

Student Leaders' Source of Social Support and its Association with their Identification in a University Setting

The Power of **AND**

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ABSTRACT

This research study was based on Social Identity Theory (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), which states that people tend to classify themselves and each other into various social categories, which aims to find how individuals identify themselves within organizations. Work-based social support has been shown to result in a stronger organizational identification (Wiesenfeld, 2001). Social support (SS) studies have tended to focus on subordinate support as received from their supervisors (Czech & Forward, 2010). In addition, organizational identification studies have primarily focused on the organization as the primary source of employee identification. As a result, other sources of SS and organizational identification are under studied. For example, students employed as leaders of university residence halls (Resident Assistants) may represent a population for whom these studies do not apply. Resident Assistants (RAs) identify simultaneously as students, employees, supervisors and administrators, and are likely to receive SS from a variety of vertical and horizontal relationships, which may alter the usual source of organizational identification. This qualitative research study examines how various sources of SS may be associated with sources of identification other than the employing organization. Using interviews with RAs at a Midwestern University, this study examines the frequency and type of SS received from various sources and its association with their source of identification.

METHODS

Design:
This research was conducted as a qualitative research study through one-on-one interviews. Participants answered a number of questions related to the type of SS they receive. The study also examined how RAs receive SS, and how this influences their source of organizational identification. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

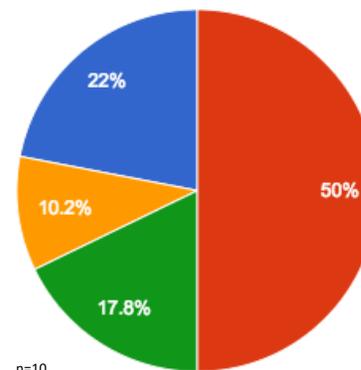
Participants:
10 Resident Assistants
• 3 identified as male
• 7 identified as female

Ages 19-22

Time as an RA ranged from 1 ½ semesters to 6 semesters.

Data Coding:
We used a thematic analysis using pre-existing themes: social support and source of support. Participant responses were coded using these units and were then separately coded and compared by theme. There was one hundred percent coder reliability due to mutual agreement on pre-existing themes from completed interviews.

Type of Social Support



- Emotional
- Instrumental
- Appraisal
- Informational

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- Empathy
- Love
- Trust
- Caring

INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT

- Tangible Aid
- Services

APPRAISAL SUPPORT

- Information that's useful for self evaluation

INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT

- Advice
- Suggestions
- Information

n=10

RESULTS/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

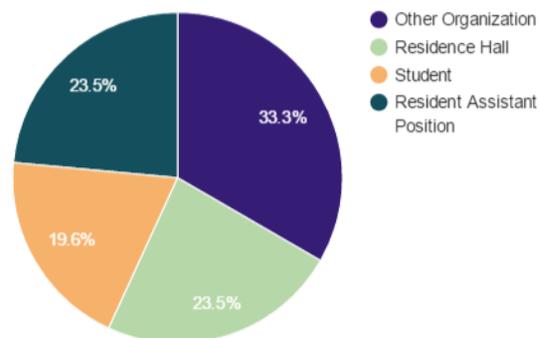
RQ 1: What type of social support do RAs report receiving most often?

In assessing what type of SS RAs report receiving most often, results showed that the type of support more often received by RAs is emotional support: 50% of the SS received was emotional (157 of 315 instances). 22% of the SS received was informational (69 of 315 instances). 17.8% of the SS received was instrumental (56 of 315 instances). 10.2% of the SS received was appraisal (33 of 315 instances).

RQ 2: What sources do RAs receive social support from and how does this shape their source of identification?

In evaluating what sources RAs receive SS from and how this shapes their source of identification, this study found that RAs received most of their social support from other RAs, but they were more likely to report a stronger identification within other university organizations.

Resident Assistant's Source of Identification



DISCUSSION

Key findings from our research indicated that RAs most often received SS from other RAs. The type of support most commonly received by our surveyed RAs was emotional support. These results indicate the need for a significant level of emotional support within a leadership position, specifically from other leaders on the same level.

Our study expands on previous research such as Allen's (1992) study, concluding that leader to subordinate SS is positively correlated to organizational identification, by looking at student leaders and their identification. Unexpectedly, the primary source of identification was from other university organizations, not specifically related to the RA role. This suggests that RAs represented in this study identify with other organizations over the RA role.

Our findings suggest that Social Identity Theory is reflected in this study, because of the limited meetings that RAs are required to have together. As opposed to the greater time spent outside of the RA role, their student role contributes to their identification with other organizations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

We suggest further research to be conducted in the area of SS and organizational climate. Through conducting individual interviews, results found that different residence halls had varying organizational climates which may play a role in the type and source of SS received by RAs.