPA were: A, 3.7 to 4.0; B+, 3.3 to 3.6; B, 3.0 to 3.2; B-, 2.7 to 2.9; C+, 2.3 to 2.6; C, 2.0 to 2.2; C-, 1.7 to 1.9; D+, 1.3 to 1.6; D, 1.0 to 1.2; D-, 0.7 to 0.9; F, < 0.7.

There were 67 RAs with GPAs between 3.7 and 4.0 (A), 35 RAs with GPAs between 3.3 and 3.6 (B+), 15 RAs with GPAs between 3.0 and 3.2 (B); 5 RAs with GPAs between 2.7 and 2.9 (B-); 1 RA with a GPA between 2.3 and 2.6 (C+), and 1 RA with a GPA between 1.7 and 1.9 (C-). Because there is a minimum GPA requirement of 2.5 to serve as an RA, RAs with GPAs below a 2.5 may be placed on academic warning or probation, accounting for their inclusion in these GPA scores.

23 of the RAs with GPAs between 3.7 and 4.0 (A) were male and 44 were female. Of the RAs with a GPA between 3.3 and 3.6 (B+) 13 were male and 22 were female. 8 of the RAs with GPAs between 3.0 and 3.2 (B) were male and 7 were female. 3 of the RAs with GPAs between 2.7 and 2.9 (B-) were male and 2 were female. The one RA with a GPA between 2.3 and 2.6 (C+) was a male, as was the RA with a GPA between 1.7 and 1.9 (C-).

Finally, program type served as the final separator for independent variables. There were 97 RAs in an undergraduate program and 27 RAs in a graduate program. Undergraduate RAs
were made up of 35 males and 62 females. 14 males and 13 females comprised the graduate group.

Table 3.2

*Overall Demographics of Final Sample Population*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident Assistants</td>
<td>n = 124</td>
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<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (3.7 to 4.0)</td>
<td>n = 67</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+ (3.3 to 3.6)</td>
<td>n = 35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (3.0 to 3.2)</td>
<td>n = 15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B- (2.7 to 2.9)</td>
<td>n = 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+ (2.3 to 2.6)</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C- (1.7 to 2.0)</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Type</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>n = 97</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>n = 27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N = 124</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrumentation**

There were multiple instruments or pieces of data collected for this study: the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey and demographic data regarding RAs’ biological sex, GPA, and program type.

**Maslach Burnout Inventory**

The instrument being used to measure burnout is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). See Appendix A for a copy. This tool was originally introduced in 1981 when there was significant interest in burnout but little in the way of empirical research; the authors recognized the need for a validated and reliable tool to measure this phenomenon empirically (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Since that time, several versions of the MBI have been developed,
providing researchers with the opportunity to select the most appropriate version for their research (Maslach et al., 1996). The specific version being used in this study is the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (MBI-ES). The MBI-ES requires a license to be purchased for each use, which was completed after approval for research to be conducted was given from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University.

Once the MBI became known to the research community in the education field, concerns about teacher burnout prompted the adaptation of the survey (Maslach et al., 1996). Because of that, the creators adapted the original MBI, now called the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey, to design a version to better fit the educational realm. The adaptation’s primary adjustment was the replacement of the word “recipient” in the original survey with “student” in the educator’s version (MBI-ES).

The MBI-ES is designed to capture the feelings of burnout where professionals spend a large amount of time working with their students (Maslach et al., 1996). The instrument provides a quantitative measure of burnout in the participant; thus, it was an appropriate tool for this study. The MBI-ES has widely been used to ascertain burnout among teachers, administrators, teaching assistants, counselors and health professionals who work in school settings, and others (Maslach et al., 1996). Additionally, several other research articles have used the main tool, or its alternatives, to measure burnout in RAs (Stoner, 2017; Paladino, Murray, Newgent, & Gohn, 2005; Hardy & Dodd, 1998).

The MBI-ES is made up of 22 questions presented with a seven-point scale, answers ranging from zero, “Never”, to six, “Every day” (Maslach et al., 1996). The description for each numerical answer is: Never = 0, A few times a year or less = 1, Once a month or less = 2, A few times a month = 3, Once a week = 4, A few times a week = 5, Every day = 6 (Maslach et al.,
The construct validity of the MBI-ES test is well documented in the research literature; most validity studies replicated a similar three-factor structure found in other human service workers (Iwanicki & Schwab, 1981; Schaufeli & van Dierendonck, 1993; Worley, Vassar, Wheeler & Barnes, 2008). Many studies have assessed the relationship between the three burnout scales and different aspects of the work experience (Maslach et al., 1996). For example, consistent with other MBI tests, role conflict, work overload, classroom climate, support from peers, supervision and others have been shown to have a negative relationship with the burnout scales (Maslach et al, 1996). Furthermore, student behavior in the classroom is consistently shown to be related to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 1996).

The MBI-ES does not provide a full-scale measurement of burnout, but rather provides a measurement on the three subscales identified with feelings of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 1996). Each of the subscales should be calculated independently and it is not appropriate to combine the three subscales into one burnout score (Maslach et al., 1996). Because there is not a full scale and each subscale functions independently, reliability scores are given for each subscale below.

**Emotional exhaustion.** The first of the subscales for the MBI-ES is the emotional exhaustion subscale. Emotional exhaustion is the feeling of being overextended and exhausted by one’s work (Maslach et al., 1996). As emotional energies are drained, the feelings of being tired and fatigued begin to develop as the initial aspect of burnout (Maslach et al., 1996). If these feelings become chronic, educators find that they can no longer work with students as well as they once could (Maslach et al., 1996).
There are nine total questions for the emotional exhaustion subscale, each containing a seven-point frequency scale. The scale ranges from zero, “Never,” to six, “Everyday”; the high score for the emotional exhaustion subscale is 54, with the low score being zero. Higher scores on this subscale indicate a higher degree of burnout. The emotional exhaustion scale is both a valid and reliable test. Cronbach’s alpha for emotional exhaustion has been seen to be 0.90, 0.88, and 0.87 in research studies (Maslach et al., 1996). Additionally, a test-retest value for this scale is 0.60 (Maslach et al., 1996).

