

**DIVERGENT HALLWAYS:
RESIDENT ADVISORS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE MANAGEMENT
OF CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT**

by

Lindsay Alida McDonough
B.A., University of New Brunswick, 2005

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the management of cross-cultural conflict by Resident Advisors (RA) at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. A total of twelve RAs were interviewed on the policies and expected practices of RAs, how these policies are implemented and whether these policies are effective in resolving cross-cultural conflict. This research analyzes and demonstrates that besides conflict itself, the discourse of conflict--how one speaks about conflict--and its representation are equally important. In many circumstances, the cultural discourse and its representation are not only a major part of the problem, but even a source of it. I argue that a narrow conceptualization of culture in the expected dispute resolution practices of RAs constrains the management of disputes between residents. Examples of disputes pertaining to nationality, racial and sexual discrimination, drugs, and alcohol illustrate the use of culture as a controlling factor in conflict, defining culture as bounded and discrete. This neglects the underlying structural issues at play, serving only to reproduce conflict and to ensure that social and economic inequities are passed on.

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To my Oma, whose praise and criticism gave me the ambition and confidence to succeed.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Current anthropologists argue it is extremely important to expand the manner in which the concept of culture is used and understood in daily practices (Ortner 1984; Keesing *et al.* 1987; Nader 1997; Stephenson 2001). Culture, it is argued, must be treated in a “complex, critical and multidimensional way” (Stephenson 2001:4). Despite dispute resolution’s recent fixation with “situating” conflict and urging practitioners to become more reflexive in their approaches to conflict (Cobb 1994; White 1990), dispute resolution processes in schools and universities remain outdated (Brinson, Kottler, and Fisher 2004; Schuck 1993). Of greater concern is the fact that most recent discussions of dispute resolution processes include “culture” as a fixed entity, and a factor to be accounted for in decisions that people make while in conflict. In other words, culture is seen as a controlling mechanism in disputes. In this thesis, I argue that a narrow conceptualization of culture, apparent in the training and expected conflict management practices of Resident Advisors (RAs), inhibits the management of cross-cultural conflict in University of Victoria (UVic) residences. As will be shown in the pages to follow, this narrow definition of culture is problematic because not only does it neglect the role of human agency in disputes among residents, but it neglects the underlying structural issues that give rise to disputes in the first place. RAs definitions, examples and perceptions of the management of cross-cultural conflict illustrate the need to rethink the way culture is used and appropriated in everyday dispute resolution practices.

For the purpose of this research, cross-cultural conflict has been broadly defined as disputes which occur out of a clashing of cultural norms and practices. It is important to note, however, that this research relies primarily on RAs definitions of cross-cultural

conflict. The above definition was only used under special circumstances where an RA was having difficulty defining cross-cultural conflict on their own. In addition, this thesis will demonstrate how static definitions of culture such as this are criticized more often than they are followed.

As will be revealed, university residences are host to numerous kinds of cross-cultural conflict, including cultural differences relating to nationality, ethnicity, background, age, gender and sexuality. This study focuses on RAs definitions and attitudes towards culture, as well as the cultural framework from which they are expected to work, and the impacts of these attitudes on the management of cross-cultural conflict. The central research question for this project is: What do RAs perceive/think are the appropriate conflict management policies and practices for resolving cross-cultural conflict at UVic, given their definitions and attitudes of conflict and culture? The study is evidence of the problems which arise out of differing forms of communication and preferences for certain conflict management styles which vary cross-culturally.

Details of the Study

Research for this study was carried out at the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. The study was comprised of twelve one-on-one interviews, one group interview (two participants) and one focus group interview (four participants). The one-on-one interviews included a series of open-ended, semi-structured questions covering a range of topics such as: *interviewee background* (age, ethnic group, place of birth, year and field of study, years of RA experience); *policies and expected practices* (definition of a dispute, frequency and nature of disputes in residence, policies for

managing disputes); *actual practices* (how RAs are actually involved in resolving disputes in residence, how this might or might not differ from policy); *cross-cultural conflict* (definition of, prevalence of, management of); and *evaluation* (Were the policies and practices helpful? Are they effective? What changes could improve the policies and practices?). These questions helped elicit views on the policies and practices used by RAs and whether those policies and practices, according to the RAs, are conducive to settling cross-cultural conflict among residents.

Value of the Research

This information was important for a number of reasons. As will be indicated in the review of literature, most previous cross-cultural research on conflict has taken place in the United States and reflects the earlier belief of conflict theorists and specialists that culture is stable and accessible by all (LeBaron 2001). Though recent literature acknowledges culture as dynamic and ever-changing, there remains little empirical research on the relationship between culture and conflict (Ting-Toomey 1985). For example, we know very little about the impacts of utilizing culture-specific dispute resolution methods in public domains such as schools and universities. This is particularly surprising considering the vast amount of evidence which suggests that culture plays a crucial role in the management and reconciliation of disputes (Clark 2002; Salem 1993; Bennett 1993).

Until now, very little research on cross-cultural conflict in post-secondary schools has been explored in Canada. A review of the literature indicates that most university residences bring together diverse groups of students who interact daily with those who

differ from themselves and when students live in close proximity to one another, misunderstandings and disharmonies are bound to arise (Palmer and Devine 2000). Literature on cross-cultural conflict suggests that the dominant Western world view is becoming increasingly problematic for mediators and dispute resolution workers (Clark 2000; LeBaron 2003; Kahane 2004). For example, reconciliation processes which include direct, face to face communication between disputants are not always effective as certain cultural groups, and individuals within those groups, may consider this form of intervention both invasive and even disrespectful. While most universities in North America (Canada and U.S.) provide training for Resident Advisors on cultural diversity, many of the mediation policies implemented are culture-specific. Findings for this research may therefore be beneficial to other researchers, practitioners and policy makers.

This study will begin by setting the research in an academic context through an analysis of current literature on this topic (Chapter Two). From there, the reader will be presented with a more detailed explanation of the methods and theoretical assumptions that guide this study (Chapter Three). The chapters following will focus on dispute resolution training and policies (Chapter Four), Resident Advisor's perceptions of the relationship between culture and conflict (Chapter Five), as well as recommendations for the prevention and management of cross-cultural conflict in UVic residences (Chapter Six). Several key themes which are touched on in the following pages include: cross-cultural communication, exchange students, drugs and alcohol, racial slurs and discriminatory words, inconsistency, neutrality, common sense, personality and experience.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been written on the Anthropology of Law (also called “Legal Anthropology”), mainly in terms of human rights, the clash of non-western and western cultural beliefs, rights of minorities, religious groups and indigenous peoples, non-western and alternative methods of dispute or conflict resolution, legal pluralism in multicultural settings, as well as explorations of the cultural dynamics at play within western legal systems (Bohannon 1965; Brenneis 1988; Comaroff & Roberts 1981; Conley & O’Barr 1990; Gulliver 1979). Anthropologists have been primarily interested in examining the social processes through which conflicts are handled, viewing disputes as embedded in social relationships that directly affect the way conflicting parties pursue and settle grievances (Barfield 2005:83). In *The judicial process among the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia*, anthropologist Max Gluckman (1955) found that disputants were more willing to compromise and settle disputes amicably when there was greater emphasis on preserving relationships with each other. On the other hand, social relationships which were less stable and weaker relied more on adjudicatory procedures that produced win-lose outcomes (Gluckman 1955). Gluckman’s work is most recognized for stressing the role of conflict in social life and in taking into account the role of colonialism and race relations in modern African societies. Rather than viewing African societies as fixed and closed, Gluckman was one of the first to take into consideration the changes brought about by colonialism and racialized relations.

Laura Nader (1978) expanded Gluckman’s theories by providing numerous case-studies on how conflicts were handled in diverse places around the world. Her work on conflict resolution in Oaxaca, Mexico has largely contributed to the creation of

alternative methods of dispute resolution in Canada and the U.S. In it, she illustrates how ideas about conflict, including how it is perceived, experienced and managed, is a reflection of the society in which it is present and is strongly influenced by economic and political power. Her discussion of the harmony model and its effects on the dispute resolution process will be explained in the pages to follow.

Nader is one of many critics who contend that the dispute-processing paradigm has neglected the analysis of historical change and power relations (cited in Starr & Collier 1989). She argues:

Anthropologists know, of course, that dispute resolution ideologies have long been used as a mechanism for the transmission of hegemonic ideas, and indeed we no longer speak of culture as referring simply to shared traditions passed from one generation to another.

(Nader 1997:715)

Historically, dispute resolution theories and practices assume that conflict is universal and timeless rather than asking what it means to be in conflict across cultures and over time. Moreover, the categories of culture and conflict are taken for granted with little concern for how those categories are created, including by and for whom. This type of analysis ignores the larger influences and historical forces (i.e. the spread of capitalism) that affect the fundamental nature of what people dispute and why.

Much of Nader's work is illustrative of a Marxist anthropological stance on intercultural conflict in which disputes are defined as the outcome of social inequities. Conflicts arise and are dealt with but the actual economic and political systems which give rise to them do not change. This is particularly evident in the 1994 civil war in Rwanda in which hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and Hutus were killed. To this day, the situation in Rwanda is typically referred to as an "ethnic conflict," resulting from ethnic

stereotypes and cultural misunderstanding. However, Malkki (1995) argues that upon deeper examination, the conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi is not just about race and ethnicity but an issue of differential access to resources, political power, and control which came out of Belgian colonial rule. Again, culture is treated here as a justification for certain types of conflict behaviour rather than as a dynamic process. Such practices only aid in reproducing a system of inequities by reinforcing the status quo and do not open up opportunities for new practices. In contrast, Marxist anthropologists argue that in order to both understand and manage intercultural conflict, it is essential to look at relations of power including who gets to define what and who benefits from placing disputes into the realm of culture. Thus, it is important to keep in mind the way in which culture informs dispute resolution processes (not how it determines them) and how powerful inequalities influence what is "conflict" or "cultural."

Increasingly, conflict studies and dispute resolution scholars are accepting culture as a subject worthy of academic consideration; however, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the way in which culture is being treated here is quite limited. To date, few anthropologists have concerned themselves with examining cross-cultural conflict in North American universities. Yet there are important reasons for redressing this neglect. First, conflict needs to be understood and made sense of within the local cultural experience of the particular people involved in a dispute (Lederach 1995). Second, traditional problem-solving techniques and strategies are not always applicable to cross-cultural situations and in specifically a university context, this often increases vulnerability to emotional and behavioural problems (Brinson, Kottler & Fisher 2004). Third, it is important to understand the role that culture has in influencing human

behaviour and interactions and its effects on the problem-solving process (Tyler, Lind & Huo 2000). This role may be subtle but it is an important reference point for anthropologists, dispute resolution workers and the like. Last but not least, cross-cultural research on conflict plays a critical role in revealing limiting assumptions and identifying boundary conditions for dispute resolution theory and research (Gelfand & Brett 2004). The following review of literature will address the relationship between conflict and culture and its importance to the management of cross-cultural conflict. The review includes theoretical and practical studies from a variety of disciplines (anthropology, psychology, sociology, law) and settings (businesses, organizations, schools, universities) conducted in the U.S., Canada and abroad.

The Role of Cultural Sensitivity in Dispute Resolution

Current literature suggests a lack of agreement about the interrelationship between culture and conflict and the significance of those connections (Chew 2001:63). For some, aspects of culture can act as both a bridge and a barrier to resolving conflict (Gelfand & Brett 2004; LeBaron 2003). As a bridge, studies indicate that shared cultural traits and behaviours may benefit dispute resolution processes in numerous ways (Gelfand & Brett 2004). First, dispute resolution processes such as negotiation become better organized when a culture is shared by the group (Morris & Gelfand 2004). Second, cultural ties often help mediators broker compromises that might otherwise not be accepted (Carnevale *et al.* 1979). Third, cross-cultural partnerships provide creative and innovative ways for dealing with disputes of every kind, specifically those dealing with vital global and environmental issues (Brett & Kopelman 2004; Brinson, Kottler & Fisher 2004). As

a barrier, culture can add another layer of complexity to the dispute resolution process when conflicts arise from different frames (or "viewpoints"), different emotional experiences, differences in communication and strategies, and differences in the construction of the social context (Gelfand & Brett 2004:419). These differences can pose serious obstacles to reaching agreements and is an important consideration for people who have a major role in managing conflict.

According to anthropological thinking, some people tend to be ethnocentric in their views of "us" and "them" (Cashdan 2001). That is, people sometimes interpret what goes on in their own culture as correct or natural. This often leads to negative categorizations of other cultures as either wrong or unnatural. Avruch & Black (1991) discuss this in the following: "intercultural encounters present us with situations (other peoples' behaviours and understandings) that appear strange and bizarre; our common sense labels them as such and our moral sense evaluates them as good or (more likely) bad" (9). As Gadlin notes, much of the literature on cultural differences in conflict is valuable for alerting us to the ethnocentricities inherent in many of the styles, concepts, values, and practices of contemporary western dispute resolution (Chew 2001:135). Dator (1991) argues there are three main reasons for why dispute resolution methods and tools should change to respond to cultural concerns: (1) rapid changes in ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism; (2) the growth of ADR [alternative dispute resolution] is indicative of a desire by some people to satisfy their own disputes and/or a dissatisfaction with traditional processes; (3) the proactive use by the judiciary and others of culturally-appropriate dispute resolution techniques is appropriate and desirable (3).

LeBaron (2001) claims that the goals and objectives of dispute resolution are similar to those of multiculturalism:

Multiculturalism mandates recognition of the unique qualities of each person and the valuing of diversity; dispute resolution focuses on each individual's unique interests, including goals, fears, hopes and concerns. Multiculturalism requires that all Canadians advance their understanding of each other, working towards harmony; dispute resolution provides the tools through which this may be done.

(LeBaron 2001:117)

Thus, the survival of multiculturalism relies particularly on effective and expedient management of disputes. LeBaron goes further to explain that as long as Canada is a multicultural society, there will be a need for dispute resolution workers to respond to these cultural and individual differences. However, this is no easy task to achieve. As Warfield (1991) posits, many immigrants in Canada come from authoritarian forms of government "where concepts of neutrality and consensus are unheard of and may not even be in the language" (7). For the Canadian or American dispute resolution worker, these terms are often fundamental to mediation and negotiation strategies. The importance of situating conflict in culture is exemplified in the following discussion of dispute resolution training, specifically the emergence of *ADR* or Alternative Dispute Resolution.

Dispute Resolution: Methods and Alternatives

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) was first introduced during the 1970's, growing out of a response to overcrowded courts and questions regarding the effectiveness of the judicial form for resolving cross-cultural disputes (LeBaron 2001:124). The shift resulted in the creation of non-adversarial methods for resolving

disputes including most commonly mediation, negotiation, conciliation and arbitration. While ADR was partially created as a solution to dealing with cross-cultural and value-based disputes, scholars argue that many aspects of ADR are also culture-bound (Lederach 1986; LeBaron 2001; Cobb & Riftkin 1991).¹ In particular, the use of culture-specific mediation practices is becoming increasingly problematic for mediators and dispute resolution workers wishing to implement policies and practices which are conducive to resolving cross-cultural conflict (Clark 2002; LeBaron 2003; Kahane 2004). Such a premise “makes certain deep assumptions about how the world should be viewed that profoundly affect both our understanding of human nature and the way we treat the world that supports us” (Clark 2002:2).

In “The Mediator’s Cultural Assumptions,” Lederach criticizes Fisher and Ury’s (1991) mediation model in which the mediator acts as a neutral third party. In this case, the mediator is responsible for guiding the discussion and encouraging parties to look beneath their positions (a disputant’s stance on the conflict issue being addressed) to interests (the needs, desires, concerns, fears and hopes that motivate people in a dispute) (Fisher and Ury 1991:14). Lederach argues that there is an assumption that the incoming model is neutral and applicable across all contexts and cultures (Lederach 1986:2). This assumption is implicit in the model’s principles in which participants are expected not only to be autonomous decision-makers but willing to openly talk about their problems and negotiate an agreement in a short span of time (4). While these aspects are helpful in some cultures, they are counterproductive in others. Of even greater concern is the goal

¹ The terms “cross-cultural conflict” and “value-based conflict” are often used synonymously in the dispute resolution literature. Though it is assumed that all conflict is in a sense “cultural,” it is only when culture is at the forefront that alternative dispute resolution methods tend to be used. Oftentimes, this occurs when a disputant’s values are at odds with another’s and there is a refusal (or even inability) to come to an agreement or compromise.

of traditional mediation in which a third party seeks to halt violence in order to gain a speedy settlement, often in the interests of the status quo. This suppresses processes of social change as well as opportunities for greater equity and equilibrium. As a consequence, the nature of the social relationship between the parties is often ignored.

Culture may influence how participants see the role of the third parties and disputants, the purpose of the resolution process, as well as the pace, purpose, and style of communication used (Chew 2001:19). For example, LeResche (1990) argues that to openly air feelings and interests in this “self-determined” way does not accord with the values of harmony, diplomacy and collectivity that are important Asian-American society. The notion of talking to solve problems can in fact be detrimental when dealing with parties which are not familiar or comfortable with participating in face to face discussion (Kahane 2004). In Native cultures, the emphasis is on healing. Rather than focus solely on a resolution, there is the added task of rebuilding the relationship that existed before the dispute (LeBaron 2001:125). This aspect is often neglected in most mediation processes but is an integral component to the dispute resolution process of Native cultures. In parts of China, mediators often take on a much more persuasive role by summarizing laws and government policies for which disputants are expected to comply. LeBaron (2001) points out that the persuasive element of this intervention is contradictory to the neutrality professed by Canadian and American mediators (125). In cultures where age and status are intricately linked, the mediator would never be younger than those involved in the conflict as this would counter cultural notions of respect and privilege. All of the examples illustrated above point to the fact that the Eurocentric underpinnings of the mediator’s role do not apply to diverse, multiethnic settings, nor do

they apply to a host of other cultural issues such as gender, profession and age. LeBaron argues that an acknowledgment of the differences in the way “mediation” is practiced in different societies is a gap which needs to be filled (2001:125).

