

TITLE: Followers' Perceptions of Leaders: Prototypes and Perceptions of Resident Assistants

RESEARCHER: Marcia J. Levy
Department of Counseling and Personnel Services
University of Maryland
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OBJECTIVE: To explore the college student leadership experience through the theoretical frame of social cognition. Understanding leadership as a relationship between leader and followers, this thesis focused on identifying two primary cognitive structures, prototypes of a leader and perceptions of leader behavior.

METHODOLOGY: Participants were undergraduate college students living in the North Hill Community at the University of Maryland. Six buildings are included with two staffs of eight resident assistants (RAs). Of these 16 RAs, six (38%) were men. They ranged in age from 19-24 years. Five (31%) were in their first year of the job. Twenty residents for each RA were identified by a systematic sampling technique; with usable responses (62%) from 71 men (36%) and 125 women. These students ranged in age from 17-30 years. The student version of the LPI was used, with no modifications to the constituent (observer) form. RAs completed the LPI-Self modified to reflect "the extent to which you say the following actions and behaviors fit your image of a resident assistant." Internal reliabilities for this modified version ranged between .83 and .92. Respondents also indicated their level of satisfaction with their residence hall experience, and provided demographic information.

KEY FINDINGS: LPI-Student scores between RA "expectations" and residents' perceptions were significantly correlated for all five leadership practices. There were significant differences between RA leader behavior perceptions between those who held the consensual prototype and those who did not. Residence members' satisfaction with significantly correlated with LPI-constituent scores for enabling and inspiring. LPI-constituent scores were significantly higher for female RAs versus male RAs for challenging and inspiring. As RA experience (time in service) increased so did their perceived behaviors on all five leadership practices.