**Depersonalization.** The depersonalization subscale measures the aspect of unfeeling and impersonal responses toward students (Maslach et al., 1996). When burnout begins to set in, educators begin to lose their positive feelings toward students, leading to the display of indifferent or negative attitudes (Maslach et al., 1996). When this occurs, the educator often exhibits cold or distant postures, physically distances themselves, and psychologically withdraws from the students (Maslach et al., 1996).

For the depersonalization scale there are 5 total questions, again on the seven-point frequency scale. The answers given range from zero, “Never,” to six, “Everyday.” The low score on this scale is zero and the high score is 30; and like with the emotional exhaustion scale, the higher the score, the higher the degree of burnout in the participant. Cronbach’s alphas for the depersonalization scale have been seen to be 0.76, 0.74, and 0.76 (Maslach et al., 1996). In addition, the test-retest score for depersonalization was 0.54 (Maslach et al., 1996).

**Personal accomplishment.** The personal accomplishment subscale measures the feelings of competence and success in one’s work with students (Maslach et al., 1996). Most educators enter the field of education to help students learn and grow; thus, when educators feel that they are no longer helping students’ development, burnout begins to take hold (Maslach et al., 1996).
The personal accomplishment scale consists of eight total questions. The scale remains the same as with the other scales, ranging from zero, “Never,” to six, “Everyday.” With this scale, there is a low score of zero and a high score of 48. However, in contrast to the previous two scales, the lower the scores on this scale, the higher the degree of burnout. The personal accomplishment scale has variously demonstrated a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.76, 0.72, and 0.84 (Maslach et al., 1996). Additionally, test-retest properties have been seen to be 0.57 (Maslach et al., 1996).

**Demographic Information**

In addition to the MBI-ES, demographic data was used to break down the subjects for the independent variables. This data was requested from official university databases and was sent to the Dissertation Committee Chair. The Dissertation Committee Chair redacted all identifying information before sharing it with the researcher; at no time did the researcher have access to any identifying data for any of the participants in this study.

The first piece of information to be obtained was biological sex, which was reported as either “male” or “female.” This step is consistent with previous research that has been conducted on burnout in RAs based on their gender (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Heatherington, Oliver, & Phelps, 1989; Stoner, 2017).

Additionally, the cumulative GPA of each member of the sample population was obtained. This is similar to a design that was used by Maroto, Snelling, and Linck (2014). GPA is viewed as the level of academic achievement that a student has obtained in all of their previous classes at this particular level, combined (Seibert, Bauer, May, & Fincham, 2017). GPA is calculated as a total average of grade points earned by the student in all of their credit hours attempted (Seibert et al., 2017). Other research has used this variable in connection to burnout in
college students (Pouratashi, 2018; Saville, Bureau, Eckenrode, & Maley, 2018; Seibert et al., 2017).

Finally, as research has shown that those with a higher degree of education may experience more burnout, the level of program RAs are enrolled in was also included (Smullens, 2015). The program levels were either undergraduate or graduate, consistent with other research that has been done with educational level as a variable (Nuri, Demirok, & Direktor, 2017). This created two groups for the researcher to use for an independent variable.

**Procedures**

The researcher requested and received approval from university administration to conduct the research on burnout in RAs though the administration of the MBI-ES (See Appendix B). Upon receiving the appropriate permissions, the researcher secured the approval of the IRB (see Appendix C).

The independent variables—biological sex, GPA, and program type—were collected from the university databases, as described above under Demographic Information. For the dependent variables, a list of the email addresses of all 248 RAs was obtained and sent to the researcher’s Dissertation Committee Chair, who sent the survey electronically. The electronic survey (See Appendix D) was sent to all RAs. RAs were asked to report their university identification number, so their responses could be matched to the demographic data. RAs were given three weeks to complete the survey before the results were compiled and analyzed. A reminder was sent each week, to encourage those who may not have completed the survey to do so.

The MBI-ES (See Appendix A) was the content of the online survey sent to all 248 RAs. In the text of the email sent with the survey, the participants were informed that the survey was
being sent by this author, through his Dissertation Committee Chair, who was interested in RA attitudes regarding their responsibilities. While the RAs had knowledge that the research was being conducted by this author, they were informed that the researcher would not have access to the information related to specific individuals who completed the survey or not. This step was taken to ensure candid responses from the participants, since the researcher is the department head for the office for which they perform their duties. No identifiable information was released to the researcher. The data was channeled through Qualtrics to the researcher’s Dissertation Committee Chair. All identifying material was redacted prior to the data being sent to the researcher.

Additionally, the authors of the instrument suggest presenting the instrument as a “survey of job-related attitudes” with no mention of burnout (Maslach et al., 1996). This is in an effort to mitigate negative effects due to the participants’ beliefs or expectations regarding burnout (Maslach et al., 1996). Therefore, the participants were led to believe that the survey is for a measurement of their feelings regarding the role of RA.

The authors of the MBI-ES state that the instrument should be accompanied by clear instructions, even in an online format (Maslach et al., 1996). Thus, instructions were provided to the participants at the beginning of the survey, as well as an assurance that their participation in the survey was voluntary and that their answers would remain confidential. The instructions clearly encouraged honest answers and candidness.

Data from the survey (minus redacted identifying information) was compiled and stored on a password-protected cloud storage account that will remain in the sole possession of the researcher. Survey participants were asked to provide their email addresses for a chance to win one of two $100 Amazon gift cards. One drawing was completed for RAs at the undergraduate
level and one drawing was completed for RAs at the graduate level. The random selection was completed by the Dissertation Committee Chair and no identifying information was ever seen by the researcher. After the winners had been randomly drawn, the list of email addresses was permanently deleted by the Dissertation Committee Chair.

Data Analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for all data analysis in this study. After the data was collected it, was organized in Microsoft Excel, and the data for each dependent variable—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment—was calculated. After organization and calculation, the data was loaded into SPSS for analysis. Three separate multivariate analysis of variances (MANOVA) tests were run to test the research question for differences in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between RAs based on biological sex, cumulative GPA, and program type. This was appropriate as MANOVA is a test that evaluates an independent variable against multiple dependent variables (Rovai et al., 2014). Additionally, while it is possible to run several analyses of variance, it is preferable to run a MANOVA to guard against a Type I error (Warner, 2013).