In “Culture and Negotiation Pedagogy,” Kevin Avruch (2000) discusses the often ignored or misrepresented role of culture in negotiation theory and practice. He argues, “negotiation pedagogy concerned in any way with culture, in the end, can only be as good as the concept of culture it draws on” (Avruch 2000:339). The author offers six mutually related ideas that help explain what culture is *not* and how it is misrepresented in dispute resolution literature:

1. *Culture is homogenous.* This presumes that cultures are free of dissensions, of internal contradictions or paradoxes such that culture provides unambiguous behavioural instructions for individuals.
2. *Culture is a thing.* Reified, culture is presumed to act independent of individual agency.
3. *Culture is uniformly distributed among members of a group.* This inadequate idea is what makes nominalizing culture — turning it into a label — possible. Like “national character,” it fits the requirements of work that stresses the “national negotiating styles” approach. Intracultural variation, if ever noted, whether at the individual or group level, is dismissed as “deviance.”
4. *An individual possesses but a single culture.* Usually the “culture” here is national or ethnic. The individual is simply and monolithically Mexican, Moroccan, Moluccan. Once again, the effect is to make culture a synonym for group identity. When predominantly identified with national or ethnic groupings, moreover, this inadequacy makes it more difficult for researchers to think productively about other “vessels” filled by cultural content: professions or occupations, or organizations and institutions, for example. It also tends to “freeze” culture in a single sociological category, at the expense of recognizing situational or contextual factors — think of the important research on “boundary roles” or negotiating definitions of the situation that could benefit from a nuanced cultural perspective.
5. *Culture is custom.* Here, culture is virtually synonymous with “tradition,” customary ways of behaving. It is thus reduced to a sort of surface-level etiquette. Cultural variation becomes, as Peter Black once put it, merely a matter of “differential etiquette.”

6. *Culture is timeless.* In this construct, a changeless quality is imputed to culture, especially to so-called traditional cultures. We speak here, for example, of the “Arab mind” as though a unitary cognizing element has come down to us from Muhammad’s Mecca. Or, “Be careful,” the neophyte heading off to Beijing on a mission is told: “The Chinese have been negotiating for a thousand years.” (One wonders if the adviser has any particular Chinese in mind).

(Avruch 2000:341)

In this case, dispute resolution tends to frame culture as an inescapable mental construct, or in Avruch’s words, “a homogeneous, essentialized, uniformly distributed, customary, timeless, and stable ‘thing’” (2000:343). As a consequence, little attention is paid to the asymmetries of power in intercultural negotiations in the real world. By ignoring the underlying structural problems inherent within certain cultures, dispute resolution from such a perspective only reproduces a system of inequalities.

Due to its complexity, culture is often reduced and turned into a label by practitioners rather than being viewed as a process; something which is continually remade and taken up along the lines of power, gender, and ethnicity. This is indicative of James Clifford’s (1988) classic work, titled *The Predicament of Culture*, which posits it is becoming “increasingly difficult to attach human identity and meaning to a coherent ‘culture’ or ‘language’” (95).² In it, Clifford argues that culture (and identity) is not located within a group but is something that happens between people. The use of cultural descriptors in dispute resolution processes only reinforces the notion that people can be authoritatively characterized across all contexts and settings. Instead, Clifford states: “we should attempt to think of cultures not as organically united or traditionally continuous but...as negotiated, present processes (1988:27). The idea that there are cultural givens

² In a sense, Clifford and Nader are advocating the same thing: culture as a process. However, while Clifford attributes changes in perceptions of culture to an ever-changing globalized world, Nader would argue that culture has always been a process.

which determine people's behaviour during social interactions is no longer acceptable. Our current understanding of culture recognizes that culture is derived from numerous domains and is distributed across complex social and psychological landscapes. The implication for conflict theorists and practitioners is huge: culture is context not cause (Avruch 2000:344).

Cross-cultural Communication

Since the 1990's, there has been a strong focus in the field of dispute resolution on finding "culturally sensitive" techniques which are appropriate and desirable (LeBaron 2001). Though many techniques have been developed in response to the emergence of cross-cultural communication theories (as will be shown in the discussion below), whether these techniques are appropriate or desirable is questionable. Binaries such as low-context versus high-context cultures and individualism versus collectivism are being utilized as a basis for understanding the differences between cultures and the importance of acknowledging those differences in conflict settings. However, there is a danger in taking these binaries at face value. Cultural theorists argue it is important to note that culture is a dynamic process and that there is as much diversity within a culture as there is between them (LeBaron 2001; Triandis 1990). At the same time, targeting one "culture" (or most commonly, one nationality) as more individualist than another only seeks to reify culture as something fixed and discrete. Kevin Avruch (2000) argues that these terms are outdated and that they oversimplify cross-cultural differences. While certain people may possess the trait of individualism, how that trait may be historically derived or experienced or socially applied can be very different from one context to another

(Avruch 2000:345). Moreover, people may (and often do) possess characteristics from both sides. Thus, there remains much controversy over the validity of using such models to analyze what, when, and how conflict is dealt within various cultures.

In a now classic study, anthropologist Edward Hall (1976) posits that conflict interaction takes on different meanings depending on whether the conflict has occurred in a low-context culture or a high-context culture. He describes this in the following:

Any transaction can be characterized as high-, low-, or middle-context. HC [high-context] transactions feature pre-programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. LC [low context] transactions are the reverse. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context.

(Hall 1976:101)

Low context groups (United States, Canada and northern Europe) are characterized by individualism, overt communication and heterogeneity whereas high context groups (Asia and Latin America) feature collectivism, covert communication and homogeneity (Chew 2001:47). According to Stella Ting-Toomey, “in the HCC system what is not said is sometimes more important than what is said...[whereas] in the LCC system words represent truth and power” (Chew 2001:47). Theorists such as Ting-Toomey argue that these varying forms of communication behaviour have a direct impact on the management of disputes. For example, disputants who are not from a high context culture will likely not understand the implicitly shared social and cultural understandings of their low context counterparts. Also, low-context individuals are better able to separate the conflict issue from the person involved in the conflict and to maintain social ties afterwards (Chew 2001:51). In contrast, in high-context cultures the issue is closely tied

with the person who originated the issue. To openly disagree with someone in public may cause both sides to “lose face” (Chew 2001:48).

Brislin (1990) argues that the key to understanding cultural difference lies in the individualist/collectivist dimension. In anthropology, this is known as relational versus individualistic value orientation. Once again, these concepts are not oppositional but “orthogonal,” meaning they can only be viewed and understood in relation to the other (LeBaron 2001:144). In terms of conflict, collectivists tend to value group harmony; therefore, more emphasis is made on resolving disputes amicably. Like high context cultures, communication in a collectivist society is associative and much more attention is paid to the context of the communication including verbal associations, facial expressions and body posture (LeBaron 2001:143). Individualists stress human independence and value achievement, pleasure and competition. As such, individualists do not accept the role of the third party facilitator whereas collectivists, who are more comfortable in a hierarchal setting, do. Triandis also argues that in individualistic cultures, confrontations are acceptable and even desirable because they “clear the air” (Chew 2001:53). In contrast, collectivists emphasize avoidance of confrontation as a means of preserving harmony. The confrontational nature of most dispute resolution processes may cause collectivists anxiety or discomfort. For example, in Korea, beliefs and practices surrounding conflict may occur within a historical context of Confucian thought which includes an emphasis on reciprocity and proper attitudes to be exhibited within five basic complimentary relationships: “loyalty between ruler and ruled, piety between father and son, duty between husband and wife, obedience and respect between elders and younger people, and mutual faith and trust between friend” (LeResche 1990:137). All of these

relationships are built on the collective good and not for individual objectives (LeResche 1990:137).

Hall (1976), Ting-Toomey (2001), Triandis (1990), and LeResche (1990) all share a common position in that they believe these binaries illustrate how fundamental differences in norms, values and beliefs may complicate or inhibit the dispute resolution process. At the same time, categorizing disputants based on “typical” cultural behaviour is extremely problematic. Binaries such as high/low context and individualism/collectivism do not take into consideration a host of other cultural influences, or perhaps more importantly, the power of human agency. As will be shown in my summary of a selection of studies on cross-cultural conflict, many recent approaches to conflict illustrate the importance of examining the impacts of cultural discourses on conflict management processes. In other words, how do people’s definitions of culture narrow or limit their conflict management approaches. Similarly, this research considers the ways in which culture is continually made and remade and taken up along the lines of gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and profession. As well, it considers the relationship between oversimplified definitions of culture and poor conflict management processes and/or outcomes.

Studies on Conflict and Culture: Past and Present

Sally Engle Merry (2001), Austin Sarat (1998), Susan S. Silbey (1992), Richard Delgado (1999), Michelle LeBaron (2001), and others pioneered work on various aspects of the relationship between culture and conflict. However, according to LeBaron, earlier research and literature reflects a naïve belief that culture is stable and accessible by all of

the dominant culture (2001). In contrast, recent literature is beginning to acknowledge culture as a “dynamic that both shapes and reflects experience and that both dominant and multiple minority cultures may be more ‘opaque’ and complex than assumed” (LeBaron 2001:1). Though there has been greater emphasis on the relationship between conflict and culture, particularly how culture may influence definitions and experiences of conflict, this relationship is poorly understood as there has been very little empirical research on cross-cultural conflict (Ting-Toomey 1985). This may be due to the fact that there are many difficulties associated with conducting methodological research on culture and conflict. Weiss (1987) identifies the four major pitfalls of studying conflict and culture in the following:

1. Multiple cultures - people are influenced by many different “cultures,” including those of the nation, the region, their ethnicity, their religious and/or other affiliations, etc.
2. Consistency v. paradox - individuals do not always behave in predictable ways according to a given style or norm.
3. Consistency v. change - some cultural markers change over time, while others remain stable. Those not using up-to-date information may engender confusion.
4. Aggregate v. individual patterns - Patterns of group behaviour cannot be reliably used in every situation to predict individual actions.

(LeBaron 2001:139).

Conflict and culture are difficult to examine because they are multidimensional phenomena whose meanings are ambiguous. Even definitions between disciplines vary, making it difficult to generalize and apply the work of social scientists to dispute resolution theory and practice.

Despite these drawbacks, theorists continue to stress the importance of examining cultural biases in conflict and new studies are developing each day. Topics range from research on increased cultural awareness in the workplace and government agencies

(Evans 1991; Williams 1994; Gentile 1995), the context of culture in school settings (Brinson, Kottler, and Fisher 2004), various cross-cultural issues in universities and colleges (Schuck 1993; Goldstein 1990), and even comparison studies on perceptions of conflict (Nader 1990; Park 1996).

Since the 1950's, academics have become increasingly interested in anthropological studies of culture and conflict. Anthropologist Laura Nader, for example, discusses the influence of harmony ideology on conflict resolution processes among the Zapotec of Mexico. In the preface of her book, *Harmony Ideology*, Nader writes: "Harmony and conflict are not antithetical as previous theories of conflict have suggested" (Chew 2001:38). Harmony ideology is the belief that all conflict is bad and as such, is in need of constant control and management (Chew 2001:42). A healthy society is one that achieves harmony between people and minimizes conflict and confrontation. The model is reminiscent of aspects of the judicial system used in Canada and the U.S. which presumes that all conflicts can be resolved through consensual processes such as mediation. Nader's fieldwork in Mexico illustrates how conflict can be positive for economic growth and change through confrontational forms of political action. She argues that the obsession with peace in Canada and the U.S. not only suppresses legitimate social conflict, but the people themselves by socializing them toward conformity (Chew 2001:43).

Although Nader does discuss the need to take into account different beliefs, practices and legal systems, she remains critical of the ways in which alternative dispute resolution is practiced in the U.S. and internationally. Dispute resolution processes, from her point of view, neglect the involvement of social and political economic inequalities

that are the root of most conflicts (Nader 1997:713). Such inequalities, she argues, cannot be addressed by a process that does not bring about structural change (1997:715). In addition, dispute resolution processes tend to favour those with more power and in doing so, reinforce existing inequalities. Nader advocates greater emphasis on changing the very structures by which conflicts arise but does little to explain what changes would be necessary to do this.

Another fairly recent anthropological study on culture and conflict is Kyeyoung Park's (1996) work on Black-Korean tension in America. In "Use and Abuse of Race and Culture," she uses data attained through interviews with African American and Korean American business people in order to explore how White racism is reconstructed in the context of Black-Korean tension. The interviews focus on the 1991 Soon Ja Du-Latasha Harlins incident in which a Black woman was shot and killed by a Korean shopkeeper for stealing a bottle of juice. Park argues that Blacks, Koreans and white institutions interpret Black-Korean conflict in different ways. She writes: "the role of culture emerges in four different ways: (1) Korean American's approach toward business, (2) Black and Korean Americans' perceptions of each other's cultures, (3) the impact of the dominant society's discourse on Black and Korean relations, and (4) the social construction of race by both Koreans and Blacks, mediated by the dominant cultural discourse" (Chew 2001:158). Park's thesis is that the increase of Korean-owned businesses in America has had an enormous impact on race ideologies in both the public and private sphere (Chew 2001:152). Here, Park differentiates between context and culture in her analysis of Black and Korean relations. Her work focuses more on the contextual factors behind increased tension between both sides including migration patterns and immigration status. Park's

work is perhaps most recognized for giving voice to Korean immigrants, small businessmen, and women; however, it is her analysis of the impacts of cultural discourses on conflict management processes, and the ways that culture may be used as a justification for certain types of behaviour, that is of crucial importance here.

Despite a shift in thinking on the relationship between culture and conflict, many recent studies continue to rely on a narrow and oversimplified definition of culture. This is especially apparent in conflict studies conducted at post-secondary institutions. In “Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution in the Schools,” Brinson *et al.* (2004) evaluate a variety of conflict resolution techniques used in the United States, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Western Europe, and the Pacific Islands. Their objective is to decrease levels of violence in U.S. public schools by providing cross-cultural conflict resolution training for counsellors. They argue that children often use violence in order to resolve conflict among their peers and that alternative forms of dispute resolution are not only beneficial but required (Brinson *et al.* 2004:2). Traditional conflict processes such as peer mediation and process curriculum are culture-specific and are therefore ineffective when dealing with value and behavioural differences among students (Brinson *et al.* 2004:4). In order to resolve conflict, they argue, counsellors must define, understand and make sense of conflict within the cultural context of the group (Brinson *et al.* 2004:5). However, in contrast to Park’s study, the term “cultural context” here refers solely to differences in nationality and/or ethnicity and does not consider the influence of other aspects of culture; for instance, gender. The idea that there is one particular method or process for resolving conflict in each country does not account for the fact that there are many sub-cultures within a country. Each sub-culture will bring various assumptions and

approaches to the conflict management process that may affect the role of the parties, the pace and style of communication, as well as the ways in which the conflict is both viewed and resolved. While the study provides evidence of increased interest in creating and improving conflict resolution approaches in U.S. public schools, their methods for doing so remain far too simplistic.

In “RA Perspectives on Violence in Residence Halls,” Palmer & Devine (2000) argue that cultural traits and behaviours often play a role in increased levels of violence in residence halls. However, they do little to address the management of violence by Resident Advisors, paying no attention to the dispute resolution skills and techniques involved. At the same time, research projects such as Brinson *et al.*'s study on school violence suggest that poor dispute resolution skills is a *major* factor in increased levels of conflict and violence between students (Brinson, Kottler & Fisher 2004). The dispute resolution methods and procedures used in most schools in Canada and the U.S. are often ineffective because they neglect the culturally and linguistically diverse background of students, not to mention the influence of age and maturity. That being said, there is a strong need for research in this area, particularly in terms of the assessment of cross-cultural dispute resolution initiatives in Canadian and American universities. Although research on cross-cultural conflict in primary and secondary schools, businesses and organizations is expanding, there has apparently been very little published research conducted at post-secondary institutions. Exceptions to this are articles that deal with violence in residence, multicultural competence among Resident Advisors, and differing conflict management styles among university undergraduates (Palmer & Devine 2000; Watt 2004; Goldstein 1990). These studies indicate that, to date, little research exists to

measure both individual differences in conflict management style and cross-cultural dimensions.

Until now, very little on cross-cultural conflict in universities has been explored in Canada. An anthropological perspective will contribute to existing knowledge by providing an account of the complex, interactive, and encompassing narrative of culture and conflict within a specifically Canadian context. Although most universities in Canada provide training for Resident Advisors on cultural diversity, the majority of mediation policies implemented by Canadian universities are culture-specific. If the proposed research indicates that the current conflict management policies and practices used by RAs at the University of Victoria are not conducive to resolving cross-cultural conflict, recommendations will be made to change this. Findings for this project will therefore be beneficial to other researchers, practitioners (Resident Advisors, Dons, Community Coordinators) and policy makers (Residential Life and Conference Services). This research will expand current thinking in applied anthropology to include cross-cultural perspectives in dispute resolution programs, training and initiatives in a Canadian university context.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

Research Objectives and Questions

Research for this project was conducted at the University of Victoria (British Columbia, Canada) between September 2006 and March 2007. The duration of this time was spent organizing a series of individual and group interviews with Resident Advisors (RAs) on campus. The objective of this research was to examine RAs perceptions of the management of cross-cultural conflict in UVic residences. Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were designed in order to explore (1) the policies and expected practices of RAs; (2) how RAs implement these policies and; (3) RAs perceptions of their effectiveness in resolving cross-cultural disputes among residents. The research question for this project, therefore, was: *What dispute resolution policies and practices used by Resident Advisors (RAs) at the University of Victoria are conducive to effectively manage cross-cultural conflict in residences?* In conjunction with the broader research question, the following sub-question was used: What changes (if any) can be implemented to improve the conflict management policies and practices used by RAs for effective management of cross-cultural conflict at UVic? The sub-question was posed during the group interview and focus group session and was also considered in the data collection process.

Definition of Key Terms

As pointed out in the previous two chapters, there continues to be much debate on definitions of culture and the role of culture in conflict management processes. This is

particularly problematic in dispute resolution theory and practice where culture is often treated as a determining factor in disputes. Anthropologists generally define “culture” as sets of learned behaviour and ideas that human beings acquire as members of society (Schultz & Lavenda 2001:3). Over the years, the term culture has become increasingly complex, incorporating groups which centre on a wide variety of shared identities. These include: race, ethnicity, age, nationality, geographical setting, socioeconomic class, able-bodiedness or disability, sexual orientation, gender, language, religion, profession or job role, and workplace and business (LeBaron 2003:10). The complexity of the term “culture” was reflected again by RAs in their varying definitions and perceptions of culture. However, this sophisticated conceptualization of culture as a process was not evident in discussions of actual cross-cultural conflict cases. For the most part, RAs examples of cross-cultural conflict focussed solely on nationality and more specifically, interactions between exchange and non-exchange students. Exceptions to this were conflict cases regarding the use of marijuana and alcohol in residence as well as one instance where cross-cultural conflict was linked to sexuality. As a result, this research focuses primarily on cultural identities attributed to nationality.

Gelfand & Brett (2004) argue that conflict generally occurs when: (1) people differ in their preferences regarding how to accomplish an objective and (2) these differing preferences impede each side’s ability to get what they want (177). However, according to LeBaron (2003), conflict may also arise from different expectations about communication, behaviour and relationships (10). Due to the emphasis on culturally specific cases of conflict, *conflict* is defined here as “a clashing of cultural values, norms and practices.”

For the purpose of this research, *cross-cultural conflict* refers to “cultural differences which occur out of a clashing of identities, meaning-making, worldviews and territories.” According to dispute resolution theory, cross-cultural conflicts can be identified by the following signs: (1) It usually has complicated dynamics. Cultural differences tend to create complex combinations of expectations about one's own and others' behaviour; (2) If addressing content and relational issues does not resolve the conflict, it can often be rooted in cultural differences; (3) Conflict may reoccur or arise strong emotions even though the issue of disagreement appears to be insignificant (Williams 1994).

To date, there remains much controversy over the terminology used in the fields of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Definitions vary not only by country or state but organization as well. It is therefore extremely important to specify which terms are being used, under what circumstances, and with regards to whom. The terms “conflict management” and “conflict resolution,” for example, are often used interchangeably; however, conflict theorists and practitioners are beginning to make a concerted effort to distinguish the two terms in order to avoid confusion. According to Rubin *et al* (2004), conflict resolution refers to “an agreement in which most or all of the issues are cleared up,” whereas conflict management occurs when “the parties work out ways of de-escalating and avoiding future escalation” (190-1). For the purpose of this study, I will be using the term “conflict management” in reference to the training, policies and expected practices of UVic RAs. This term was chosen for two reasons: for one, in contrast to conflict resolution, RAs are not expected to fully resolve disputes but to deal with them on a short-term basis. Their role, according to the *Community Standards Handbook*, is to

provide an opportunity for students to live together comfortably for the duration of the academic year. Thus, they are not expected to seek lasting solutions or to rebuild relationships. Secondly, conflict management also signifies a recognition that not all disputes can or should be fully resolved, particularly those that are cross-cultural. As such, conflict management in this case refers to the ways in which RAs are trained to deal with disputes between residents in order to stop a conflict from escalating.

Description of Participants and Their Role

At the University of Victoria, RAs are student staff members who are employed to assist students in their transition to residence and university life, as well as creating an environment where all students are able to live and learn in comfort (Residence Life Community Standards 2006). After a hiring process including group and individual interviewing, RAs undergo a two-week training session in the fall involving courses in first aid, fire prevention and safety, alcohol issues, programming, communication skills, health and wellness, diversity and roommate issues. Aside from enforcing rules and regulations, RAs are also expected to organize a wide variety of educational programs for residents including topics of diversity, sexualized violence prevention and many others (<http://housing.uvic.ca/winter/resadvisor.php>). This population of RAs was of interest for the following reasons: RAs are students themselves and share the same living environment as residents; RAs deal directly with complaints and issues arising between residents; and RAs are generally excited about their role and are eager to share their experiences. In conjunction with the RAs perceptions, I have also drawn on my own

previous experiences as an RA and my four years as an undergraduate living in residence in order to obtain rapport with the study participants.

Participants were recruited with the aid of Manager of Residential Life and Conference Services.³ In September 2006, recruitment letters were forwarded to all potential RAs in both electronic (email) and paper (on-campus mail) form. The Manager of Residential Life and Conference Services gave permission to speak at the weekly Sunday night RA meetings, which provided a forum to discuss the project goals and objectives. Interested RAs were contacted by email and phone in order to schedule interviews. At this time, consent forms were sent via email outlining in more detail the purpose of the project, the style of interview (one-on-one, semi-structured), proposed topics of discussion as well as privacy issues. In January, an email regarding a focus group on recommendations and alternatives to training was sent out to all participating RAs. In order to ensure anonymity, all names of participants, residents and buildings have been given a pseudonym.

In total, twelve RAs were interviewed. Since studies indicate that gender has a significant impact on experiences of conflict and violence (Palmer and Devine 2000), an equal distribution of female and male participants was a priority. This study, therefore, includes participation of six male Resident Advisors and six female Resident Advisors. Also, as with any topic, participants in this project may hold differing views of conflict and culture depending on their background and education. Gubrium and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) write: “Identities are shaped according to the historical, cultural, and disciplinary contexts within which the interview participant describes reality” (710). This project includes a mix of participants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and nationalities

³ Ethical approval for this project was obtained through the University of Victoria’s HREB.

(Canadian, East Indian, Hindu, Australian, Greek, Irish, American, Persian, Arab and Jewish) and university faculties (psychology, political science, social work, biology, geography, environmental science, marine biology, education, engineering and chemistry).⁴ Finally, experience in dealing with conflict in residence was essential for this study. Due to the low return rate of Resident Advisors at this university, it was difficult to recruit RAs with more than one year's experience. A total of six first year RAs (three months experience or less) and six returning RAs (six months experience or more) were recruited for this study.

Research Activities:

This study incorporates the main tenets of qualitative research including: conducting interviews in a convenient location, seeking involvement of participants in data collection and analysis, and incorporating the researcher's involvement in the research process⁵ (Creswell 2003). The three main activities in the methods portion of this study include: (1) a literature review; (2) one-on-one interviews; and (3) a series of group interviews. Given that participants were not observed directly, interviews and focus groups provided an opportunity for participants to discuss historical information on past conflict situations and relevant life experiences.

In order to situate the research in an academic context, a review of literature was conducted (Chapter Two). Though the greatest portion of the review is made up of peer-reviewed articles, sources also include textbooks from relevant courses, theses, dissertations and online web searches. Several key topics include: cross-cultural conflict

⁴ At the beginning of our interviews, I asked RAs what ethnic group or groups they affiliated with if any. The terms specified here were the terms used by the RAs themselves in responding to this question.

⁵ See section on "reflexivity" at end of chapter.

and communication, dispute resolution, diversity in residences, higher education, residence policies and practices, and Resident Advisor training. The review of literature not only provided a historical framework for understanding and explaining the relationship between culture and conflict but emphasized the importance of studying the two terms collectively. Also, the review helped identify overall trends in what has been published on cross-cultural conflict including gaps in research and scholarship and studies of immediate interest.

The second activity was organized in September of 2006 and involved conducting one-on-one interviews with the Resident Advisors who volunteered to participate in the study. These Resident Advisors included male, female, new and returning staff. In order to better understand participants' experiences and views of conflict in residence, semi-structured, open-ended questions were used. Questions were asked based on a number of broad themes (see Appendix 'A'): *interviewee background* (age, ethnic group, place of birth, year and field of study, years of RA experience); *policies and expected practices* (definition of a dispute, frequency and nature of disputes in residence, policies for managing disputes); *actual practices* (how RAs are actually involved in resolving disputes in residence, how this might or might not differ from policy); *cross-cultural conflict* (definition of, prevalence of, management of); and *evaluation* (were the policies and practices helpful? Are they effective? What changes could improve the policies and practices?). The open-ended nature of these questions allowed new concepts to emerge by encouraging depth and vitality in responses.

The time and venue of interviews was also important. In order for participants to feel comfortable and relaxed, interviews took place in a convenient location (e.g., on-

campus office) and never exceeded more than one hour. All one-on-one interviews were conducted in a research office in the Department of Anthropology, which provided a convenient, private and generally undistruptive environment. Due to the public role of RAs, it was decided that the residence would be an inappropriate area for discussion as interruptions and noise were inevitable. In order to create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, decorations were added to the office walls and on several occasions, light snacks and refreshments were provided.

Each interview was audio recorded and conducted in English. The interview protocol was used primarily as a guide for discussion and was not intended to dominate but rather to aid the interview process. The main focus was allowing participants an opportunity to control the direction and flow of questioning. Thus, there was no defined ordering of the questions and the ordering of further questions was determined by the participant's responses. It is therefore not surprising that the open ended nature of these questions led to an assortment of divergent views and issues. Definitions and examples of cross-cultural conflict were especially varied throughout the interviews; however, several common themes and categories still emerged (e.g. individual discretion, neutrality, inconsistency). A copy of the transcribed interview was sent via email to each participant approximately one week after the interview. Dearnley (2005) argues that this increases the validity of the findings by providing participants an opportunity to confirm what they have said, to make changes or clarifications, or to withdraw statements with which they are not comfortable.

The third and final activity, group interviews and focus groups, were organized near the end of the data collection process (January 2007) in order to provide a venue for

expanding discussions and generating plausible solutions. The first group interview was organized to facilitate a discussion with two RAs regarding a specific cross-cultural conflict in their building. Since the incident occurred in late September, few details were known at the time of the one-on-one interviews and an additional meeting for further discussion was needed. Both RAs decided it would be beneficial to wait until after their second meeting with the residents so they would have more information to offer. In order to provide a more comfortable atmosphere, a classroom on campus was reserved and snacks and refreshments were provided. The group interview lasted approximately one hour and focused on factors contributing to the dispute, how the dispute was being managed, and the results of the first and second meetings.⁶

The focus group occurred mid-January and included the participation of four RAs. All four participants had previously volunteered for the one-on-one interviews, including one of the participants from the previous group interview. The purpose of this focus group was to discuss possible recommendations for policy-makers and future training workshops for RAs. A list of issues and topics gleaned from the one-on-one interviews was created beforehand and handed out to all participants. The list provided a point form summary of recommendations and alternatives to training as well as a variety of prevention methods provided by RAs. Several major topics included: changing the structure of residences, changes to programming, implementation of workshops on cross-cultural awareness and communication, use of art or theatre in conflict management, and the creation of a policy or guideline for managing cross-cultural conflict in residence.⁷

⁶ See Appendix "E" for a complete list of questions and topics addressed during the group interview.

⁷ For a complete list of issues and topics discussed during the second focus group including point form notes, please see Appendix "G"

Again, due to the number of participants involved (four) and time of interview (9:00 am), a large workroom in the Residential Life office was used and breakfast was provided.

Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis for this project was an ongoing process involving continuous reflection and included asking analytic questions and writing memos throughout the study. Such questions include: How do RAs define cross-cultural conflict and how does this definition inform or influence their management of a particular cross-cultural dispute? What factors make it difficult to manage disputes in residence and is culture considered a factor? What are the most common disputes in residence and how do they relate to differing cultural norms, values and beliefs? Finally, how does the cultural background of an RA play a role in the management of cross-cultural conflict?

Key steps in the data analysis process included preparation of data for analysis, reading, organizing, interpreting and representing the data. Following Creswell (2003), a timeline of steps was created in order to analyze and interpret findings from this project.

These included:

1. Organize and prepare data for analysis. This first step involved transcribing the one-on-one and focus group interviews and sorting them by participant(s).
2. Read through all the data. The purpose of this second step was to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. For example, what general ideas are participants saying? What is the tone of these ideas? What is the general impression of the overall depth, credibility, and use of the information?
3. Begin a detailed analysis and coding of the data. Coding is the process of organizing the material into “chunks” before bringing meaning to those “chunks” (Creswell 2003). This includes sorting the text data into labelled categories. These categories were developed during the data collection process by using the terms employed by the RAs themselves. Major categories include: (1) Common sense, Judgment and Discretion; (2) Personality; (3) Experience; (4) Inconsistency; (5)

- Neutrality; (6) Racism; (7) Exchange Students; (8) Marijuana use; (9) Homosexuality; (10) Intolerance; (11) Racial Slurs and Discriminatory Words; (12) Disrespect; and (13) Language and Cultural Barriers.
4. Establish categories or themes for analysis. This portion of the research was initiated in conjunction with the coding process and included generating five to seven categories for the proposed study. These themes are included as headings in the findings section of the research and incorporate both interview and literature review data. Major chapter themes include: “Policy and Training,” “Definitions of Culture and Conflict,” “RA Background(s) and Experience(s),” “Perceptions of the Management of Cross-cultural Conflict,” and “Recommendations and Alternatives to Training.”
 5. Representing the data. In order to advance how the description and themes were represented in the qualitative narrative, a detailed discussion of themes was created. This included sub-themes, inter-connecting themes, relevant illustrations, multiple perspectives from individuals and quotations.
 6. Interpreting the meaning of the data. This section involved describing the RAs' perceptions, organizing the data around their views of culture and conflict to the greatest degree possible and finally, interpreting the data. A comparison between the findings of this project and previous research conducted on this topic was also included. Finally, recommendations for policy makers are provided in the final chapter.

Analyzing interview data involves critical assessment and interpretation of the participants' narratives and understandings of their lived experience. Pyett (2003) writes that “we must respect but not necessarily agree with the actors or research participants” (1173). A vital portion of research involved examining the circumstances, structures, and constraints that have contributed to the formation of the participants' worldviews (Pyett 2003:1173). Anthropological and dispute resolution theories regarding the relationship between culture and conflict aid in developing an understanding that reaches beyond the perspective of the participants. This was analyzed in conjunction with the historical and contextual information provided by RAs.

Methodological Assumptions

Conflict theorists argue that society and culture influence individual behaviour, almost but not quite to the point of determining it, by the way culture structures the way people are able to think and act (Abu-Nimer 1996; Lederach 1986). Following Michelle LeBaron (2003), this study assumes a social and cultural constructionist approach to the study of culture and conflict. Guba and Lincoln (1989) discuss the main proponents and assumptions of social and cultural constructionism in the following:

- “Truth” is a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with objective reality.
- “Facts” have no meaning except within some value framework; hence there cannot be an “objective” assessment of any proposition.
- “Causes” and effects do not exist except by imputation.
- Phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied; findings from one context cannot be generalized to another; neither problems nor solutions can be generalized from one setting to another.
- Data derived from constructivist inquiry have neither special status nor legitimation; they represent simply another construction to be taken into account in the move toward consensus (44-45).

Research will be guided under the assumption that *culture* is a socially constructed entity which shapes human perceptions, attributions, judgments, and ideas of self and other and that *conflict* occurs out of a clashing of cultural values, norms and practices (LeBaron 2003). According to cultural and social constructionist approaches,

- Culture is invented.
- Conflict is fully constructed by culture/society.
- The self or individual is constituted by culture and is always shifting.
- Reality is a manifestation of habitual codes and cultural norms.
- Change occurs when cultural norms and practices are interrogated.

This theoretical approach was chosen because of its emphasis on situating conflict in its social and cultural context as well as its consideration of the existence of multiple “realities.” For example, in a university residence setting, it is important to consider the

impact and influence of all those involved (e.g., the students themselves, families of students, Resident Advisors, staff, administrators) as each would have very different experiences and perceptions of culture and conflict in residence. Certain foundational questions may include: How have people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, ‘truths,’ explanations, beliefs and worldview? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviours and for those with whom they interact? (Patton 2002:96). Thus, rather than focusing on *facts*, the purpose of this research is to look for *themes* surrounding perceptions of conflict and culture in residence. Since this research is primarily focused on the Resident Advisors’ perspectives, this research will explore the influence of the researched upon definitions and constructions of conflict and culture.

Due to time constraints and lack of funding, this project focuses primarily on Resident Advisors’ perspectives and does not include the perspectives of the residents themselves or Residential Life staff. However, I have also incorporated a particular concept of hermeneutics including the examination of the researcher’s active subjectivity and influence over the research process (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg 2005). This is exemplified in the following section on “reflexivity.”

Reflexivity

This section follows the hermeneutic approach to research by positioning the researcher as an active participant in the research process (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg 2005). Kong *et al.* (2002) argue it is important to look at (a) the subject of the research along with (b) the social locations in which research knowledge is produced, as well as

(c) a much fuller sense of the spaces—personal, cultural, academic, intellectual, historical—that the researcher occupies in building that knowledge (249). Some of these “spaces” are touched on in the following discussion of my own assumptions, judgments and attitudes towards conducting this particular study.

One of (if not the) greatest challenges of conducting research on this topic was providing a detailed yet open definition of culture. Prior to my interviews with RAs, I had spent several months immersing myself into the dispute resolution literature and every study on culture and conflict I could get my hands on. When it came time to decide on a definition of culture that would guide my study, my initial decision was to limit my research to studies that involved differences in ethnicity. This decision was based on the fact that I did not think it would be possible to include every facet of culture in a study of this size. Moreover, I assumed that most RAs would cite ethnicity as a primary factor in cross-cultural conflicts. However, after speaking with RAs, I found that their definitions of cross-cultural conflict varied tremendously and that my own perceptions of what constitutes a “cross-cultural conflict” had drastically changed. I learned (or perhaps re-learned) that all conflict is in a sense cultural. Thus, what I thought would become a study on the management of cross-cultural conflict in university residences turned into a study on the relationship between definitions of culture and conflict management processes and their impacts on the management of conflict in university residences.

With regards to the interview protocol, I found that the sections on “tools” and “tactics” were not clearly understood by participants and could have been omitted from the discussion. Without a background in dispute resolution or training in conflict theory, these terms were useless. A similar issue evolved out of my use of the terms conflict and

dispute. At the beginning of this study, conflict was defined as: “a clashing of cultural values, norms and practices;” however, in speaking with RAs, I asked them to define a “dispute” and “cross-cultural conflict” but not conflict on its own. In the dispute resolution literature, disputes and conflicts are considered on completely separate terms. A “conflict,” according to Sloan and Chicanot (2003), is defined as “a point at which expectations, goals or objectives diverge” whereas a “dispute” is defined as “a manifest conflict, in which the issues are typically identified, the parties known and the ‘particularity’ of the conflict is understood by those involved” (76-77). While these terms are viewed quite differently in the literature, this study uses them interchangeably. Upon further reflection, it does not seem that this lack of clarification had an impact on the actual data collected though I feel it is important for the reader to understand the distinction between these two terms, particularly considering their distinction in the dispute resolution literature.

As a final thought, I think it is necessary to point out that I do not wish to state that *all* conflict resolution processes use a narrow definition of conflict. In fact, notions of culture as a dynamic (rather than fixed) process are beginning to materialize in both theory and practice. In a 1986 study conducted by Lederach, a series of pilot workshops on mediation and conflict management skills were facilitated in three Central American countries with the goal of creating a “culturally appropriate” model for mediators. The model utilizes the term culture in the broadest sense, referencing not only to national and ethnic differences but to the culture of social workers and inner city neighbourhoods as well.