A MANOVA was run for all three hypotheses. Data was screened for outliers, normality, and linearity. A Box and Whisker plot was used to screen for outliers, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine multivariate normality, and a scatterplot was used to ensure linearity between the dependent variables for each independent variable. Additionally, Levene’s Test for equality of variances was used to ensure equality of variance, and Box’s M checked for homogeneity of variance. Upon completion of all assumption testing, the researcher ran each MANOVA. Data was analyzed, utilizing Wilk’s Lambda, at the 0.05 level for a medium effect.
size, expressed as a partial eta squared. Because of a violation of the assumption of equality of variance and homogeneity of variance, Pillai’s trace was used for the analysis of the MANOVA for hypothesis two. This was done because of the unequal sizes in the sample groups; Pillai’s trace is more robust to violations of the homogeneity of variances (Warner, 2013). Finally, degrees of freedom and $F$-value were observed. None of the three MANOVAs were significant, consequently follow up testing was not required.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a difference in burnout scores among resident assistants based on biological sex, grade point average, and program type. The dependent variables in this nonexperimental causal-comparative study were emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment, measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) with biological sex, grade point average, and program type being the independent variables. A convenience sample of 248 resident assistants at a large university in the southeastern United States was utilized. Three multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) tests were conducted. This chapter provides the findings of the research, including the research question and hypotheses, descriptive statistics, and results of each test run.

The first MANOVA was utilized to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment based on the biological sex of the RAs. The researcher failed to reject the first null hypothesis utilizing Wilk’s $\Lambda$. Another MANOVA was run to analyze whether there was a statistically significant difference among RAs in the three subscales of the MBI-ES, based on GPA. Due to violations of equality of variance, Pillai’s Trace was preferred over Wilk’s $\Lambda$ and failed to reject the null hypothesis. Finally, a third MANOVA was performed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment among RAs based on their program type. Again, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis utilizing Wilk’s $\Lambda$. 
Research Question

RQ1: Is there a difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between RAs based on biological sex, cumulative GPA, and program type?

Null Hypotheses

H01: There is no statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between RAs based on biological sex.

H02: There is no statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between RAs based on cumulative GPA.

H03: There is no statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment between RAs based on program type.

Descriptive Statistics

The MBI-ES was sent to 248 individuals with a total of 124 RAs completing the survey, providing a response rate of 50%. All of the 124 completed surveys were usable (N = 124). Data was obtained from university databases that allowed the separation of the sample into categories for the independent variables. The first variable was biological sex; of the 124 total participants there were 49 males and 75 females. Next, the GPA of the participants was obtained and categorized, resulting in 67 participants in the A category, 35 in the B+ category, 15 in the B category, 5 in the B- category and 1 in each of the C+ and C- categories. MANOVA requires the samples in each cell to be larger than the number of independent variables (Warner, 2013). Thus, the categories of C+ and C- were omitted from testing. Finally, the program level of the RA was evaluated; 97 RAs were enrolled in an undergraduate program and 27 were enrolled in a graduate program. Three MANOVAs were run to test the research question; descriptive statistics for each hypothesis are displayed below.
Table 4.1

Demographics of Final Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident Assistants</td>
<td>n = 124</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (3.7 to 4.0)</td>
<td>n = 67</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+ (3.3 to 3.6)</td>
<td>n = 35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (3.0 to 3.2)</td>
<td>n = 15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B- (2.7 to 2.9)</td>
<td>n = 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>n = 97</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>n = 27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N = 124</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Null Hypothesis One

Null hypothesis one states that there is no difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment among RAs based on their biological sex.

Descriptive statistics for this hypothesis are provided in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

MBI-ES Subscales by Biological Sex and Overall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Male (n = 49)</th>
<th>Female (n = 75)</th>
<th>Total (n = 124)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>m</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Exhaustion</td>
<td>18.35</td>
<td>8.071</td>
<td>20.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalization</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>4.882</td>
<td>7.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Accomplishment</td>
<td>37.27</td>
<td>5.431</td>
<td>37.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Null Hypothesis Two

The second null hypothesis posits that there is no difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment among RAs based on GPA. Descriptive statistics for this hypothesis are displayed in Table 4.3. Statistics are not displayed for categories C+ and C-, as there was only one participant for each of those groups.

Table 4.3

*MBI-ES Subscales by GPA and Overall*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>A (n = 67)</th>
<th>B+ (n = 35)</th>
<th>B (n = 15)</th>
<th>B- (n = 5)</th>
<th>Total (n = 124)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>m</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19.67</td>
<td>7.355</td>
<td>21.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalization</td>
<td>8.24</td>
<td>5.560</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>3.232</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>5.928</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Accomplishment</td>
<td>37.33</td>
<td>5.520</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>4.015</td>
<td>37.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37.87</td>
<td>4.103</td>
<td>37.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Null Hypothesis Three

The third null hypothesis states that there is no difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment among RAs based on program type. Descriptive statistics for this hypothesis are presented in Table 4.4.
Table 4.4

MBI-ES Subscales by Program Type and Overall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Undergraduate (n = 97)</th>
<th>Graduate (n = 27)</th>
<th>Total (n = 124)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>m</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalization</td>
<td>7.31</td>
<td>5.034</td>
<td>7.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Accomplishment</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>5.001</td>
<td>38.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Data Screening

The data from the surveys was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). MANOVAs were run to test the research question, one for each of the three null hypotheses.

Null Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one investigated whether there is a difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment based on RAs’ biological sex. The data was visually screened for inconsistencies and any unusual scores, and a Box and Whisker plot was utilized to screen for any outliers, revealing none. Several assumptions tests were then conducted. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run to check for normality, which found that the data was normally distributed ($p > 0.05$) for both biological sexes in emotional exhaustion (males, $p = 0.200$; females, $p = 0.200$), depersonalization for males ($p = 0.082$), and personal accomplishment for females ($p = 0.200$). However, normality was violated ($p < 0.05$) in depersonalization for females ($p = 0.030$) and personal accomplishment for males ($p = 0.029$).
MANOVA is considered robust to violations of normality; thus, the researcher proceeded with the test (Warner, 2013). Levene’s Test was utilized to test for equality of variance, which was met ($p > 0.05$). Finally, homogeneity of variance-covariance was met, assessed by utilizing Box’s M test ($p = 0.586$).

Table 4.5

*Tests of Normality for Biological Sex*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Biological Sex</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Exhaustion</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalization</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Accomplishment</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.082</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With all assumptions found tenable, the MANOVA was run with data being analyzed with a statistical power of 0.7 at the .05 alpha level for a medium effect size. There was not a statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment based on RAs’ biological sex, $F(3, 120) = 1.074, p = 0.363$; Wilk’s $\Lambda = 0.974$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.026$. Since a significant difference was not found, post hoc testing was not required.

**Null Hypothesis Two**

The second MANOVA investigated whether there is a difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment based on RAs’ GPA. The categories C+ and C- for the dependent variable only included one response for each category. The minimum sample size for each cell in a MANOVA is more than the total of the dependent variables (Warner, 2013). As there were six dependent variables, the categories of C+ and C-
were omitted from the test resulting in four distinct groups for the dependent variable. Data screening occurred prior to running the test. No inconsistencies or abnormalities were detected with visual screening and a Box and Whisker plot demonstrated that no outliers existed.

Additionally, assumptions were found tenable. Normality was evaluated with the Kilmogorov-Smirnov test and all categories for emotional exhaustion, A ($p = 0.200$), B+ ($p = 0.200$), B ($p = 0.200$, B- ($p = 0.200$), and personal accomplishment, A ($p = 0.074$), B+ ($p = 0.174$), B ($p = 0.200$, B- ($p = 0.200$), were found normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). Additionally, the depersonalization categories of B+ ($p = 0.232$) and B- ($p = 0.200$) were found normally distributed ($p > 0.05$), while the categories of A ($p = 0.030$) and B ($p = 0.026$) were not ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4.6

Tests of Normality for GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Exhaustion</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>0.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>0.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>0.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalization</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>0.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>0.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Accomplishment</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>0.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>0.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>0.236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MANOVA is robust against violations of normality; thus, the researcher proceeded with the assumptions testing (Warner, 2013). Furthermore, Levene’s Test demonstrated equality of variance ($p > 0.05$). Box’s M test demonstrated that the data did not meet the homogeneity of
variance assumption \((p = 0.037)\). Due to the violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption, and considering the unequal \(n\)s in the groups, Wilk’s \(\Lambda\) was abandoned in favor of Pillai’s trace, as it is a more robust test (Warner, 2013).

After assumptions were found tenable, the MANOVA was run and analyzed at a statistical power of 0.7 at the 0.05 alpha level for a medium affect size. A statistically significant difference was not found in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment among RAs based on GPA, \(F(15, 354) = 1.003, p = 0.451;\) Pillai’s Trace = \(0.122;\) partial \(\eta^2 = 0.041\). Post hoc testing was not needed as no significant difference was found.

**Null Hypothesis Three**

A third MANOVA was run to determine whether there is a difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment based on program type. The data was screened visually for inconsistencies and abnormality, and none were found. Additionally, a Box and Whisker plot was utilized to screen for outliers, with none being discovered.

Assumptions were found tenable prior to running the MANOVA. The Kilmogorov-Smirnov test demonstrated that the data was normally distributed \((p > 0.05)\) for graduates on all three scales: emotional exhaustion \((p = 0.191)\), depersonalization \((p = 0.141)\), and personal accomplishment \((p = 0.200)\). Personal accomplishment for undergraduates was found normally distributed \((p = 0.184)\), while emotional exhaustion \((p = 0.014)\) and depersonalization \((p = 0.001)\) were not \((p < 0.05)\). MANOVA is considered robust against violations of normality, so the test was continued (Warner, 2013). Levene’s test was met to demonstrate equality of variance \((p > 0.05)\) Finally, Box’s M was utilized to test for homogeneity of variance and the assumption was met \((p = 0.806)\).
Table 4.7

Tests of Normality for Program Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov Statistic</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Exhaustion</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalization</td>
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<td>0.120</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After all assumptions were found tenable were met, the MANOVA was run with a statistical power of 0.7 at the 0.05 alpha level for a medium affect size. No statistically significant difference was found in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment based on program type, $F(3, 120) = 2.617, p = 0.054$; Wilk’s $\Lambda = 0.939$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.061$. Post hoc testing was not necessary.

Summary

This study investigates differences in burnout scales according to certain demographic variables among RAs. Three MANOVAs were run to test the various hypotheses for the research question. The results of this study show that there is no difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment, among RAs, based on biological sex, GPA, or program type.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This research adds to the existing body of studies regarding burnout in resident assistants (RAs). Freudenberger (1974) and Maslach (1976) established the framework for burnout. This phenomenon occurs in individuals who do “people work” of some kind (Maslach & Schaufeli, 2017, p. 14). Furthermore, Astin’s (1999) work on peer leadership underscores the importance of the resident assistant (RA) position as a peer leader. The 24-hour nature of the job, the work with people, and the RA responsibilities create an environment where burnout is likely (Stoner, 2017). These realities demonstrate the importance of understanding what factors may signify an increased chance of burnout in RAs. This chapter provides a discussion of the results presented in the previous chapter. Implications of the study, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a significant difference in burnout among RAs based on biological sex, grade point average, and program type. While many studies have been conducted regarding indicators of burnout in RAs, many of the findings regarding gender’s role in burnout have articulated back and forth between projects (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Heatherington et al., 1989; Stoner, 2017). Furthermore, up to this point, GPA and program level have not been investigated for their indication of burnout likelihood.

This study involved three multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) tests to determine if there were differences in the areas of burnout based on the independent variables of biological sex, GPA, and program type. The research question was investigated through three
different null hypotheses. The first hypothesis evaluated potential differences in emotional 
exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment based on biological sex. The second 
hypothesis examined potential differences in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and 
personal accomplishment based on the RAs cumulative GPA. And the third hypothesis 
investigated possible differences in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal 
accomplishment based on program type. Participants for the study were recruited from the 
current team of RAs at a private four-year university in the southeastern United States during the 
Spring 2020 semester. The participants responded to a survey containing the Maslach Burnout 
Inventory-Educator’s Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996).

**Null Hypothesis One**

The first null hypothesis states that there is no statistically significant difference in 
emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment among RAs, based on 
biological sex. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was utilized to examine this 
hypothesis. After assumptions were found tenable, the researcher failed to reject the null 
hypothesis; no statistically significant difference was found in the three burnout variables, based 
on the biological sex of the RAs.