During a summer institute on peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Bolivia, a representative from the Conciliation Centre in Santa Cruz spoke of their experiences in working with indigenous groups involved in conflict. The speaker stressed the importance of understanding the indigenous “cosmo vision” (worldview) and its relationship to the conflict parties and the conflict itself. The speaker provided numerous examples of the ways in which conflict may be managed differently in urban versus rural areas of Bolivia, particularly with regards to both prevention and control. Though these examples may be small, they are a significant step towards creating lasting solutions to the daily conflicts that occur in our universities, schools, workplaces and homes.

CHAPTER FOUR: TRAINING AND POLICY

The following chapter analyzes the expected training and conflict management policies and procedures of UVic RAs (as outlined in the *Community Standards Handbook*) and how those processes are actually carried out in practice (as discussed by RAs during interviews). With regards to training on conflict management, RAs voiced mixed reviews of the role playing exercises offered by Residential Life. The majority of RAs found role playing helpful in illustrating the numerous conflicts that may occur in residence; however, few found that the experience gave them the practical skills needed to deal with those issues. Most, in fact, relied primarily on their own common sense, judgement and experience to deal with conflicts in residence. In terms of policy, RAs noted that few policies were helpful in managing conflict in residence. This was due to the fact that policies tend to be resolution-centric in the sense that there is added pressure to “fix” conflicts fast, often through the use of fine or penalty. RAs noted that this does little to identify the context of the conflict and ignores the issues that precipitated the conflict in the first place. Thus, while policies may be deemed “resolution-centric” in a sense, they are in the end only a temporary solution to the problem.

What do RAs do?

As noted, RAs are student employees hired by the university to look after the health and safety of students living in residence. The role of the RA, as outlined in training, includes a number of identities such as role model, resource, rule enforcer, listener, mediator, problem solver, and friend. The four major responsibilities of RAs are duty, enforcing rules and regulations, programming, and training. Duty includes a number

of tasks such as letting students into their room, dealing with residents' concerns, responding to emergency situations, monitoring the physical condition of the building, and dealing with behavioural incidents (*Resident Advisor Terms of Employment*). Each RA is responsible for working one day of four between Monday and Thursday nights and one day in two on Friday and Saturday nights (7:00 pm until 8:00 am). Since staff meetings with the house team (Resident Advisor Coordinator, Complex Leader and Resident Advisor's) occur every Sunday night, RAs are expected to be available for Sunday duty as well. RAs are issued a pass key which allows access to all rooms in residence in case of emergency or if a resident is locked out of their room. During the one-on-one interviews, RAs noted that while disputes occurred on a daily basis, they would deal with them most frequently while on duty. This was due to the fact that RAs tend to be more visible and accessible while on duty. RAs also commented that the majority of residents do not understand the organization of the duty schedule. As such, RAs from outside the building are not always recognized or respected as authority figures.

According to the University of Victoria website, RAs spend a great deal of time enforcing rules and regulations in order to maintain an environment that is conducive to both sleep and study (<http://housing.uvic.ca>). Rules and regulations are outlined in the *Community Standards Handbook*, which is given in document form to all residents at the beginning of each year.⁸ The handbook is prefaced with the UVic Residential Life philosophy, which states:

UVic residences house over 2300 students. Students come to our community from all over the world, from big cities, rural living, from the prairies and from the

⁸ The Community Standards Handbook can also be located online at the following address: <http://housing.uvic.ca/winter/communitystandards.pdf>

mountains. You all bring different experiences of the world with you, which is what makes living in residence so interesting. Because students all have different expectations about what standards are acceptable in a community, it is our job in the residence life department to establish a set of standards that meet the needs of the general student population. These standards should make it possible for all students to feel safe and welcome here, while having the opportunity to sleep and study well. These standards have evolved over time to reflect the laws of the Victoria community, requirements for basic safety in high density living (e.g. our candle policy), and the feedback of students over the years.⁹

Students who choose to live in residence are expected to behave according to a set of community values which include “respect for diversity, for others’ space and property, and for the community good” (3). The thirteen community standards outlined in the remaining sections of the handbook provide a means for maintaining these values. These community standards include: collective rights, personal safety, fire safety, cleaning and maintenance, damage, guests, noise, student health and wellness, alcohol, social functions, guidelines for hosting a responsible function, drugs, and roommates.

Residential Life Staff: Roles and Responsibilities

Residential life staff have very different roles in enforcing and monitoring the community standards which are based on a hierarchy of responsibility. The following is an excerpt from the *Community Standards Book* which explains, in detail, the expected roles and responsibilities of the Resident Advisor (RA), Complex Leader (CL), Residence Area Coordinator (RAC) and the Manager of Residence Student Affairs (MRSA), specifically with regards to managing disputes in UVic residences:

⁹ While the Residence Life philosophy expands culture to include differences in rural versus urban upbringing as well as differences between regions of Canada (East coast/West coast), these contextual issues are not present in the conflict management processes offered to RAs.

Resident Advisor (RA)

Part of the Resident Advisor role is to ensure that residence rules and regulations are being followed. When encountering a situation where the rules are being broken they have the option to deliver a verbal warning or issue an incident report. It is at the RAs discretion when to use a warning or write an incident report, however, if a Resident Advisor needs to warn a resident several times, this will result in an incident report. At times RAs will work in conjunction with their Complex Leader.

Complex Leader (CL)

The Complex Leader is the senior student position in each building. Their role is to support the RAs to ensure that residence rules and regulations are being followed. Complex leaders may both write incident reports and participate in the meetings that may follow an incident.

Residence Area Coordinator (RAC)

The Residence Area Coordinator is responsible for following up on all behavioural concerns in their area. They meet with residents who have received incident reports due to violations of the residence agreement. In the meetings they discuss the incident with the student and impose the necessary sanctions. The Residence Area Coordinator may also refer students to the Manager of Residence Student Affairs, when incidents require more severe sanctions.

Manager, Residence Student Affairs (MRSA)

The Manager of Residence Student Affairs is responsible for dealing with situations where a student's behaviour is a danger to themselves or to others or when a student consistently does not follow the residence agreement.

A chart illustrating the procedures for dealing with disputes in residence and the delineation of responsibility involved can be found in Appendix "H" of this thesis.

Most RAs found the hierarchy of responsibility both reassuring and helpful to their role. When asked how one would go about resolving a dispute in residence, Paris comments:

...I would meet with the individuals separately first and if both parties were in conflict and I sort of had the okay from my supervisor, I might bring them together...it would depend on their comfort, my comfort, my supervisor's comfort...there's sort of that chain where if I'm not comfortable with something I

can sort of pass it on to someone...but at the same time, there are definitely situations where I think this is something I can definitely deal with...

The benefits of having support from other Residential Life staff are reiterated by Everlast in the following:

I always have the option of calling on other RAs or my supervisors in terms of situations I didn't feel comfortable dealing with, or situations I wasn't sure how to deal with, because that would be ideal right, to bring someone in with experience...say I approached a group of people and asked them to continue moving on and to continue their conversation elsewhere...you can ask them several times and they won't do anything in which case I'll say, okay it's your turn...I'll ask another RA to try the situation...a new face always helps...sometimes all of the RAs would try and my complex leader would go to campus security and get their help... if you're ever in need of help, the resources are plentiful...you've got peer helpers, you've got AVP on campus, you've got counsellors, you've got doctors, the list is endless...

Complex Leaders (CL) were described by many RAs as a type of “coach” and a great resource for handling disputes of every nature. RAs also saw the role of the RAC as integral to the Residence Life team due to their experience with managing emergencies, major disputes, and delicate emotional or physical problems such as suicide attempts or depression.

In terms of enforcement, the *Community Standards Handbook* (2006) provides a table with guidelines on what might happen under normal circumstances. The table includes a detailed description of level one, level two, and level three offences. A level one offence is defined as: “Actions by an individual(s) which interfere with the rights of another individual(s) to the peaceful use and enjoyment of his or her space in residence” such as throwing anything from windows and balconies (2006:5). A level two offence includes anything from an unsanctioned function or party and is defined as: “Actions by an individual(s) which create a significant nuisance and/or disturbance to an individual or community or violate a university or housing policy” (2006:10). Finally, level three

offences include: “Actions by an individual(s) which endanger the safety and security of themselves or another individual(s); and/or compromise personal or university property; and/or attack the dignity/integrity of an individual; and/or contravene the laws of the land” (11). A specific example of this would be tampering with fire safety equipment.

The level of offence determines the severity of penalty. In general, Incident Reports or Written Warnings are issued for first level offences while Behaviour Bonds and Behaviour Contracts are issued for third level offences. IR’s are forms which are filled out by RAs to document all incidents that occur in residence (15). These forms include details on the date, time and nature of the incident and whether alcohol was involved. Written Warnings are letters which are issued by the RAC “in order to ensure that students are aware of the impact and consequences of their own questionable or inappropriate behaviour” (15). A Behaviour Bond is defined as “an interim charge levied for inappropriate behaviour” which ranges anywhere from \$50-\$100 (15).¹⁰ Students who continue to be a nuisance in residence are put on a Behaviour Contract, a signed agreement which outlines a specific set of conditions which a student must follow in order to remain in residence (16). Under circumstances where alcohol is involved, an “Alcohol Awareness Meeting” may also be required. Other less common sanctions include restitution for damages, loss of privileges, alcohol probation, relocation, early dismissal, parental notification, eviction, and transfer of residence file.

During interviews, RAs noted that most of the residence policies and expected practices surrounding dispute resolution provided ways to penalize conflict cases but not how to resolve them. Conflicts over cultural issues, such as how to deal with language

¹⁰ It is unknown if the term “behaviour bond” is being used synonymously with “fine” or whether the resident is actually provided an opportunity to earn the money back based on good behaviour.

barriers, are not included in the *Community Standards Handbook*. The RAs argue that there is in fact no set process for handling disputes in residence. Instead, RAs depend on common sense, personality and experience for the resolution of conflicts between residents. These three themes (common sense, personality, and experience) were cited over and over again by RAs, particularly during discussions of expected policies and practices. The fact that there was no set process for handling disputes in residence generated much debate. For some, this meant independence and freedom to use the skills they were most comfortable with and tactics they found most effective. For others, it allowed too much grey area and led to inconsistency among the RAs. These pros and cons are discussed in more detail in the following section.

Evaluation of Policies and Expected Practices

Many of the RAs commented that the policies and expected practices were helpful but not always followed. RAs rely tremendously on their own common sense, judgment and individual discretion to resolve disputes. Even the policies themselves highlight the fact that it is ultimately up to the RAs discretion to decide when and to whom they should fill out an Incident Report (IR) or issue a warning (*Community Standards Handbook* 14). Several RAs noted that the number of warnings given prior to issuing an IR varies considerably and was not discussed during training. Penelope commented that her building partners were finding it difficult to come to an agreement over how many warnings to give residents. She notes:

...it had to be brought up at a meeting and we had to agree on a system...we came to a common consensus after but it wasn't clear...it's kinda harsh to give an IR right away sometimes...I mean if it's the end of the year and they've known for the

whole year that it's not okay to drink in the hallway, then it's okay, but we have to be reasonable for a certain period of time.

Penelope also makes a valid point in stating that while training is a step-by-step process, disputes do not always follow the same path; therefore, RAs have no choice but to make the call themselves. Use of judgment and discretion was referred to again by Stacey:

...in every situation I have to use my judgment call because there are some situations where technically, if I was to follow every single rule...I should write an incident report...at the same time, there are situations where I just give a warning...technically we don't have to give warnings...if it's someone who we've never had a problem with before...I'm not going to be like you're getting an IR and that's the end of it...so that is a judgment call for us...whether or not to incident report something.

RAs found that common sense and judgment were typically used when (1) distinguishing between a lower or higher offence; (2) dealing with disputes; (3) dealing with controversial issues; and (4) deciding when to call for backup.

With regards to conflict management or dispute resolution, RAs found that a great portion of their skills came from their own personality and experiences. Most thought that aspects of their personality and experience allowed them to manage cultural disputes more effectively. In terms of personality, Nicole argues that RAs are generally hired based on their maturity and ability to interact with people and that for the most part, these and other skills are “innate.” Blue holds a similar view arguing that helping and sympathizing with others is a part of human nature:

...when a resident comes up and says this is what is going on in my life...it goes to a personal, intimate level...the training does not teach how to deal with those situations but again, as a human being, most people understand that it is private, intimate...training doesn't teach how to talk to them, what words to use...

Oak attributes her ability to calm people down to personality, commenting:

I'm sort of good at explaining to people why something needs to be done, or why we need to step away from the situation for now...for example, I have lots of

residents [who] come to me on a Friday night because they're angry at another RA for shutting down their party...they're so mad, they're so frustrated...I have an ability to explain to them why it had to be that way and I can get them to understand...

For Sail, humour is the best skill for successfully managing conflict for it breaks tension between the two parties, allowing for a “lighter” atmosphere and greater communication. For Stacey, it is patience. These are just a few of the examples provided by RAs which indicate differing ways to tame conflict. So while there are a multitude of skills provided during training, RAs tend to choose the skills they find most conducive to their personality and comfort level.

RAs also argued that their skills for dealing with people in conflict comes from experience, whether it is work, travel, culture, or family-related. As will be noted in *Chapter Five*, Blue found that as a minority in Canada, it was easier to relate to conflicts over national difference because he had first-hand experience dealing with such issues. Similarly, Jack partly attributes his Jewish identity to effective management of racial slurs and religious stereotypes. In terms of family, Kent commented that growing up with four brothers helped provide all the skills and experience needed to deal with a large household setting and conflicting forms of communication. Both Sail and Blue commented that their travel experiences (national and international) helped prepare them for the management of cross-cultural conflicts. Through travel, they learned more about diversity, culture shock and language barriers than any form of training could provide. Other forms of experience cited by RAs included various leadership opportunities such as youth programs, life-guarding, and baby-sitting. The latter is described by Penelope in the following:

I babysat for tons of years...this job, honestly, is like babysitting at times...it really is because...you have to organize things and get people together...While they are young adults and they are almost the same age as us, the fact is that when they're intoxicated, it's basically like you're taking care of [a kid]...you have to treat them like a kid because you can't treat them as you would when they're sober...I mean you have to be really conscious of what you say and really sensitive to their response and their needs...you just have to be really cautious.

Together, these life experiences taught RAs the value of patience, preparation, organization, public speaking, self-confidence, tolerance and respect (to name just a few). Finally, RAs also found that while training was helpful, they gain all of the experience they need within the first two weeks of residence. According to them, the more experience you have, the better equipped you are to deal with conflict.

The fact that RAs rely tremendously on their own judgment, personality, and life experiences for conflict management tends to lead to inconsistency. As Blue states, different personalities cause different actions. Moreover, though residence rules are defined and made available to residents and RAs, there is a lot of grey area among them. Penelope, for example, asks: "what's drunk?" How do RAs consistently distinguish between people who are having a good time and people who are out of control? In general, the number of warnings given out to residents varies substantially from situation to situation, person to person. This results in inconsistent treatment of residents and causes strife amongst RAs. As indicated in *Chapter Five* and *Chapter Six*, RAs find it especially difficult to maintain consistency in larger buildings where there are more RAs on duty and more residents to deal with. In contrast, RAs who work in smaller buildings become more familiar with the residents on their floor and tend to be more lenient. Tod explains:

There is a lot of inconsistency like for me, I know the residents in my building. I feel more comfortable dealing with residents in my building. I give them a lot

more leeway than other RAs would...they [the other RAs] come into the building and they don't know who anybody is...the same with me going into another building...we're slowly kind of meeting the other residents in the other buildings but because we don't live there, we don't get that opportunity to actually socialize with those residents so we'll deal with situations differently with people we know than with people we don't know.

The issue of inconsistency was brought up during the focus group session when one of the RAs spoke about organizing a meeting with their cluster.¹¹ The RAs thought that due to differing personalities, experiences and familiarity with residents, it is an unrealistic goal for RAs to expect to be consistent at all times. However, they argue that greater consistency can be achieved through greater communication. By keeping communication open, RAs will have a better sense of who or what to look out for while on duty leading to more effective conflict management.

How are RAs trained?

RAs partake in a number of training initiatives throughout the year including two weeks of instruction each fall, one half-day workshop each Sunday of every month,¹² and a weekend workshop in January. This year's fall training was scheduled from August 26 until September 1 and included team building exercises, games, fitness, as well as a significant number of workshops and role playing activities. Some of these workshops are:

1. "Importance of being a student leader:" RAs discussed the benefits of being a student leader and the ways in which their decisions as a student leader affect the community.

¹¹ A "cluster" refers to a section of residences (usually including two to four resident buildings on the same campus) for which a Resident Advisor Coordinator (RAC) is responsible for.

¹² These workshops, also referred to as "in-service training," incorporate a variety of topics and representatives from various resources on campus. Unlike the fall and January training, these workshops are not mandatory but are strongly encouraged. RAs are expected to attend at least two or three in-service training sessions each year.

2. “Role and function:” RAs learned how the role of the Resident Advisor has changed over the years, learning more about what is expected from their role in the upcoming year.
3. “Goals and Mission:” RAs created a mission statement for the 2006/2007 Residence Life Team including goals they hope to accomplish as a team.
4. “Duty Overview and Area Tours:” RAs were shown what a typical duty shift would look like, what needs to be covered and documented on a round, and a tour of the buildings they would be working in.
5. “Behaviour Issues:” Tips on how to approach, communicate and perhaps persuade students who may be acting inappropriately in your community.

For the purposes of this research, this discussion will be limited to training which is applicable and/or beneficial to the management of cross-cultural conflict. The three most significant workshops that were offered during this year’s training include: “Behind Closed Doors,” “Creating Spaces,” and “Identity and Diversity.”