This result continues the trend of varying and articulating findings regarding indicators of 
burnout in RAs based on gender. While this study supports the work by Hardy and Dodd (1998) 
and Stoner (2017), who found no difference in burnout based on gender, it is in conflict with 
other studies that found that either men or women were more likely to experience at least one of 
the dimensions of burnout (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Heatherington, Oliver, & Phelps, 1989; 
Paladino, Murray, Newgent & Gohn, 2005).
While no concrete reason has been found that this variance in results exists, there are a few possibilities. First, while many of the research designs are similar, there exists large time gaps between the studies, which could possibly contribute to differing results (Stoner, 2017). Furthermore, the number of institutions in question in each research project may contribute to the varying results (Stoner, 2017). While some projects have looked at multiple campuses, most have been focused on a single campus (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Heatherington et al., 1989; Stoner, 2017). So, while the methodologies employed were similar, the variance in number of institutions under consideration in studies could explain the differences in findings (Stoner, 2017).

Moreover, Stoner (2017) states that a limitation of his study is the cross-sectional nature of the design. Burnout was investigated at a single moment in time and did not investigate how feelings of burnout change throughout the academic year (Stoner, 2017). A review of the studies on RA burnout over the years finds a similar limitation in all studies. All of the research on RA burnout reviewed for this project is latitudinal in nature (Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988; Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Heatherington et al., 1989; Stoner, 2017). Since studies have focused on RA burnout at singular moments, rather than how RA burnout grows or reduces over time, this may account for the differences, depending on the specifics of what may have been going on in each setting at the time of their investigations.

Another reason that no difference was found in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment among RAs based on biological sex may be the fact that the RAs in the sample population mostly work in partnerships or teams. Only one of the previous studies that found no difference in burnout based on gender reported that the RAs in their study worked in two-person teams (Hardy & Dodd, 1998). While the other studies do not give information on
how the RAs in their studies work—individually or in groups—it is possible that the group dynamics serve as a built-in regulator, reducing, or at least managing, burnout across the team at large.

Additionally, the teams of RAs at the research site tend to become rather close and create a type of supporting community. Supporting communities, especially from one’s closet group of friends, may provide a guard against burnout (Chang, Chou, Liou & Tu, 2016; Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). Furthermore, a healthy team climate, characterized by workplace friendships, has been demonstrated to help reduce the members’ individual feelings of burnout (Chang et al., 2016; Charoensukmongkol, Moqbel, & Gutierrez-Wirsching, 2016; Choi and Ko, 2020; Kao, 2009). Thus, it is likely that the close-knit and supportive teams created among the RA team may be a natural buffer against burnout for both men and women.

Furthermore, both male and female RAs in this study’s sample population are equally supported by the professionals in the office. Each RA is closely supervised and mentored by a Resident Director (RD) and is required to attend a weekly meeting with their RD and the other RAs in their set of buildings. They are also required to attend a biweekly training meeting with RAs from other areas of campus. The equal support and encouragement that RAs of both biological sexes receive may be an additional reason that no difference in any of the burnout dimensions presented itself.

Another reason that no difference was found may be the fact that RAs are considered working students, and thus may regulate their burnout more effectively. Some research makes a distinction between academic exhaustion and work-related exhaustion (Benner & Curl, 2018; Galbraith & Merrill, 2012). Additionally, students who work 20 or more hours a week experience higher academic exhaustion (Benner & Curl, 2018). However, some studies have also
shown that working hours do not negatively affect work-related exhaustion levels; in fact, working students appear to be able to self-regulate their work-related exhaustion levels throughout the semester (Galbraith & Merrill, 2012). Since RAs of both biological sexes are “working” students, it is likely that they viewed the survey from that perspective, rather than from an academic perspective; this would potentially account for the lack of difference in burnout between male and female RAs.

Null Hypothesis Two

The second null hypothesis alleges that there is no statistically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment among RAs, based on grade point average (GPA). A second MANOVA was utilized to assess this hypothesis and the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, no statistically significant difference was found in the burnout subscales among RAs, based on their GPA.

This finding is at odds with previous research that has shown that a student’s GPA does have an effect on burnout (Boudreau, Santen, Hemphill, & Dobson, 2004; Galbraith & Merrill, 2012). Specifically, Galbraith & Merrill (2012) found that as GPA scores lowered, emotional exhaustion increased. A reason for the discrepancy between this study’s results and previous research may be the differences in the study designs and the populations under consideration. Boudreau, Santen, Hemphill, and Dobson (2004) were interested in burnout in medical students, while Galbraith and Merrill (2012) were investigating burnout in undergraduate business students. RAs, however, are students across various disciplines and their circumstances are different than those of other students. Furthermore, they often receive specific training regarding stress management, time management, and other topics designed to help them navigate their
roles and responsibilities. Thus, the differences in populations under consideration between the studies may account for the differing results that were found.

Additionally, GPA was used in this study as a category for the independent variable. Since RAs are required to maintain a certain GPA, evaluating whether students with higher GPAs experienced more or less burnout was important (Paladino et al., 2005). This study did not seek to evaluate burnout in relation to changes to RAs’ GPA, as other studies have done (Galbraith & Merrill, 2012). Rather, it only measured differences in the burnout subscales according to what level GPA they currently possessed. It is possible that burnout is affected by changes in GPA over time, rather than what GPA a student has at any given time.

Another likely explanation for why no differences were discovered is related to the research site’s GPA requirement of 2.5. This contributes to the sample students having high GPAs to start with, accounting for a lack of difference between the groups. Had those who have GPAs below the requirement been in the sample, it is possible that a difference would have been present and discoverable.

Finally, it is conceivable the wide discrepancy in the number of participants in each GPA category and the relatively small difference in GPA scores between categories presented issues. In MANOVA designs, it is preferable to have a low number of groups and to have a large number of participants in each group; further, it is desirable to have a balance between the number of participants in each group (Warner, 2013). While there were four groups in the test, there was a wide range in the number of participants with the highest being 67 and the lowest being 5. Additionally, each GPA category was made up of a range of only 0.03 points. All of this could have resulted in differences not being detectable to the statistical test.
Null Hypothesis Three

The third null hypothesis assumes that there is no statically significant difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or personal accomplishment among RAs, based on program type. After assumptions were found tenable, a MANOVA was run to evaluate the hypothesis and the researcher failed to reject the null. Thus, there was no statistically significant difference among RAs, based on program type, on any of the three burnout scales.