“Behind Closed Doors” is a popular interactive role playing exercise used in many university residence communities in Canada and the U.S. The program’s objective is to provide an opportunity for RAs to acquire confrontation skills that prepare them for the reality of both living and working in a residence hall (Clark 2007). A series of typical residence hall scenarios such as fighting, depression, or discrimination are set up in various rooms. RAs travel in groups of three to six to each room and all are given a chance to role play. If the RA thinks that the situation is out of control or too intense, they have the option to stop the scenario and ask for guidance. At the end of the scenario, Resident Advisor Coordinators, Complex Leaders and repeat RAs provide feedback on the RAs performance and suggest ways to improve. Clark (2007) states that the training “is not intended to change the perceptions or thinking of the group; rather, its goal is to develop the existing problem solving abilities into the confrontation skills that are applicable to living and working in residence halls” (4). Moreover, the exercise is not intended as an evaluation of the use of specific residence hall rules and policies. The

primary goal of the training is to familiarize RAs with effective crisis management and confrontation skills.

Several RAs claimed that the “Behind Closed Doors” exercise was great because it gave them the chance to practice certain statements and words to use when confronting residents who are under severe emotional distress. According to Sail:

[Role playing was] very helpful. It got me in the mindset that very first week because I didn't know what to expect...it got me in the mindset to say or to give me the vocabulary of what I would say to residents or how I would deal with them, how I would hold my composure.

Oak discusses her positive experience with the role playing exercise:

I think they should just skip the talking and do the role playing because that's where you learn the most...that's where you learn about yourself the most too, where you gain a little confidence of being able to make snap decisions in a situation...if we hadn't done role playing, I might not have approached the situation. I might have just backed off... if I didn't know how to deal with it, I might not have dealt with it.

When asked what it was about role playing that makes it so beneficial, Oak comments:

...doing it in a comfortable environment where you know it's fake...where you know if you go wrong, you can stop the role play and be like “you know I have no idea what to do in this situation, can you give me some help?”

Oak's comments here signify that the feedback forum was not just a venue for educating RAs but an encouraging reminder that others were always available for guidance.

Other RAs shared a much more negative experience noting that the public nature of the activity made them uncomfortable and even embarrassed. One RA noted that the settings were “unnatural” and could not be applied to everyday life. While there were obviously mixed reviews regarding the activity itself, none of the RAs thought the activity was helpful in managing cross-cultural conflict. This was mostly due to the fact that most of the scenarios focused on internal conflicts such as depression, suicide

attempts and eating disorders and most of the group conflicts dealt with noise and alcohol. Regardless of the issues discussed, RAs remain skeptical as to whether such an activity could ever fully prepare them for a cross-cultural dispute.

During the “Creating Spaces” workshop, representatives from Counselling Services and the Human Rights Office teach RAs tools and resources for creating an atmosphere of care and respect. The workshop is based on the assumption that students arrive with diverse backgrounds, ethnicities and cultural upbringings and, as such, have a diversity of experiences, beliefs and lifestyles. According to the UVic website, the Creating Spaces Campaign is “a campaign designed to make UVic a more welcoming and supportive community for all dimensions of diversity” (<http://web.uvic.ca/spaces/>). The main goals of the campaign include: (1) anti-oppression skill building; (2) learning and education; (3) awareness; (4) deconstructing “normal;” (5) respect for human rights; and (6) making connections (<http://web.uvic.ca/spaces/>).

Part of the workshop consisted of a cultural scenario exercise in which RAs were asked to “step out of their comfort zone.” One RA discussed a scenario where she played the part of an African American woman whose mother was a lesbian and was having an affair with her professor. The purpose of the role play was to show RAs how to avoid creating barriers between themselves and a resident who may be culturally different from them. In an individual interview, Nicole mentioned that although the creating spaces exercise was interesting, it was not helpful in practice. She provides an example of why in the following:

In my first week as an RA ever I had a girl move out of my building without telling me...she felt the building was very homophobic and she just came out as a lesbian and I didn't know anything. She listed a number of reasons why she felt the building was being homophobic towards her...eventually I went for a conference

with her at the women's centre with my building partner and she had an advocate and we didn't and we felt totally ganged up on...

In this particular situation, the RA was not aware of the residents' concerns until it was too late. In fact, several RAs mentioned that when it came to identity issues, residents were typically secretive and did not approach RAs regarding such topics. By the time RAs were aware of what was going on, the residents had already made their decision and were generally unreceptive to alternate solutions.

While the cultural scenarios were not as effective, Paris discusses having learned during the workshop other ways to create an inclusive environment for residents such as keeping communication open, using and promoting the use of "open language," and "coming down hard" on racial and ethnic slurs. Open language, in Paris' words, includes:

Not using words that might come across as offensive to someone else...not using words that would exclude someone or exclude an ethnic group...not using phraseology that labels and stereotypes people...

Unfortunately, the workshop focused primarily on ways to prevent conflicts from occurring and did not seem to have an impact on the actual management of cross-cultural disputes in residence.

The final workshop, "Identity and Diversity," is a very short introduction to racial and gender identity which includes resources for students wishing to make a connection with a particular group. The workshop is primarily devoted to helping international or exchange students who may be experiencing culture shock and wish to talk about their experiences. Despite the list of questions pertaining to training and workshops on diversity, few RAs made reference to this workshop during the individual interviews. Those who did mentioned the workshop in passing and focussed the discussion on resources rather than skills. For example, Jack mentioned that in order to increase cultural

awareness in his building, he would like to organize a visit to the campus chapel so that students can gain knowledge about differing religious beliefs and customs. The chapel was one of the resources cited during the workshop which included where to find it and who to contact for details. Due to the RAs limited discussion of this workshop, it is difficult to determine how often RAs provide such resources to residents and whether the residents find these resources useful. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that these resources have had a positive impact on the management of cultural disputes in residence.

Another form of training for RAs, referred to as “in-service training,” includes two-hour workshops which occur monthly. RAs are responsible for attending three out of four sessions a year. These training sessions are geared towards updating and enhancing RAs knowledge and skills on a variety of topics, most of which are introduced during the fall training. Two of the sessions organized this year included grief and loss training and a workshop on “living well.” The latter focused on how to deal with the pressures of being an RA, how to balance the RA role, and how to take care of oneself. The former was described by Blue as relevant but not practically helpful. He states:

I went for a training which is coping with grief and loss...it's a good thing and it's quite relevant...in residence, there's lots of people for example that lost their pet and maybe they were close to their pet or they lost their grandfather...[they taught us] what words to say but it's not long enough...all we talk about are the problems and we quickly say this is how you deal with this and no problem...they don't really teach you what to do...it made people aware but it didn't help when it comes to how would you deal with that.

Almost every RA interviewed gave negative feedback on the in-service training stating it was “too short,” “too broad,” “too boring” or “too repetitive.” According to Kent:

This is my second year and I've been to a lot of these in-service trainings...I can't say that I've ever really learned a lot from any of those...they're sort of a hassle...really boring...a lot of this stuff is done over in training so it's just repetitive...I myself am not a fan of the in-service training...

Olivia comments further:

The general feeling that I've gotten from people is that they're [in-service training] not helpful and it's just saying stuff that we already know...I've only been to one but it felt like it was just a repeat of what we did in training...why are we doing it again? That was like a month after we had started...like we just did this a month ago...why were we doing this?

Several RAs recommended including the workshops on cross-cultural awareness and communication as part of in-service training instead of fall training. They thought that this would be the best venue for such topics because the topics were not applicable to every RA.¹³ As well, these workshops were described as “something different” and one way to break the repetitive reputation of in-service training.

Programming

It is the RA's duty to organize and promote events and activities for residents. This includes educational events (such as alcohol and drug awareness, sexualized violence prevention, eating disorder information, diversity, healthy sexuality) and social/recreational events (coffee houses, hiking trips, soccer intramurals, survivor, yoga, and formals). RAs are also expected to attend other residence programs regularly and to sign up for program supervision at least once a month. Some of the advantages of programming cited by RAs were that it allows residents an opportunity to get to know their neighbours and that it enhances mental and physical health by providing a fun and

¹³ This statement is evidence again of a preoccupation with cross-cultural conflicts relating to nationality. The RAs that are being referred to here (and who have been designated as “most needing” of cross-cultural awareness training) are those that live and work in residences that house international and/or exchange students. Again, despite the significant number of RAs who termed all conflicts as cultural, the actual examples provided and recommendations made were geared mainly towards international and exchange students living in residence.

welcoming environment. Jack provides an example of a successful programming initiative that helped promote cultural diversity:

I know one of the RAs from Jordan, he cooked a middle eastern meal for some of his residents on Thanksgiving...things like that are just really cool and I think people would react to that better if it was like “hey, I’m a resident. I’m from this place. This is what it’s about”... once you get loyalties in your building, people are like: “let’s go out to so and so’s event because he worked really hard and he’s really cool and he’s trying to teach us where he’s from”...as opposed to posting up signs on Italian cultural night...[residents] don’t really care about that because they don’t have any individual connection with the person...

Though participation in residence events is typically low, this particular event was successful because the residents had an individual connection with the RA which made the event more personal and meaningful. Most of the other “cultural” programs organized by RAs did not share in this success. For example, Blue attempted to organize a soccer tournament with a cultural theme. He describes the event in the following:

I tried to do a soccer tournament with everyone from their region...for example, Chinese people come up with their own theme...their own motto...their own cheer...and it doesn’t have to be in English...it could be in their language too...just something to bring their community together but at the same time [allow] their identity be recognized by other people...so that they understand each other more effectively...

While Blue confessed not having enough time to advertise the event, he argues that there is little incentive for people to take part in cultural events, adding that university students have hectic schedules and a life of their own. He also commented that it is difficult for RAs to come up with interesting ways to organize cultural events on campus which are both easy to initiate and appealing to residents. Programs on culture or religion are not only controversial but are difficult to organize because they often neglect a certain faith or ethnicity causing residents to feel outcast or unwelcome.

Conflict Resolution

When asked, “What role does your training allow you to most closely identify with when dealing with cross-cultural conflicts?” the majority of RAs cited mediator. Mediation was also outlined in training as one of the major roles of the RA in dispute resolution. When dealing with disputes between two or more parties, RAs are expected to meet with those parties and to assume the typical (neutral) third party role. After discussion (and presumably resolution) the RA files an incident report and sends the parties on their way. According to Kent and Oak, mediation is only appropriate when dealing with civil or minor disagreements and is not an effective method for addressing emotional, controversial or escalated disputes. Firstly, mediation does not require the act of follow-up. It is only under special circumstances, such as major disputes involving a resident’s health and safety, where the RA is required to follow-up. Secondly, there is the assumption that RAs will remain impartial at all times; however, RAs argue that this is a difficult (if not impossible) task to achieve and that their opinions and experiences have proven helpful at times. Lastly, the traditional purpose of mediation is to come to some form of resolution. This creates a problem for disputes in which culture is at the forefront because not all residents, or conflict cases, benefit from such forms of dispute resolution. This is particularly evident in the case example of the Korean exchange students (*Chapter Five*) where mediation was not possible due to the language and cultural barriers involved.

At the time this research was conducted, there was no *specific* workshop on dispute resolution training for RAs at UVic; however, RAs made note of numerous conflict management skills which were attained over the course of fall training. When

asked: “What skills or policies from training have helped you resolve disputes?”

Penelope comments:

Learning like how to manage certain situations and certain people...I wouldn't just have brought them together and started talking about [the issue] because that would have just gotten out of hand and they both would have probably started yelling...just take it calmly, at a low level...get a basic understanding of what's wrong...one guy might have had a bad day...get a feeling for that...listening skills is something we definitely learned in training...how to be a good listener which is really important and which I definitely used a lot in my experience so far...

Here, Penelope emphasizes the need for RAs to remain calm, or as she says, keep “at a low level” during conflict situations and to get a basic understanding of the context of a dispute.¹⁴

Listening skills was cited most frequently by RAs during the one-on-one interviews and was even described as “the key to almost any situation.” RAs practiced their listening skills during training by pairing up into groups of two and alternating between the role of listener and speaker. This allowed RAs to practice “proactive listening” by providing responsive feedback and recognizing other non-verbal forms of communication such as body posture, gestures or facial expressions. Penelope describes this experience in the following:

We paired up into groups and one person talked for 30 seconds and the other person just listened. I wasn't allowed to say a word...I wasn't allowed to make expressions or respond...and we saw how awkward that was...we had to make eye contact the whole time and we realized that no one wants to have a conversation like that...it's so stressful, it's horrible. We did it the opposite where we had to give responsive feedback using only our hands or using words...so we realized how important it is to encourage conversation or respond in ways that would encourage someone to keep on talking and not to shut off or feel embarrassed...how you respond definitely could encourage or discourage a person from talking.

¹⁴ While the importance of considering the context of disputes (i.e. background information) is cited here, from my interviews with RAs, this did not seem to be a main priority when resolving disputes in residence.

In a mediation setting, the exercise was useful in that it provided ways to listen to both parties equally as well as stressed the importance of managing power imbalances. Kent describes this as “bringing residents down on an equal playing field” by allowing both parties an equal amount of talking space.

Communication skills were also cited by RAs as a key tool for resolving disputes. According to Sail, RAs were told during training to “start at a volume zero, not a volume ten.” When confronting residents in conflict, training suggests that RAs remain conscious of the tone of their voice so that residents do not feel threatened or become angry. Kent discusses having learned through training how and when to balance the tone of his voice, whether it is friendly/relaxed or professional/serious. Finally, the use of “open language” noted at the beginning of this chapter was included as a valuable skill for dealing with disputes, particularly cross-cultural ones.

One of the most difficult and controversial conflict management skills cited by RAs was neutrality. Again, the RAs role as mediator requires that they remain impartial at all times; however, most RAs thought this was an impossible task to achieve. As Tod explains:

No matter what, your personal feelings and your personal beliefs come into effect whether it's minimally or maximally...every decision you make is biased no matter what...if you choose to follow a certain path when dealing with somebody, it's biased and it's based on your personal belief and your personal experience.

When asked what factors might make it difficult for RAs to follow policy or training,

Paris comments:

Probably my own personal preferences towards certain situations like if it is an issue around noise where someone is cranking up their music at two am and it's waking me up, I'm going to be internally like I'm totally on the side of the people that want them to be quiet...but I can't always let that be obvious because I'm not

supposed to take sides...it doesn't always take into account that we are going to have our own little personal biases.

Other RAs argue it is especially difficult to remain neutral or unbiased when the issue also affects themselves, when a situation becomes personal or morally challenging, and when RAs are feeling tired, frustrated or stressed.

One of the less cited conflict management skills included what Sail terms “approaching skills.” The following is an example of how to effectively use an approaching skill in a conflict setting:

I came up first to [a group of students] and they were quite angry...If I had been aggressive, they would have not reacted well...I walked up, not quickly, I took my time...then I let them turn to me instead of trying to get their attention...then I asked them how they were doing...and in talking to the other group too...I didn't leave the [other] students quickly...I said the same thing to the other group...the same approaching skills worked for both groups...not too aggressive, not too timid...

Here, the emphasis is on caution and balance between groups. According to Sail, approaching skills are particularly useful in group conflict situations in which parties are hostile or violent. They help reassure conflict parties that the RA is coming in “peace” and that both sides are spoken to on equal terms. Other less cited dispute resolution tactics included getting a basic understanding of the conflict situation and using follow-up.

The topics dealt with in this chapter highlight several key points. First, though there are policies for managing disputes in residence, these policies centre on penalty or fine. And as will be seen in the following chapter, penalty does not always mean resolution. RAs argue that these policies are ineffective particularly when resolving cultural disputes. Conflicts which include language barriers, for instance, put a different spin on things which require RAs to steer away from university protocol. It is only through training that RAs are provided with effective ways to manage disputes. Secondly,

basic dispute resolution skills such as proactive listening, responsive feedback, and open language were favoured over cultural awareness and diversity training. RAs argued that when it comes to practice, these were the skills they found most helpful for resolving cross-cultural conflicts. Third, the primary role of the RA as mediator is problematic in that it is not conducive to resolving all types of disputes. This was expressed by concerns over neutrality and the unrealistic expectation that RAs remain impartial at all times. Lastly, personality and experience has an enormous impact on the way in which RAs frame and tame disputes. This is particularly true for cross-cultural disputes where values and beliefs are often at the forefront.

CHAPTER FIVE: RA PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

During our one-hour interviews, twelve RAs volunteered to share their stories on the management of cross-cultural conflict in university residences. RAs were asked to first identify what words come to mind when they think of the terms “dispute” and “cross-cultural conflict” and then to provide examples based on their experience as an RA. Aside from definitions of conflict, the prevalence and management of cross-cultural conflict in residence seemed implicit in my introductory remarks to the interview. Not only did I assume that cultural issues arise in residence quite frequently, but that these conflicts would be easy to identify and locate. RAs argued that very few cross-cultural conflicts were actually brought to their attention and that they were generally difficult to identify. This was attributed to the fact that there is an emphasis on tackling disputes promptly; therefore, RAs are rarely given the opportunity to find out the context of a dispute or the background of the parties involved. Many of the RAs also felt that cross-cultural conflict should not be a separable category because all conflicts have various cultural dynamics at play.

In terms of management, I had made the assumption that (a) cross-cultural training was lacking and needed; and (b) that policies on the management of cross-cultural conflict were lacking and needed. However, a general theme discussed by RAs was the fact that while there is no specific policy for dealing with cross-cultural conflict at UVic, it was questionable as to whether there ever should be. According to RAs, this is due to the fact that no cross-cultural conflict is ever the same. For most, effective management of conflicts (especially cultural ones) requires flexibility as well as a diversity of skills and knowledge. Finally, the research questions for this study focused

exclusively on disputes between residents; however, RAs noted that cross-cultural conflicts also occurred between the RAs themselves. Although these examples were not included in the study results due to limited data, it is an important reference point for future studies on this topic.

The following includes a breakdown of major themes and concepts revealed during the interviews and their relationship to the prevalence and management of cross-cultural conflict. Details of specific conflict cases and their resolution (or lack of) rely solely on information provided by this specific group of RAs at one university over the course of one year, and may not reflect the actual events that occurred. The focus of this research is on RAs' perceptions of dispute resolution practices, not the actual events that led up to the dispute. In other words, how do RAs' constructions of events in turn affect the outcomes of disputes and to what degree is there resolution?

*Exchange Students*¹⁵

When asked to provide an example of a cross-cultural conflict, a high number of RAs made reference to a particular residence on campus called Akers.¹⁶ What is unique about the residence is the fact that not only is it the biggest residence on campus (294 beds), but it is also the only residence at UVic which has an entire floor designated to exchange students. This includes students from outside Canada who are part of a four-month study exchange program. Though the size and structure of the building seems to have an impact on interactions between students, the RAs were divided as to whether the

¹⁵ Though very different in actuality, the terms “international student” and “exchange student” were often used interchangeably by RAs. However, the students being referred to in this section were all involved in an exchange program to Canada and were generally not full degree students. For the most part, these students were attending classes at UVic for four months to a year (depending on the exchange program).