Some prior research regarding burnout in various fields has demonstrated that those with a higher educational attainment experience greater burnout (Lim, Kim, Kim, Yang, & Lee, 2010; Smullens, 2015; Williams & Dikes, 2015). However, this particular finding agrees with other studies that have demonstrated that there is no difference in burnout based on degree level obtained (Galek, Flannelly, Greene, & Kudler, 2011; Nuri, Demirok, & Direktor, 2017). It could be that educational attainment only affects burnout when the individual regards their education at a higher quality than the specific work they are performing. This may explain why no difference was found in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment in this sample of RAs.

Additionally, the students in this study are continuing their educational career, even if they have already completed their undergraduate degree. Thus, their graduate level becomes another “year” in school, from their perspective. In this way, the research would support other studies that have found that academic year has no effect on burnout in students (Dubuc-Charbonneau, Durand-Bush, & Forneris, 2014; Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). Furthermore, the RA position is not a career position and everyone who holds it is seeking an education to support their eventual career. Perhaps burnout may be an issue related to education for those in their specific field or career.
Finally, it may be expected that RAs in graduate programs may experience more burnout than those in undergraduate programs because they carry, presumably, a higher workload due to the more robust nature of the degrees they are seeking. However, it is important to remember that higher burnout can be seen when a student subjectively views their workload as higher than their actual workload would support (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). Consequently, it is possible that no difference was found in this sample because each respondent was experiencing a similar workload, rather than seeing their workload as excessive.

Other Considerations

An additional possibility for why differences in the burnout subscales were not found among the various independent variables may have to do with the team environment encouraged in the sample setting. Research has shown that where trusted workplace friendships exist, characteristics that decrease and manage burnout levels are strengthened by those relationships (Chang et al., 2016; Kruger, Bernstein, & Botman, 2001). Furthermore, team environments can help to ensure productivity and a healthy workplace culture (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002). So, one may ponder whether a healthy team environment in the research setting impacted the lack of differences.

The setting for this particular study is one with a high team environment and friendships among team members are encouraged. Each RA in this study is partnered with at least one other RA, and sometimes two, creating a team to serve each floor or building. That smaller team is then part of a larger team of RAs, led by a Resident Director, that serves a specific group of buildings. These midlevel teams make up the larger RA team as a whole, who participate in biweekly training meetings focusing on collaboration and training across the entire team. This provides an opportunity for RAs from different parts of campus to interact together where they
otherwise would not. Consequently, the team environment, and its associated benefits, may have
be related to the lack of difference in burnout among RAs based on biological sex, GPA, or
program type.

One final reason exists that may contribute to the lack of differences found in burnout
among all of the independent variables: a biblical worldview. This research took place among a
group of RAs that, as a requirement for the position—which is at a Christian school—must
profess to be Christians. It is possible that the resulting biblical worldview contributed to a lack
of differences in burnout because these students are willing to give more of themselves to help
others. Research has shown that most individuals sign up for the RA position out of a desire to
help others (Boone, 2008). This reality is likely at play in the sample population, whom may rely
on this motivation, along with spiritual rest and biblical mandates to love others, to regulate their
burnout.

Implications

It seems clear that one major implication of this research is the necessity to not assume
that one’s biological sex predisposes an RA to a greater chance of experiencing burnout.
Accordingly, student affairs and residence life practitioners should refrain from developing
gender-specific interventions to burnout in RAs (Stoner, 2017). Rather, officials should create
holistic approaches to education on this topic and suggest interventions to limit and reduce
burnout across the RA team as a whole. Research has long suggested that stress for an RA can be
reduced by providing training on managing stress prior to beginning RA responsibilities (Hardy
& Dodd, 1998; Nowack & Hanson, 1983). It is likely that this would be true for burnout as well.
Focusing on this topic at the beginning of a RA’s tenure and consistently in training thereafter
should help the individual student to continue to be aware of burnout in themselves and how to
deal with it. This type of strategy would be beneficial regardless of what indicators may be existing in the RA.

In training RAs about burnout, practitioners should be sure to point out that burnout is not just a phenomenon that will be experienced in the RA position. The reality that research is being conducted regarding burnout in a multitude of professional demonstrates that the phenomenon affects people throughout the various occupations. Thus, it is important that those who work with RAs use the unique aspects of the role to emphasize how students can recognize burnout and mitigate it throughout their careers. Specifically, it has been suggested that student affairs practitioners focus on training RAs to practice “self-care”; specifically, how to monitor their own behavior patterns and set healthy goals for avoiding burnout. (McLaughlin, 2018). Self-care is essential to preventing and recovering from burnout; teaching RAs to care for themselves physically and psychologically can help them become their own agent in overcoming the burnout phenomenon (Bogue & Bogue, 2019). Training that focuses on teaching an RA to recognize their burnout and self-care to overcome it will be helpful throughout their lives.

Additionally, residence life practitioners should train supervisors to understand their role in helping to prevent or manage burnout in RAs, and in how to monitor the workload of the RAs on their teams. A person’s supervisor plays an important role in helping to increase personal accomplishment, while reducing emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Charoensukmongkol, Moqbel, & Gutierrez-Wirsching, 2016). They can do this through their own relationships and functions as supervisors and by encouraging healthy relationships between coworkers (Chang et al., 2016; Charoensukmongkol, Moqbel, & Gutierrez-Wirsching, 2016). Setting clear job expectations and developing good interpersonal relationships, along with providing emotional support, are clear ways that an RA’s supervisor can create a healthy
working environment that may mitigate the possibilities of burnout (Charoensukmongkol, Moqbel, & Gutierrez-Wirsching, 2016). These are simple practices that those who supervise RAs should be trained in and expected to perform.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated a link between workload and burnout; where workload increases, burnout scales increase and professional quality of life of working individuals is impacted negatively (Karapinar, Camgoz, & Ekmekci, 2016; Laverdiere et al., 2019). This information has similarly been found in students (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; Kao, 2009). Thus, it is necessary to continue to monitor each RA individually and have healthy conversations about their workloads and productivity strategies. Residence life officials should be especially cognizant of RAs’ own views of their current workload at specific points in the year when assignments and responsibilities may increase. For example, RAs are often busiest when checking students out of the residence halls, which falls in line with final exams and the end of the semester. Similarly, RAs may experience heavy workloads at random times as situations occur that may require them to operate within their first response duties, which may cause negative impacts on the RA (Lynch, 2017). Supervisors would do well in such times to pay particularly close attention to the emotional toll a first responder may experience. In summary, while it is advisable that emphasis be placed on teaching RAs how to recognize their own burnout, it is also sensible to teach those who work closely with them to recognize burnout in their RAs to help them overcome it (Paladino et al., 2005).