¹⁶ The name “Akers” is a pseudonym and was chosen for confidentiality purposes.

impact was positive or negative. For some, the size of the building made it difficult for residents to get to know one another. As well, the assignment of exchange students to one floor did not allow for mingling with other students. Others argued that students tend to group together regardless of the size of the building and that they were impressed by the close ties created amongst exchange students. In terms of the management of cross-cultural conflict, the size of the building made it difficult for RAs to know each and every resident on their floor; thus, many conflicts went unnoticed or unmanaged. Those conflicts that were brought to their attention generally involved a disagreement between an exchange student and non-exchange student. These concerns are discussed in more detail in my final findings from the one-on-one interviews.

Everlast, one of the youngest second year RAs, was born in Dubai and has lived in Canada since the age of eleven. He describes Canada and the city of Victoria as “welcoming” and “friendly,” sharing that he has never had to deal with a conflict regarding his ethnic or national identity. He argues that although the exchange students in his building seem separated from the others, it is a separation by choice, not by force. Exchange students tend to group together out of comfort. As he explains:

They are in a different country...they're in a completely different environment (culture shock)...that happened to me when I moved from the Middle East to North America...basically, they stick to their groups most likely for comfort...their comfort zone...being outside of that zone, I guess it's not comforting...

He goes further to explain that exchange students relate to one another, support one another and share similar pastimes (e.g. touring and exploring Canada).¹⁷ If the time

¹⁷ When discussing the assignment of exchange students in residence, the assumption that exchange students share similar interests and/or are supportive of each other was repeatedly brought up by RAs. While there is obviously potential for such friendships, perhaps even due to the common experience of being on an exchange in Canada, it is important to note that this is certainly not the case for *all* exchange students.

came when they would like to interact with other students, Everlast argues that from his experience, “they would be welcome with open arms.”

In terms of the structure of Akers, Everlast was asked how he felt about the exchange students being clumped together rather than being dispersed throughout the building. He explains:

I've received many questions about that and I don't have a straight answer to be honest...I think that they're part of the same society on campus, or club, or organization...so they've been put on the same floor together...also, if you think about it, if you're an exchange student, you go to a different country to immerse yourself into that country's culture so if that is the case, it would most likely be a good idea if you spread the international students [exchange students] within normal culture...not normal in essence...just in the culture that's found in that country...that way...they're completely immersed in that culture...

When asked if he noticed little interaction between the exchange and non-exchange students, he notes:

Yeah, generally the groups don't mix...unless it's the students who live on the second floor...those guys will interact most likely because they're on the second floor...I've noticed...the people on the first floor will hang out with their little group of people...people from the fourth floor will hang out with their group of people...that's because it's a huge building...most people will hang out with the people on their wing...

Though he does not necessarily agree with grouping the exchange students together, Everlast voiced that he did not see it as a major concern. Regardless of the structure of the hallways, he argues, residents would still form separate cliques. In fact, he argues, people in all parts of society naturally tend to group together. He uses the appellation of the best friend as an example. Best friends are chosen because they share similar interests and personalities. They are the people you can trust. In other words, they “click.” According to him, exchange students lead very different lives and hold many different experiences from their non-exchange counterparts. For the student from abroad, there is

always the added excitement and anxiety involved in experiencing something new and facing the unknown. According to Everlast, it is this shared experience that draws exchange students to one another and separates them from the rest of the crowd.

Olivia, a 23 year old resident of Victoria, spent her first year as an RA working in Akers and remembers how well the exchange students got along. For her, having an international floor in residence has been very positive. She comments:

I'm a big fan of it. I think it's really a neat experience for them because I see this year and last year's group and they bond so much...it just seems they have like the time of their lives and they're so sad when they have to leave each other. My friend last year was the RA for that floor so I got to know those residents quite well...I find it's almost the same way for everybody you know they find their group and they're just like glued together.

Like Everlast, Olivia argues that people with similar personalities and/or experiences tend to group together naturally. As a former exchange student herself, Olivia stresses the importance of having support from other students like herself and relating to each other's experiences. As well, she also felt that exchange students share many of the same interests such as exploring Vancouver Island and touring Victoria. Despite the low level of interaction between exchange and non-exchange students in Akers, Olivia is hesitant to blame it on structure. As she says, there are many other opportunities outside of residence where exchange students can mingle with "Canadian" students such as in the classroom, at the library, and downtown. Moreover, she explains, exchange students generally tend to create stronger ties with other exchange students regardless of their location in the building.

Oak, another former RA of Akers, disclosed that she had positive and negative feelings towards the designated international floor. She claims:

To me, if someone is coming here internationally, be it for many reasons, some of their reasons are probably because they want to experience this culture and if they come here and they're put on an international floor...who you live next door to is likely going to be your friend for the year. It's just a high possibility. I just don't feel that they [exchange students] get the whole experience of being here...but at the same time, they seem comfortable and maybe not outcasts because there are some other people who feel the same way they do...

For the most part, RAs thought the exchange students were happy with the designation of rooms in Akers as they had never received any complaints. However, many disliked the division of the two groups and were apprehensive about the fact that many exchange and non-exchange students did not seem to get along. A couple of the returning RAs thought it was too early in the year to provide examples of conflicts since arguments between residents typically arose later in the year. Only one RA cited a specific dispute that arose between an exchange and non-exchange student which was brought to the attention of the RA. This particular incident was discussed during an interview with Penelope and relates to the management of conflict by RAs.

Penelope is Canadian born of East Indian descent and a first year RA in Akers. In describing her residence, she remarks, "it's way too big." She adds that the size of the building makes it impossible for RAs to organize building-wide events so they are limited to only floor-wide events. For most of the floors in the building, she explains, this does not seem to have an impact, but for the exchange students, it does. She goes further to emphasize that since exchange students are placed on one floor and are only able to participate in floor-wide events, there is little opportunity to mingle with students from their host country. As a result, exchange students and non-exchange students have been known to clash on several occasions. Penelope comments:

They [exchange students] work really well together and they get along really well together...[but] they actually seem to clash with other students in the

building...we always call second floor heaven because it's always quiet...they party, they have fun, they do their thing...but it's never a group of drunk people getting rowdy, breaking things, making a mess...a lot of them are older students...they know how to manage their alcohol. I think they feel what the rest of the students are doing is kinda silly...I think they think it's immature...because I've heard them make comments...I don't remember anything but they don't seem to get along.

While a lot of these differences stem from differences in age and maturity, Penelope attributes a great portion to upbringing. This relates to her definition of a cross-cultural conflict as:

...everyone's brought up and raised in different ways and sometimes their methods and ideas clash...different ideas and beliefs that would shape how people handle different situations.¹⁸

These different ideas and beliefs, she argues, are formed by culture. It is through misunderstanding of these differences that cultural conflicts arise.

Despite the influence of age here and its links to perceptions of appropriate behaviour (i.e. alcohol consumption) the focus remains on conflicts which are resultant of differences in nationality. As an example, Penelope makes note of a conflict between an exchange student and a resident from another floor. Again, the conflict revolved around noise. Penelope recalls a time when an exchange student addressed another RA regarding a student who was notorious for playing loud music. As Penelope notes:

There was a conflict between them because nothing was done cooperatively...he [the exchange student] swore at him [non-exchange student] and came in on a really bad note...the other guy was like if you're going to talk to me like that I'm going to be an even bigger pain in the butt...they were both being really uncooperative at that stage...they really clashed there.

When asked if she would find a similar occurrence happening between any two students (not just exchange and non-exchange), she argues:

¹⁸ The use of the term "everyone" here also indicates that Penelope may not perceive cross-cultural conflict as strictly limited to ethnicity or nationality.

For some reason, I don't think so because a lot of them want to look good to each other...like I haven't really seen many conflicts between people...I'm surprised...I actually thought I would see more...just general fights...I noticed that everyone wants to be on good terms with everyone because everyone parties together...if one person had a conflict, it would kind of "out" you in the whole group...so I don't think there are many or there would be many [conflicts between non-exchange students]...I haven't noticed anything really yet.¹⁹

Penelope's comments indicate how physical space has an effect on the development and/or destruction of social relationships. In a positive light, the exchange student floor has provided a large support network for students coming from abroad. Some RAs attribute this to the fact that exchange students are able to relate to one another and share stories about their experiences in Canada. In negative terms, other RAs argue that the structure of the building has literally divided the residents from one another, hindering interaction and communication in the process. This adversely affects the management of conflicts in residence because it creates tension between the two groups. As a result, residents refuse to work cooperatively and conflicts remain unresolved.

The issue of space was reiterated by two other RAs (Stacey and Tod) working in another building. This time, however, it was the designation of rooms rather than the structure of the building itself that seemed to have a negative impact on the social relationships between residents. The majority of exchange students located in this building were students from Korea who were part of a different four-month ESL (English as a Second Language) exchange program. Though each floor is divided by male and female, this particular building has female Korean students living on the male side and male Korean students living on the female side. RAs noted that this was a mistake made

¹⁹ The idea that noise is not a frequent issue in residence and occurs primarily between exchange and non-exchange students is contradictory to other interviews where RAs noted noise complaints were one of the top conflicts in residence.

by housing and an exception to other years. When asked about the level of impact these room allocations had on issues between the two parties, Stacey commented:

I think [it] is huge...it's such a disruption for them personally...just to walk to the washroom you have to walk to the other end of the hallway...I don't like seeing many people in the morning and if I had to walk all the way [to the other end], I'd be pretty upset about it...

The conflict between the Korean and non-Korean students was instigated, according to RAs, by a series of pranks which led to instances of vandalism, disrespect and a general feeling of tension in the building. Despite the influence of age, gender, status, and structural problems on relationships between residents, this negative behaviour was described by RAs as a result of misunderstanding and differences in cultural beliefs, norms and customs.

Throughout our interviews, RAs cited issues relating to age, gender and status (e.g. short-term students versus degree students), all of which may have had an impact on the current strife between residents. For example, Tod noted that Korean exchange students arrive earlier in the year and form friendship ties several weeks before the rest of the residents arrive. As well, Korean exchange students take different classes and hold very different schedules.²⁰ According to RAs, these differences in schedule and arrival time provide little opportunity for the two groups to mingle. RAs also thought that the Korean's limited English speaking abilities, as well as non-Korean residents' unfamiliarity with the Korean language, inhibited communication between the parties. Despite these factors, when it came to the actual management of this particular conflict, the focus remained on national differences. One RA noted that the two "groups" did not mix at all and even referred to themselves in separate terms as "the Koreans" and "the

²⁰ One RA mentioned that most exchange students typically have Fridays and Mondays off which affects the regulation of quiet hours throughout the school week.

Canadians.” Tod correlated perceptions of noise, including what was too loud or disruptive, to nationality differences, arguing that Koreans “perceive us [Canadian culture] to be loud whereas we perceive them to be really loud.” Both RAs cited the cultural disconnect and low level of interaction between the two groups as the primary factors behind the dispute.

Stacey, a third year student and first time RA, cited this particular conflict after defining a dispute as something “really escalated [where] there’s emotion and things have already gone too far past the calm state where you can work it out.” In this particular case, Stacey noted that residents had approached another RA in her building several times that year regarding issues relating to noise, disrespect and vandalism, most of which included encounters between Korean and non-Korean residents. For the most part, the conflicts had occurred over a span of several weeks and included a series of smaller pranks and minor acts of disrespect. Combined, however, these minor pranks resulted in great hostility between residents which eventually led to the intervention of the RAs.

When asked how training helped prepare them for this particular dispute, both RAs were unsure as to whether it was the training or their own personalities and life experiences that were most helpful in managing the dispute. As one RA notes,

I went to an international baccalaureate high school and so we had international students from [grades] eight through twelve. They would come from China, Europe, everywhere...I have respect for them.”

In terms of personality, one RA identified patience as a key skill in dealing with cross-cultural conflict: “I think a lot of other people would be like ‘you know guys, both of you shut up.’ They’d ignore it. I really want to fix it somehow.” Though many of the skills used in this specific case came from outside sources, seminars on listening skills and

diversity were cited as the two most useful training sessions offered by Residential Life and Conference Services. As one RA commented:

I think it was managing different ethnic groups...[where] they generally talked about...different races have different religions. You're going to have different sexualities. You're going to have all these differences and you have to accept everybody that way and you have to be able to look at a person and say okay, well whether you're gay or straight or whether you believe in god or worship something else, you can't be biased towards that person. You can't make your decision based on your preconceived notions of somebody...that was generally the training that we got for managing diversity.

The listening skills seminar emphasized a similar type of respect with regards to creating a welcoming forum for discussion by allowing all parties an opportunity to speak. Tod described this as “balance,” knowing when to speak and when to listen. While certain seminars were seen as helpful, both RAs acknowledged that they could have never been fully prepared for a dispute of this nature:

I think as much training as you can do...there are always things that are going to come up...different things that you can't always prepare for....

According to Stacey and Tod, even the policies for dealing with conflict (as outlined in the Community Standards Handbook)²¹ are often subject to change and individual discretion. Noise violations, for example, may vary depending on the situation. RAs are trained that a violation of quiet hours is an automatic IR (incident report) and the student is fined in dollars according to the number of IR's attained throughout the semester. However, RAs are also made aware that they have permission to give warnings, though to whom and under what circumstances remain vague.

²¹ According to the UVic Residential Life website, the *Community Standards Handbook* is a set of standards established by the university to meet the needs of the general student population. The website states, “These standards should make it possible for all students to feel safe and welcome here, while having the opportunity to sleep and study well.” See the chapter on Training and Policy for a detailed list of these standards.

Both RAs argue that this particular dispute could not have been managed effectively by simply following university policy. The main reason for this is that there were too many outside factors to consider, what they cited as language and “cultural barriers.” Moreover, several smaller incidents led to the current strife between the two sides. If the RAs were to follow policy, each incident would be dealt with separately and fined accordingly. RAs argue that this would be insufficient for it neglects what they see as the underlying issues at hand: misunderstanding and disrespect. As such, they thought that the incidents needed to be discussed collectively without fear of fine or punishment.

Since there was no specific policy for dealing with cross-cultural conflicts, other actions had to be taken. When it comes to issues that are beyond the control of the RA, normal procedure includes speaking to the Resident Area Coordinator (RAC), an employee hired by Residential Life to deal with emergencies and major disputes. In this case, RAs met with their RAC and decided to organize a number of group meetings with the Korean exchange students to bring all of the issues to the table. The team also decided to hire a translator in order to help with the language barrier. As one RA notes:

The biggest thing for us is we have weekly building meetings and they [Korean exchange students] come to the building meetings except they don't understand everything...there are 106 [students] living in [the residence] and I think about twenty-seven or twenty-eight of them are exchange students...we can't really talk at a rate that they would understand with seventy or eighty other people sitting there (Tod).

Again, university conflict management processes centred on improving communication in a formal, face-to-face setting. This time, however, communication initiatives were directed at the Korean exchange students and RAs rather than the two groups involved in the conflict. Here, the emphasis was on addressing reasons for the conflict and not so much on treating the conflict itself.

RAs thought that the meetings were most successful in terms of providing an opportunity for the Korean residents to voice their concerns and opinions in a private atmosphere, free from the frustrations of translation. However, Stacey and Tod thought the meetings were ineffective in altering the amount of discord between residents in the building. In Tod's own words:

Leaving that meeting...I kind of felt like nothing had been accomplished...I kind of knew that nothing was going to change...as pessimistic as that sounds, it was kind of a feeling I had that it didn't go over very well and I don't know if it was the fact that the way that our concerns were expressed in Korean were not expressed the way we needed them to be or whether it was their response from our concerns...I don't know...it was kind of a hallow feeling that it was a big waste of time...

Stacey further explains:

I totally agree...I think a lot of them [Korean exchange students] just stopped listening...they just talked amongst themselves...they didn't feel that it was a problem but it is...they don't realize how frustrating it is sometimes.

Residence Life's response to the lack of improvement was to organize a third meeting between RAs and Korean exchange students with a new translator. RAs said they assumed a third meeting would ensure that everyone's concerns were voiced, including those of the RAs and the Korean exchange students.²²

Despite the effort to increase communication between RAs and Korean exchange students, little attention was paid to bridging the gap between the exchange students and other residents in the building. An exception to this was a number of social events that were being organized by RAs the following semester in hopes of providing opportunities for more positive interactions between residents. RAs noted that both groups were spoken to on separate terms and while the subject of disrespect remained the same, the amount of

²² Since the third meeting took place after my interviews with RAs, it is uncertain whether any improvements had been made to deal with this particular conflict.

time devoted to discussing the issue varied substantially. While Korean exchange students were provided with a private forum to discuss specific details of the conflict, other residents received a short announcement on the issue of disrespect at a weekly building meeting.

As a final note on the subject, Stacey and Tod commented they were surprised by the number of issues that had escalated that year, especially since it was their second year living in Wilson. Last year, they claim, everyone seemed to get along really well and students interacted with each other on a daily basis. Stacey commented that the exchange students had joined them on a number of occasions such as dinners, parties and on-campus events. The Korean exchange students from last year also took the initiative to organize their own event in the third floor lounge where all residents were invited to attend. Though both this year's group and last year's group started at the same level of English comprehension, the first group had improved significantly more. Stacey attributes this to their interaction and friendship ties with the "Canadian" students. There is no question that preconceived notions about groups of people and "their culture" has an enormous impact on the management of disputes. The ramifications of this way of thinking and its impact on the way in which disputes in residence are handled will be further discussed in the conclusion to this thesis.

Racial Slurs and Discriminatory Words

The following case examples regarding the use of discriminatory language in residence halls are unique in that they include conflicts that were not yet manifest. In both cases, the RAs took it upon themselves to deal with the issue immediately in hopes of

preventing future conflict. This counters previous definitions of a dispute as an argument between two people which is brought to the attention of the RA. In each of these cases, the parties involved were not obvious and the RAs first distinguished the issue as a problem, rather than the residents themselves. Both RAs cite awareness and knowledge as key to the prevention and management of this particular issue.