Finally, practitioners should consider the place that a GPA requirement has in RA selection processes. Maintaining a certain GPA remains a requirement for RAs in many residence life offices (Paldino et al., 2005). However, research has shown that there is no link between high-performing RAs and GPA (Jaeger & Caison, 2006). Additionally, this study, and
the lack of differences in the burnout subscales based on GPA, adds to what is known about the role of GPA in relation to the role and responsibilities of RAs. These findings suggest that student affairs officials should consider whether a GPA requirement, or stringent adherence to such a requirement, is beneficial or necessary. Students sign up to be RAs because of their desire to help other students (Boone, 2018). Adhering to a GPA requirement, especially when how one is performing academically may not guard against burnout, may only limit the available pool of applicants.

**Limitations**

This study contains several limitations; the first of which is the narrow scope of this research. To date, many of the burnout-related research projects that have occurred have looked at only one college or university campus and only one group of RAs; this study continues that trend. Convenience samples limit the potential generalizability of the research to the broader population (Warner, 2013). Therefore, it is important not to generalize these results to RAs as a whole, across the United States or other nations. It is also advisable not to generalize these results to future RA teams, even in the same setting. Additionally, nonexperimental causal-comparative research only evaluates a possible causal connection between variables and not proof of a connection (Warner, 2013). As such, this project is limited in its design.

This study also is limited by the self-report nature of the survey utilized. It is possible that the respondents fell into social desirability bias, responding what they believe is socially approved, rather than what they are actually feeling (Warner, 2013). As such, there is a limitation in whether the responses of the participants truly reflect their feelings and attitudes, or simply what they believe to be acceptable.
The requirement of the research site to maintain at least a 2.5 GPA to be an RA created an imbalance in the representation in the sample population. In fact, over 66 percent of the sample population held a GPA of 3.3 or above at the time of the study. With most of the population being on the higher end of the GPA spectrum, there is a constraint in how much of a difference could be seen. It may have been possible that a variance could have been identified if students with a lower GPA than 2.5 were in the sample but the requirement of the research site presented a limitation to the study.

During the semester that this research project was conducted, the world battled the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation caused many changes in people’s daily lives and compelled many organizations to alter their normal operations (Park et al., 2020). The pandemic caused a greater amount of stress in Americans, due to personal financial concerns, changes to their normal daily lives, and other factors (Park et al., 2020). As this situation was a global pandemic, individuals and organizations across the globe were forced to make decisions on how best to respond.

At the location of this study, the majority of classes were moved to an online delivery, and students were given the option of returning to campus or returning home to complete the semester. After initially returning from spring break to help students check out, RAs were also given that option. The initial survey notification for this study went out to RAs on the date that they were permitted to leave and return home. Over the next several weeks, the duties of the RAs were amended to emphasize welfare checks and communication with students through digital means. They were asked to check in with everyone from their hall once a week via phone, text, video calls, and other options. Additionally, they were asked to complete weekly roster verifications to determine who was still on campus, had items in their rooms, or had returned
home. Thus, the point at which the RAs were given the MBI-ES to assess their burnout came at a highly stressful time when their personal lives and RA responsibleness were in fluctuation. A limitation exists in that this survey did not occur during normal operations but through the time of a worldwide pandemic, perhaps increasing the stress and even burnout that RAs were experiencing (Park et al., 2020).

A limitation also exists in the participant sizes of some of the groups under consideration, especially in relation to null hypothesis two. It is recommended to have relatively large sample sizes for each group, and for the groups to be balanced in size (Warner, 2013). While some of the participant groups under consideration would meet that criteria—male RAs \( (n = 49) \) and female RAs \( (n = 75) \)—not all would, such as RAs with a B- \( (n = 5) \) and RAs with a B \( (n = 15) \). Thus, the low numbers in some of the groups presents a limitation to this research. Additionally, the unequal sample sizes in some of the variables—RAs with an A \( (n = 67) \), RAs with a B+ \( (n = 35) \), RAs with a B \( (n = 15) \), RAs with a B- \( (n = 5) \), undergraduate RAs \( (n = 97) \), and graduate RAs \( (n = 27) \)—likely affected data analysis.

Finally, a sample size of at least 42-54 per group was needed for a medium effect size with a statistical power of 0.7 at the 0.05 alpha level (Warner, 2013). Thus, the small subgroups—RAs with a B+ \( (n = 35) \), RAs with a B \( (n = 15) \), RAs with a B- \( (n = 5) \), and Graduate RAs \( (n = 27) \)—were likely too small for adequate power with a medium effect. Furthermore, the categories of C and C+ were removed from the data analysis, as each group only contained one entry. It is possible that the results of the tests would have been different had these groups been left in the study, and their exclusion presents a limitation.
Recommendations for Future Research

Research should be undertaken that investigates burnout among RAs on a larger level. To date, research has been sporadic and focused on small populations, often at just one college or university. A study that investigates the indicators of burnout among RAs on multiple campuses across the country would be a solid step toward fully understanding what indicators may exist for burnout in RAs. A national study could investigate differing factors, gender or biological sex being foremost, that have produced varying results over the years. It is likely that a national sample would provide clarity, finally, to the role that gender or biological sex plays in burnout among RAs, if it does at all. Without a truly national sample, it is likely that individual research projects will continue to produce different results. The information produced by a larger study would be highly beneficial to the student affairs field.

Furthermore, a longitudinal study would significantly increase the literature available on the subject of burnout in RAs. Studying students who serve in this position, and their burnout levels throughout their tenure, would provide more data than that of latitudinal studies. While the information available so far is helpful, it is focused on single groups at a single moment in time. A longitudinal design would also help to bring clarity regarding factors with varying results, such as gender, as the factor’s effect on burnout would be seen over a period of time. Evaluating burnout and risks or indicators of burnout over the two or three years a person serves as an RA would yield more useful information than that of studies that investigate burnout at a single moment in time.