First year RA, Jack, describes a dispute as something which occurs verbally, “a differing of opinions that goes past a regular conversation.” He notes that the use of racial slurs and discriminatory language is an ongoing problem in UVic residences, the most common of which include comments like “that’s retarded” or “that’s gay.” To his knowledge, however, the issue has yet to result in deep-seated conflicts among residents. For the most part, the issue remains ongoing. In the following, Jack shares his own experiences dealing with the brunt of discriminatory language and its resulting impacts:

I heard gypped a lot when I got to high school...I was working in the science lab and one of the microscopes wasn't working and one of the guys there said “uh, this microscope is so Jewish,” and I said “What do you mean by that?” And the thing is I never knew what he meant by it...apparently “jewed” is the same thing as “gypped”...I've heard it before and now I say something because I get offended...even my neighbour last year (he's a smart guy) said: “Oh well, you don't look Jewish” and I said, “What is that supposed to mean?” I had a lot of Jewish people in my high school and I went to my year book and pointed out people and I said if you can get 50% of who's Jewish and who's not then it will prove that there's some kind of look...I was just trying to show him...it's just a stereotype...

Jack associates his ability to recognize such issues with his religious ties to Judaism and his personal experiences dealing with stereotypes and cultural misunderstanding. It was partly this experience, he explains, that allowed him to differentiate between a comment taken light heartedly and one taken in offence. In his own words:

A lot of times people won't say they're offended and they really are and you can kinda tell...when people say stuff like that you want to try to break that kind of

ignorance because that could lead to people being racist...maybe if they find someone else later in life they won't say the same thing...

While no formal disputes had occurred, Jack thought it necessary to incorporate ways for preventing the issue from escalating. This was achieved in two ways: (1) spreading awareness on the meaning behind those terms and (2) finding out reasons for why residents use them in the first place. Jack advocated confronting the person individually and identified questions such as “Do you know what you just said?” and “Do you understand why you said it?” as possible starting points. In order to educate residents on the impact of their comments, Jack reported that putting a face to the name was helpful. He uses the term “retarded” in his first example citing an incident where a resident was asked how they would feel if someone with a mentally challenged sibling had just walked by.

What is interesting to note is the fact that many of Jack’s methods for preventing these types of issues were directly related to his idea that cross-cultural conflict occurs out of a lack of knowledge and awareness. As defined in his own words:

Cross-cultural conflict is...people not knowing enough about someone’s culture and basing them on that...ethnocentrism...judging other people’s cultures by your own culture on the basis of what you think is okay, of what you think is “normal”...

In such cases, Jack argues, knowledge is in fact power. For most students living on campus, being in residence is their first encounter with living in a diverse university setting. One of the major responsibilities identified by RAs is promoting diversity and educating residents on new ways to view and experience the world.

The relationship between cultural background and conflict is reiterated again in another interview involving a resident intolerant of homosexuality. Kent, a third year

UVic student and returning RA, shares an encounter with a resident who repeatedly voiced his disapproval for same-sex marriage to his friends. Since the issue never became overtly public, Kent decided to deal with the problem in a casual and non-threatening manner:

...we just sat him down somewhere casually and figured out pretty sure it was his father that disagreed with that type of stuff... it was sort of not a really huge deal because he was a nice guy and there was no malicious intent...he was just simply regurgitating what he heard from one of his elders...so as soon as they realize what their father or mother or grandparents or friends say isn't everything in the world, they can form their own opinions and a lot of times, at a place like this, people find their own opinions...they learn to tolerate people because I mean you have to...

Again, Kent argues that knowledge and cultural awareness are crucial to any conflict resolution. This reflects his perception that cross-cultural conflict takes place when “two sides don’t understand the other person’s culture or disagree with it.” While this particular case involved only one party, Kent believes that misunderstanding and disagreement were the primary causes for concern.

Kent describes having learned in training to remind students that once they agree to high density living, they must also agree to a certain level of tolerance and respect. He tries to make this explicit in a number of ways by speaking to residents collectively at building meetings as well as individually.

I go to their room with my building partner and we sit down and say there will be no tolerance for being intolerant of anyone’s race, culture, background...or sexual orientation, disability, etc....It’s made clear from the start and usually we don’t have to repeat it...it worked so well last year that I sort of took charge of that aspect in my building this year...

Kent identifies trying to set a positive example to residents by becoming more involved in various cultural and religious traditions. The increased number of Jewish residents this

year, for example, has given him the opportunity to learn more about Judaism, allowing residents to feel more accepted in the process.

I always ask them if they're doing a holiday or something...like Hanukkah when we come up close to December...[I make sure] we don't just say "hey, Christmas is coming." You gotta say "hey, Christmas and Hanukkah [are] coming," and ask them if they want to do something special for it...I find that a lot of the students start to get interested in that kind of stuff too and I think that if they wanted to do something for Hanukkah, I think there would be a lot of people in the building that would say you know, hey, that's kind of cool, I'd like to learn more about that...you're in university to learn, might as well learn about someone else's culture.

While most RAs find ways for promoting cultural awareness in residence on their own, it is once again a combination of training and personal life experience that allows them to do so. Training advises RAs to be conscious of the terms they use and the attitudes they promulgate to residents in their buildings.

They talk [about things] like be careful about what you say especially as a role model...[they tell us] to really watch what phrases we use, because if they hear us use those (even cursing), the respect goes down, and the second you offend one of your residents...you lose them...they won't listen to you...or they can bring it against you...

Workshops on role playing are organized with the hopes of preparing RAs for situations where ignorance and misunderstanding may occur. For the most part, these sessions are directed at instances involving homosexuality. Racial and religious diversity are not made an issue. Jack notes that specific policies for dealing with cross-cultural conflicts are lacking and RAs are advised to deal with such conflicts on a case-by-case manner. A problem with this, however, is that RAs are finding it difficult to maintain consistency and be flexible at the same time. (Concerns over consistency are first introduced here and will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter).

Part of the issue with maintaining consistency, according to Jack, is the fact that no two people are the same and every case is different. He comments:

We're told to be consistent...if this person does this and it's an IR [incident report], write that IR...we've had talks afterwards. How many warnings do you give to people? How many chances to give? How do you treat your own residents as opposed to other residents? Stay consistent...which is impossible, absolutely impossible...how I might deal with that type of conflict might be totally different from someone who has more experience or less experience in their life about these certain things...

So while RAs are given policies for managing roommate conflicts, alcohol abuse and violence (all of which also vary by person and by case), cultural disputes are left to the RA's discretion.

Alcohol and Violence

There is no question that alcohol consumption, if not managed correctly, can sometimes lead to a loss of control and violent behaviour. Due to the relationship between alcohol and violence, RAs cited weekends as the most common period of time in which conflicts in residence take place. Blue, one of the older RAs, argues that many people drink on weekends because they have too much free time on their hands and are not “occupied.” When people have nothing to do, they think of negative ways to occupy themselves such as bingeing or fighting. For many students on campus, it is their first time away from home and first experience with independence. RAs find that students who have been brought up in a strict home are more likely to drink excessively and to make poor judgments when it comes to alcohol and violent behaviour. Others argue that there is an enormous amount of peer pressure related to the amount and frequency in which people drink as well as how they portray themselves to others. The following deals with

the prevalence of alcohol and violence in residence as discussed by Sail, a first year, Canadian RA working in Cortez. Sail discusses how alcohol and violence bring a new dimension to the management of cross-cultural conflict.

According to Sail:

A dispute is when two different parties both want a particular event or thing to be their way but those ways conflict with each other. The best way to look at it is an example with a studying atmosphere...some people would like to go to sleep at nine o'clock, which is quiet hours, and other people would like to hang out...these are obviously conflicting things...anything where interests can't coincide.

Upon reflection, Sail goes further to explain:

I don't deal with every dispute directly but I would say there are always sort of small conflicts... where people don't address the other person. The hidden ones where your neighbours are continually loud and you can't bring yourself to ask the Resident Advisor or go ask your neighbours yourself...those are ignored disputes.

Though the term “ignored dispute” was discussed in varying ways by RAs (e.g. “hidden,” “unknown,” “private”), the meaning behind these terms remained the same. A dispute had to be something manifested, the point in which a conflict is brought to the attention of the RA.²³ Once a dispute is manifested, little emphasis is placed on the steps leading up to that particular issue or event. This has important implications for the management of conflicts in residence since RAs are rarely given the opportunity to seek out pertinent background information when dealing with conflicting parties. According to RAs, policies suggest ways to “fix” conflicts in a speedy fashion but are only short-term solutions to the problem. It is normally only through the volition of the RA (Resident Advisor) and RAC (Resident Advisor Coordinator) that longer-term solutions are made.

²³ Exceptions to this were two separate events described by Jack and Kent relating to residents using racial slurs and discriminatory language. In both cases, the conflict had not yet manifested. Instead, the RAs decided to approach the resident themselves in hopes of preventing conflict.

As noted, when it comes to cross-cultural disputes, certain policies are insufficient in creating lasting solutions. This is particularly true for what Sail terms “overt cross-cultural conflicts,” or extreme cases such as racism.²⁴ Sail describes this in the following:

[There is a] group of guys that usually hang out underneath the building and smoke marijuana...that night I knew they were not smoking...I was letting them hang out there and talk...it's quite a diverse group...there are some people from somewhere in the Middle East...and then there are some guys from Vancouver and there are one or two Asian students...they were all hanging out that night and another group came into the parking lot and I heard yelling...so I went out and tried to find out what was going on...this group that always hangs out under [Cortez] were quite agitated and weren't very receptive to me and I was like: “okay guys, calm down, what's up?” and they started swearing at me and they said that those guys that had just come into the parking lot in the car had come over to them and asked them for a light...they said they didn't have anything, they weren't smoking...they [the guys in the car] started throwing racial slurs at them and they just sort of started yelling at each other and the group automatically got defensive...the other group had been drinking...

This particular dispute was resolved by combining policy and procedure with individual skills and decision-making. Where alcohol and violence are involved, RAs are trained to step down from responsibility for their own safety and to contact outside resources such as the RAC, campus security and/or the police. Though Sail followed training by calling Saanich police, he admitted that speaking to the groups separately was not part of procedure:

I would say that if I tried to do things by training, it would have been insufficient because I would have simply gone up to the groups, not dealt with the racist remarks...I would have just sort of stood in the middle and made sure they didn't throw bottles at each other...I would have told them to both be quiet...just treated them equally in that they were both equally guilty of creating this...in terms of the group that was extremely intoxicated, they wouldn't have had a problem with that, but the group that was being racially targeted, wouldn't have respected me because I wasn't helping them out and on top of that, they would have continued to have anger in the group towards the people yelling at them and towards me...

²⁴ This point was reiterated in a separate interview with an RA from a different building when she/he identified “extreme” conflicts as a factor that might make it difficult to follow training or policies.

As Sail later states, the racist atmosphere of this particular dispute put a different “spin” on the case than policy would have allowed. Consequently, Sail thought it was necessary to speak to both parties individually in order to prevent the issue from escalating. This was achieved by discussing background information and utilizing a combination of approaching, speaking and listening skills. Such skills were partially derived from training and previous life experiences. Sail attributed his confidence with public speaking and dealing with large groups of people to his experiences abroad and participation in a number of Canadian youth programs. Strategies for skill development, including a variety of verbal and non-verbal techniques, were acquired as part of the one-week training offered by Residential Life. This incorporated workshops on proactive listening (i.e. using attentive body language and encouraging others to speak) as well as approaching skills (i.e. keeping a steady pace and relaxed posture when confronting groups of people) (<http://housing.uvic.ca/winter/communitystandards.pdf>).

Another important part of the conflict management process, as cited by Sail, was follow-up. Sail explained that he thought it was necessary to follow-up with the targeted group in order to remedy any remaining hostility or concern as well as to provide assurance that the issue was being dealt with accordingly. He notes:

I went back to talk to them...they [the diverse group of students] said they didn't appreciate that and that they expected to be treated equally...they didn't appreciate being called (this is a quote) “a brown piece of shit” by the other guys...I said I totally understand that, it's unacceptable and the police were on their way...I let them know that they were in no way in trouble...I didn't apologize for any actions because that isn't my responsibility, even though I felt horrible that it happened.

It is clear from the above description that Sail's decision to address both parties individually was crucial to the management of this particular issue, despite the fact that it

was contrary to university policy. It is also important to note, however, that policies are generally created out of a need and concern for safety. What Sail's comments indicate here is a need for balance and flexibility when it comes to conflict management, not an abolishment of university policy entirely. As one RA notes, there is no cookie cutter guideline for dealing with a cross-cultural conflict though policies are often helpful in providing suggestions on where to begin in the conflict management process. In practice, however, whether that policy is followed from start to finish is ultimately the responsibility and decision of the RA.

Marijuana

Many of the RAs cited marijuana use as one of the most complicated and most difficult issues to manage. This is primarily due to the fact that, according to RAs, there seems to be a high prevalence of marijuana use at UVic. Though Residential Life advertises "zero tolerance" for drugs on campus, procedures for dealing with drug offenders are much more complicated. For instance, drug users must be caught in the act prior to issuing a fine or punishment. Residents whose clothes smell like pot or who speak about getting "high" do not fall under this category and are therefore not recognized as participating in an offensive act. As Tod explains:

In residence, if they're caught smoking marijuana in their room, we definitely have to write it up because for one, it's marijuana and two, they're smoking inside the building...If they're smoking outside we're technically supposed to write them up. Generally most of the time we'll send them off campus or get them to do it elsewhere and generally they'll listen to that or they'll just leave so we don't have to deal with them...especially on Friday and Saturday nights we definitely catch a lot of people smoking marijuana in their rooms...

Though many are caught, few are actually penalized. In fact, when asked if he had ever heard of anyone being evicted for marijuana, Tod said he did not think so though he could not be 100% sure. If someone was evicted from residence, it was most likely a combination of factors that accumulated to such a severe penalty. From what he understood, no one had ever been evicted from a UVic residence strictly for marijuana use.

RAs admit to being more lenient when it comes to residents who smoke marijuana due to the high smoking population on campus. As one RA states:

...we know everyone abuses the rules often but we can't give out an IR for every single time everyone does...there would be thousands of IR's a year!...so we give a warning, then you get an IR...it's a one warning basis but it was never discussed.

The “one warning basis” described above has fuelled contempt between RAs as it results in too much discrepancy and inconsistency. This poses an even greater problem for the management of conflicts relating to grievances over rules and regulations. While residents are informed earlier on about the zero tolerance for drugs on campus, it is not long before they find out there are many exceptions to this rule. In my interview with Stacey, she reported that she had had difficulty explaining exceptions to the no drug rule to residents in her building. She felt that the residents did not understand why marijuana was accepted at certain times throughout the year or in specific areas on campus.²⁵ She notes that this is a serious problem for RAs as it can easily lead to a loss of respect and a questioning of authority.

²⁵ Most cited 4/20 as a day in which marijuana use on campus was typically ignored. 4/20 represents the day and month in which cannabis users in North America gather every year to celebrate and consume cannabis. In terms of specific areas on campus, RAs identified the lot in front of the library as a popular spot for marijuana users to congregate. The space was one of many areas on campus that does not fall under the jurisdiction of the RAs.

Several RAs deemed the consumption and control of marijuana use at UVic a cross-cultural conflict. According to Blue, marijuana use is very much a cultural issue. As a first year RA from India, Blue has had much experience dealing with contesting cultural values. Here, he describes his own perception of what constitutes a cross-cultural conflict:

Cultural disputes happen on a daily basis which might be the most minor things like public displays of affection all the way to smoking marijuana in public...for some people it's okay, maybe in their country, maybe in their city it's perfectly acceptable...in India, it's not an acceptable thing...drinking in public, public displays of affection, showing too much skin, smoking in general...minor little things...being way too laid back and not serious...some different things that are conflicting and when you see people doing it, and when you hear people talk, (your friends) you're like: "whoa that's not something I've been raised with"...if you see that that's what the general trend is then there is a conflict there...do you go with the general trend to try and fit in or do you try to maintain your identity?²⁶

When asked how he would deal with issues relating to marijuana use in residence, Blue stated:

Being in such situations, I've experienced it myself so I can relate to people if they have some kind of cultural difference...the best way to do it is talking it out...how do they personally feel about it?... I've told my residents don't adopt it but adapt to the situation. That means don't follow, don't completely switch to this kind of culture...when I say culture, I mean if there are some things that your society is not okay with but you're okay with, that's fine...if you can work around it, stick with it, but when you go back, you should understand that there's a difference...so adapt to it but don't adopt to it.

Blue provides an example from his own life in which he was required to follow the “adapt but not adopt” principle. In India, he claims, the idea and practice of homosexuality are taboo, so when a close friend decided to share the fact that he was gay, Blue felt conflicted. In order to avoid spoiling their friendship, Blue chose to accept his

²⁶ In this excerpt, Blue notes that perceptions and behaviours regarding marijuana use vary not only by country but also by city. Thus, he expands his definition of cross-cultural conflict in recognizing that there are differences between cities and not just national borders.

friend for who he was, despite countering cultural values. Though he was able to adapt to the situation, Blue makes it clear once again that upon returning to India, he will also return to the Indian mindset where homosexuality is not a choice.

Later in the interview, Blue spoke about a conflict regarding a resident who was caught smoking marijuana and the influence of cultural values and beliefs. The resident, an international student from the Cayman Islands, had breeched community standards²⁷ by not only smoking marijuana but smoking indoor as well. Due to the zero tolerance rules, the resident was subject to a high penalty including possible eviction from residence. Rather than persecute the resident immediately, Blue decided to find out some more background information by speaking to the resident beforehand. Over a short conversation, Blue learned that marijuana use was not only widespread in the Caribbean but also accepted in most public realms.²⁸ After making it clear that marijuana is illegal in Canada and that residents are forbidden to smoke indoors, Blue let the resident off with a warning. He explains:

Our training says if you find someone who is smoking indoors they get an IR (incident report)...but again it's up to the RA's judgment and in this situation...I thought it was unreasonable to give such a fine...[I wanted to know] why this person was doing it...which the training sort of tells you but it's just like one sentence...you should find out what the background of the situation is but they don't dwell on it.

In this specific situation, Blue thought that the resident drug policy was inadequate for managing a dispute of this nature, primarily due to the influence of culture. Again, knowledge and awareness were chosen over fine and penalty as better strategies for

²⁷ The Community Standards is a guidebook handed out each year that outlines rules and regulations for students living on campus. The contents of this book are explained in more detail in a separate chapter.