This study was conducted in the spring semester, after some RAs left the position in December. It would be beneficial for future research to be conducted in the fall semester, allowing researchers to evaluate the role of burnout in RA attrition throughout the year. Research
conducted during the fall, with a longitudinal design, would give valuable information into how RAs fair over time and whether burnout impacts their decision to leave the position early or to continue on through the end of the year and even into future years.

Another avenue of future research would be evaluating RA burnout against the amount of credits the student is enrolled in, as opposed to their current GPA, or even their change in GPA over time. Evaluating this could provide more information on the relationship between workload and burnout in the RA. While subjective workload is indicated to increase burnout, continuing to evaluate objective workloads will provide further information that can help policy makers institute practices that help guard against RA burnout (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). Like their residents, RAs are students and have their own coursework to complete. Knowing whether there is a credit hour threshold that increases burnout likelihood would be advantageous.

Research should also be conducted into whether preventative training plays a part in mitigating burnout in RAs. Research so far has focused on various preexisting factors in RAs or on their environment, looking for indicators of who is more susceptible to burnout. However, most of the research has found conflicting results or no statistically significant indicators (Stoner, 2017). It is possible that there are not specific external factors involved but other internal stressors that can be managed effectively. So, looking for external factors that can be monitored or changed may not be the most effective avenue for helping RAs manage burnout. Perhaps there is a training that can be offered to an RA at the beginning of their tenure that will help them identify and prevent burnout in themselves. Several studies have suggested that workshops regarding stress management tactics be developed for RAs, in the hopes that those trainings can reduce burnout (Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Hetherington et al., 1989; Nowack & Hanson, 1983). It is possible that continuous training—especially that which implements stress management
sessions—may assist with reducing burnout (Paladino et al., 2005). However, there has been little research into these types of strategies (Stoner, 2017). Knowledge of whether specific preservice training can help prevent burnout in RAs would be beneficial for practitioners as they design training for their student leaders.

Another opportunity for future research would be to study the effect the relationship between the residents and their RAs has on burnout. It is possible that more contentious relationships could promote greater burnout, while more amicable relationships could promote lower burnout. Research has indicated that burnout can arise due to relationships between people in the workplace; yet, little research has been done in realm of the RA’s relationship with their residents and the subsequent effect of that relationship on burnout.

Finally, further research should be conducted into the relationship that working in teams has on burnout. Research has shown that teams can have a mitigating effect on burnout (Chang et al., 2016; Kruger, Bernstein, & Botman, 2001). But no research has yet been done on this subject as related to RAs specifically. If information were found that RAs who work in teams are less susceptible to burnout, that knowledge would be of great significance to how residence life and student affairs professionals structure their residence halls and the RAs that supervise them.
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APPENDIX A
Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey

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www.mindgarden.com

To Whom It May Concern,

The above-named person has made a license purchase from Mind Garden, Inc. and has permission to administer the following copyrighted instrument up to that quantity purchased:


The three sample items only from this instrument as specified below may be included in your thesis or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument form may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below. Sample Items:

MBI - Human Services Survey - MBI-HSS:
I feel emotionally drained from my work.
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
I don't really care what happens to some recipients.
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MBI - Human Services Survey for Medical Personnel - MBI-HSS (MP):
I feel emotionally drained from my work.
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
I don't really care what happens to some patients.
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MBI - Educators Survey - MBI-ES:
I feel emotionally drained from my work.
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
I don't really care what happens to some students.
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Cont’d on next page
MBI - General Survey - MBI-GS:
I feel emotionally drained from my work.
In my opinion, I am good at my job.
I doubt the significance of my work.

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MBI - General Survey for Students - MBI-GS (S):
I feel emotionally drained by my studies.
In my opinion, I am a good student.
I doubt the significance of my studies.

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Sincerely,

Robert Most
Mind Garden, Inc.
www.mindgarden.com
October 24, 2019

Mr. Dustin DuBose
Residence Life
1971 University Boulevard
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Dear Dustin:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled “College Resident Assistants: Indicators of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment”, I have decided to grant you permission to utilize our membership list to recruit RAs for the research and access and to utilize student data/records. Further, I also grant permission to use assessment funds in the Residence Life budget to purchase the instrument.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

Dr. Mark Hine
Senior Vice President
Division of Student Affairs
Liberty University
APPENDIX C
IRB Approval Letter

Subject: IRB-FY19-20-7 - Initial: Initial - Exempt
Date: Tuesday, February 4, 2020 at 9:15:24 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: irb@liberty.edu
To: DuBose, Dustin (Office of Residence Life), Foster, Lisa (School of Education)
Attachments: ATT00001.png

February 4, 2020

Dustin DuBose
Lisa Foster

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-7 College Resident Assistants: Indicators of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment

Dear Dustin DuBose, Lisa Foster:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

101(b):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording). The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
APPENDIX D
Electronic Consent Form

CONSENT FORM
Resident Assistant Attitudes Toward the Position: Indicators of Longevity
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the attitudes of Resident Assistants toward the position. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a current Resident Assistant. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

A doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to determine whether certain attitudes toward the Resident Assistant position affect an individual’s longevity in the position.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
   1. Complete the following survey. This will take approximately 20 to 25 minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include expanding the knowledge base regarding Resident Assistant attitudes toward the position.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. However, should you choose to participate, you will be entered into a drawing for a $100 Amazon gift card. The drawing will occur after all data has been collected. The gift card will not be prorated if a subject does not complete the survey. Email addresses will be requested for compensation purposes, however they will be pulled and separated from your responses by Qualtrics to maintain anonymity.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and Dissertation Committee Chair will have access to the records. Data will be stored on a password locked cloud storage account. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Conflicts of Interest Disclosure: The researcher serves as a supervisor at Liberty University. To limit potential conflicts the Dissertation Committee Chair will ensure that all data is stripped of identifiers before the researcher receives it. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this
relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser.

**Contacts and Questions:** If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact the researcher’s faculty chair, Dr. Lisa Foster.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher’s faculty chair, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

*Please notify the researcher’s faculty chair if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

____________________________________________________________________________

Signature of Participant (Typed into Survey)                      Date