²⁸ It is important to note that the distribution and consumption of marijuana is not legal in the Caribbean; however, the attitude towards distribution and consumption seems to be more lenient.

managing conflict. As Blue states later, “information is key.” He also notes that his decision to speak to the resident beforehand had resulted in a positive outcome:

The resident apologized and said I was completely unaware of this...and it never happened again. He came back to me [a week later] and made a small little card saying thank-you. He just said I appreciate what you're doing...[It] sort of tells us we're doing a good job...

In discussing the *Community Standards Book* and residence policy, Blue argued against creating a policy for dealing with cross-cultural conflict in residence. He explains that due to the number of cultures found worldwide and the number of differences between them, a valid and useful policy seems unlikely. In his own words:

I don't think it should be on paper...I think people should be more aware of cultures...information is key...the more you know about the culture, the more you know how to deal with it [conflict]....

Blue went further to explain that it was his affiliation as a minority in Canada that gave him the confidence to deal with such conflicts.

I've been in that situation so I can relate to it, I can talk about it...there are lots of examples where I've had to deal with conflicts and cultural things...cultural issues...and I think if someone brought it up, I would have something to talk about...

The emphasis here is on experience rather than training. Many of the RAs interviewed argued that those who have had personal experiences in dealing with cultural differences are better equipped to manage cross-cultural conflict than those who have not. Though everyone has dealt with cultural difference at some point in their lives, it was assumed that some differences are more overt than others and therefore have greater influence on social interactions and relationships. According to Blue, cultural awareness and communication are difficult skills to learn for people with no prior experience. While they may be understood in conceptual terms (e.g. What is cultural awareness? What does

it mean to be culturally aware?), finding ways to practice cultural awareness is not always possible.

CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND ALTERNATIVES TO TRAINING

When speaking to RAs regarding examples of cross-cultural conflict and the effectiveness of their training and policies for managing those disputes, RAs were asked to identify strategies or skills that would benefit their role in the management of cross-cultural conflict. These strategies and skills were those that were not included during training and did not appear in UVic residence policies. Suggestions from the one-on-one interviews were compiled in preparation for the focus group, which dealt specifically with recommendations and alternatives to training. Focus group participants focused their energies on identifying the top ten most important recommendations and prioritizing them. Definitions of cross-cultural conflict varied significantly between the four focus group participants, ranging from racism to religion, family and geographical background. Despite these varying perceptions and experiences as well as the fact that each was from a different residence on campus, RAs had similar perceptions on which issues were most important and what recommendations would be the most practical.

Recommendations Suggested by RAs

One of the biggest issues voiced by RAs was the room assignment of exchange students in residence. The University of Victoria is unique from many other universities in North America (Canada and U.S.) in that it provides specific buildings and even halls for students from abroad. For the past several years, the majority of exchange students have been placed in the second hallway of the biggest building on campus. Due to the size of the building and number of residents who reside there, RAs are unable to organize building-wide events; therefore, there is less opportunity for exchange students to mingle

with other residents. As indicated in *Chapter Five*, the international floor has prompted mixed reviews by RAs in terms of its relationship to the management of cross-cultural conflict.

During the focus group session, Jack noted that fewer disputes occur in smaller residences as students have more ownership over their space and are therefore more respectful of that space and each other:

As someone who lives in a small building but who is regularly in [Akers], a huge building, you can definitely see a difference. This would have been nice to know before they built [Akers] but now they have to deal with those issues...it's a lot easier for someone on fourth floor to walk to the other side of the building on first floor and do something to the building and not feel anything of it because it's not their area...as opposed to if you're in a small building, if you do anything to your building, it's going to affect you...and there's that kind of ownership over it...the bigger the building, the bigger the chance you're going to be affected by other people.

Everlast agrees with his co-worker stating that the size of the exchange student building makes it difficult for RAs to identify who lives in the building and causes segregation among the residents. Tod identifies a similar structural problem in his residence where a mistake was made by housing regarding the room assignment of Korean exchange students. Whereas the non-Korean residents had been assigned a room according to their gender (the "male wing" versus the "female wing") the Korean exchange students had been placed on the wrong gender side. Tod provided several examples of how the faulty designation of rooms relates to the tension between the two groups including several residents who approached him with concerns of feeling "awkward" and "uncomfortable." In response to these issues, RAs are recommending that Residential Life change the structure and assignment of students in residences. In order to provide more balance in residences and decrease segregation, exchange students should be dispersed throughout

buildings. Since RAs recognize the difficulties for some of studying abroad and importance of having support from fellow exchange students, they advise against doing this systematically. Instead, RAs recommend that residents be placed at random so that there is still opportunity to have more than one exchange student on each floor. In hopes of fostering more interaction between exchange and non-exchange students, RAs recommend giving exchange students the option of living in double rooms or cluster housing.²⁹

Along with changing the structure of residences, RAs said it would be beneficial to housing to create more detailed residence application forms. This way, students have a better chance of living in an environment that is most comfortable and appropriate for them. According to Jack:

The housing office puts out a form to assign people rooms and we get to deal with their placement so if they screwed up...it doesn't matter to the housing office other than the fact they might have to do a room switch but to us, it makes a huge difference...if they communicated more or asked us...tell us what do you think could help bridge the gap between them...because I think that's a huge issue...asking people [more information on the application forms] so that they can place them better.

Tod notes that it may be helpful to add a section on level of English competency so that RAs are made more aware of students needing added assistance. There is also the possibility of incorporating more themed floors in residence such as the academic floor already in use. Other examples provided by Jack include an athletic floor or non-alcohol floor as alcohol consumption is a lifestyle preference that, according to RAs, has an enormous impact on relationships between residents.

²⁹ The option to offer cluster housing or double rooms to exchange students quite possibly depends entirely on the program for which they are a part of. As such, the decision would be up to the program organizer or coordinator and not Residential Life and Conference Services.

It is important to note, however, that due to the language barriers involved in the Korean exchange student case, changing the structure of residences is only one solution to the problem. Also, since RAs recognize the time and energy it takes to make such changes, they posed several alternative, shorter-term solutions as well. Everlast comments:

Another important point to bring up is maybe the problem is not a part of Res Life. Maybe it's part of the programs they're [exchange students] part of. What if we were to go to their program coordinators and ask them to encourage the Korean students to partake in Canadian culture 'cause after all, they're traveling across the world to learn English then why not immerse themselves in the culture as well as opposed to isolating themselves in their own little comfort zones. You go to the program coordinators and tell them to push the Korean students to try new things, encourage them to partake...

Jack responds with:

I like [the] idea of talking to the program coordinator and getting a sense of what [the exchange students] are told. Are they told here come to Canada, go to three classes and go back to your room and hang out with Korean people? If they're not told anything, that's what they'll do.

Tod goes further to explain that perhaps it is the structure of the exchange program itself that is a problem, reiterating that exchange students take separate classes and hold very different schedules from other residents. If exchange students were integrated into the actual school system, he argues, they might not be so isolated.³⁰ In a similar vein, RAs should also encourage residents early in the year to make an added effort to show interest in other cultures and welcome students from abroad.

At the end of the focus group discussion, RAs reviewed a list of prevention methods provided by their co-workers during the one-on-one interviews. One such

³⁰ Again, the decision to allow exchange students to partake in regular classes may not meet the exchange programs' goals and objectives. ESL students, for example, would not have the option to partake in the same classes as regular degree students due to their limited English speaking skills.

method included incorporating a "no tolerance" rule in residence.³¹ The rule would emphasize the fact that due to the diversity of students living on campus, there would be no tolerance for disrespect or discrimination of any way, shape or form. The RAs argued that making this explicit at the beginning of the year might prevent conflicts from arising. Several RAs disagreed with this approach stating it sounded too "heavy handed and confrontational." Others argued it would be more effective in a smaller building setting because there is a much greater sense of community and students have an easier time getting to know one another. In the end, RAs thought the no tolerance rule should only be used at the RAs discretion and should not be a part of policy. Another prevention strategy mentioned was the use of roommate contracts, a form to be completed by the residents and RA at the beginning of each semester. The form includes information on lifestyle preferences such as sleeping/study routines or cleanliness habits and is utilized to encourage communication between residents. While focus group participants recognized the benefits of implementing an official roommate contract in residence, they argued it would be more beneficial to create a more detailed residence application form instead. This way, residents would have a greater chance of sharing similar lifestyle preferences from the beginning.

The final conflict prevention method included "cracking down" the very first weekend of residence in order to keep things under control and break bad residence traditions. Sail comments:

...a lot of the buildings had bad reputations...actually that reputation continued and it was a party building...this year the two RAs (first weekend, first building meeting) went in there and said we'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't drink this weekend. This is your building, your community; you make it what you want.

³¹ A no tolerance rule for harassment and discrimination is already in place at UVic for the university as a whole; however, this is often considered a given and is rarely enforced or even communicated to students.

You all want an atmosphere in which you can learn and live and be happy and have fun...that weekend no one drank alcohol, they had a tea party...when the people from last year showed up and tried to cause trouble, the residents were at the doors and said “no you’re not coming in”...say you can control your living conditions, don’t continue bad traditions...I think that’s really effective.

In agreeing with his co-worker, Tod explains:

I think a lot of time it does have to do with that very first weekend and the way that the RAs deal with it...I think the RAs make the building what it is...if you crack down that very first weekend, chances are you are going to be pretty good for the rest of the year...you may have that occasional party but your residents will be respectful...I think they did an excellent job at [name of residence] this year...they got it under control before it got out of control.

Throughout the interview process, several RAs mentioned the impacts of residents having preconceived notions about what residence life was all about. They argued that many of the residents, including themselves, depended on Hollywood movies and older siblings’ experiences as evidence for what was to come. For the most part, these expectations centred on the stereotypical sorority/fraternity house party scene and its associative bingeing and recklessness. Since most of the conflicts, whether identified by the RAs as cross-cultural or not, occurred as a result of over-consumption of alcohol or reckless behaviour, RAs thought that it was important to find ways to both prevent or diminish these expectations from the onset. Telling residents to “create their own legacy and be their own people” was one such method that has proven to be effective.

Additional Reflections of Researcher

During both the individual and group interviews, most RAs (including myself) were sceptical over the usefulness and practicality of incorporating art or theatre into the

management of cross-cultural disputes.³² However, due to its popularity in the dispute resolution literature, I felt that this suggestion should be posed as a possible recommendation for improving the management of conflict in residence. Several RAs thought that due to age and maturity, students would not respond well to such strategies. Incorporating art or theatre into dispute resolution may cause some students to feel uncomfortable by forcing them to think outside of the box (i.e. the "self"). As well, students may interpret the strategy as juvenile, causing them to question whether they are actually being taken seriously. Many RAs also noted that they would feel uncomfortable initiating such a strategy on their own. An exception to this is an incident described by Sail in which two fellow RAs created a "move along song" to get rowdy residents out of the hallways after quiet hours. He explains:

It was just using a different medium to get the message across and because it's different like that, it was just more interesting to them and because they had good humour about it, it was receptive to their personalities and they would listen to it...but I know others who would say: "That's fucking stupid...what are you guys doing? Do you want me to smash your ukulele?" in which case they would just ignore them...so you have to use discretion on that...

While this is a good example of the effectiveness of using art or theatre as a conflict management strategy in a university residence, there was consensus among the focus group participants that such a strategy would only be appropriate under certain conditions. When, where and how to use art and theatre should be up to the RA's judgment and should not be included as a part of training or Residence Life guidelines.

As a second recommendation, I suggested the implementation of workshops on

³² The use of art and theatre is becoming a popular alternative to traditional mediation processes. LeBaron (2003) argues "Many facets of the arts are windows into symbolic and spiritual ways of knowing" and that conflicting parties can explore aspects of their worldviews by sharing songs, stories, or art in structured ways (224 & 258).

cross-cultural awareness and communication for both residents and Resident Advisors. Again, I am not completely confident that these exercises are in fact practical or even helpful; however, considering the minimal attention paid to diversity and cultural issues during RA training, I required additional feedback from RAs. Again, there was skepticism regarding the participation of residents in a workshop of this nature. In general, participation in residence-related events was low this year and since students already attend classes on a daily basis, there would be very little incentive for residents to go. In terms of the structure and content of the workshop itself, there was the added fear that certain cultural groups or individuals would be ignored, causing more harm than help. As one RA states:

Cross-cultural communication would be cool if you could get people from different cultures to come because if you get a huge group of people from the same thing and then one or two from another religion then it might be like bombarding them...I don't know if there's any way you could make sure that there was a wide [variety]...I like having discussions with people...and learning about others but I don't know if people would take it that way.

During the focus group, one RA noted that a workshop of this kind might be most beneficial in a different venue such as “first contact.” First contact is a short orientation for students living in residence that occurs in conjunction with the university orientation during the fall. Over the course of several days, residents participate in skits outlining the five main rules of living in residence including: (1) stay active, (2) eat healthy and get rest, (3) go to your classes, (4) do not drink excessively and (5) know your community standards. However, not all residents get this opportunity:

They only allow 600 of the 2,200 residents to come to first contact so initially off the bat, not everyone is getting this experience...I think also in that sense you're only preaching to half of the problem because for the most part, you're only looking at one culture that's actually doing this first contact thing...especially for the Koreans that are in my building. They were here four months before

everybody else. They didn't have the opportunity to do first contact and I don't know how many of the [exchange] students are aware of the first contact opportunity as well.

Another RA suggested incorporating cross-cultural awareness during the campus tour at the beginning of each year by including a visit to the chapel. While these alternatives may be possible, RAs agreed that a specific workshop for residents would not be useful.

Due to the already dense RA training, few RAs liked the idea of incorporating an additional workshop on cultural awareness. This was reiterated again by Everlast during the focus group when he commented that adding more topics to training would tire RAs. He goes further to reiterate the value of personality and experience in conflict management processes and that training is not always the best form of skill-building. In his own words:

...I was a repeat RA this year and the thing that helped me out most was my experiences from last year. I was immersed in it. I knew how to deal with it...and then last year, I didn't receive very much training either...The stuff I learned was basically from the job...you make mistakes as you go obviously, sometimes big mistakes, but you learn from them and you use it to improve your future interactions with residents. That's the only thing you can do.

Tod agreed with Everlast stating that 98% of the job is learning through experience. He also points out:

To tell you the truth, I don't know how much of the actual training I still retained because most of it I've just learned from going out doing the job...You can't teach somebody how to make a sandwich or build a table without them actually doing it.

Other RAs argued that they deal mostly with "lifestyle issues" and that cultural issues are less common; therefore, less emphasis is needed during training.³³ Together, the group came up with two alternative recommendations: (1) shorten certain seminars/workshops

³³ This was the first time throughout my interviews with RAs that lifestyle issues and culture were considered on separate terms. According to RAs definitions of cross-cultural conflict, lifestyle differences are an integral part of culture.

and replace them with others, such as cross-cultural awareness and communication, or (2) provide general guidelines for RAs on how to manage conflict and let the RAs use those guidelines to their own discretion.

Since there is currently no specific policy or guideline for resolving cross-cultural conflict in UVic residences, the creation of a new policy was posed as a final recommendation. Due to the lack of agreement on what constitutes a cross-cultural conflict or even culture in general, it was not surprising that RAs were against creating such a policy. Jack provides reasons for why a policy on cross-cultural conflict management would be ineffective:

You learn through doing...we have guidelines...automatic things...when this happens, we call this person...but we also have our everyday interactions of oh you see someone a little bit down and you notice them...we're not told you absolutely 100% have to talk to that person but that's kind of an unwritten rule that you might go check them out and see what's happening in their life...that's why rules on cultural conflict [would not help]...we all have different definitions of culture...you'd have to get a set definition of culture and then apply it to all of these people...between 2,200 people, people aren't going to react the same.

Tod reiterates the role of personality in the resolution of disputes, arguing that even if there were policies on cultural diversity, RAs would take different things from them and would do things differently due to personality. During a one-on-one interview, Blue provides his own reasons for why a policy on cross-cultural conflict would be ineffective in a residence setting:

...there are a million cultures and...there are different things between cultures...if you take three cultures, the common things might not be the same for three cultures...so I don't think it should be on paper...I think people should be more aware of cultures...information is key...the more you know about the culture, the more you know how to deal with it...or deal with the conflict.

As a response to the Korean exchange student case, there was mention of creating an additional RA training workshop for dealing with language barriers. The RAs involved

in the case, however, did not like the idea of incorporating the workshop into fall training as it was not a concern for all RAs. Also, they did not think that they could be prepared to manage language barriers in such a short span of time. As an alternative, Tod recommended incorporating specific building training or area training for RAs working with exchange students or their roommates. This way, the students present in the workshop will want to learn and want to be there.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Avruch (2000) describes culture as consisting of “numerous schemas derived from diverse experience and distributed across complex social and psychological landscapes” (345). Taking this perspective, an individual is never a part of just one culture but is tied to numerous cultural influences and domains which continually change over the span of a lifetime. These cultural influences are not solely restricted to ethnicity or nationality but include a wide spectrum of values, beliefs and perspectives taken from the viewpoint of gender, religion, class, profession, age, and sexuality.

One of the main reasons for why certain dispute resolution styles are ineffective in dealing with intercultural conflict is due to a misunderstanding of the concept of culture (Avruch 2000; LeBaron 2001). According to Avruch, this is illustrated by the assumption that a single cultural descriptor can characterize an individual across all contexts or

situations (2000:345).³⁴ For example, the role playing and simulation exercises offered in Resident Advisor training are often inappropriate for managing intercultural conflict due to their narrow conceptualization of culture. The assumption that RAs have the ability to further their awareness and understanding of cross-cultural conflict simply by acting out the role of another (often referred to as the “outsider”) is questionable. This is evidenced by the minimal attention paid to cultural conflicts in the Behind Closed Doors activity as well as the large number of RAs who described the role plays and simulation exercises as “unrealistic,” “unnatural,” and/or “impractical” for everyday use.

Throughout the interview process, it was evident that the majority of RAs had a very sophisticated conceptualization of culture which was not representative in their training. As shown in the previous chapters of this study, much of the training on conflict management utilized a simplistic notion of culture in which diversity and cultural awareness were equated to group membership and fixed categories of specific behaviours and customs. Perhaps it was this narrow view of culture that prompted RAs to perceive the simulation and role playing exercises as impractical and unnatural.

Through “creating spaces” and “identity and diversity” training, UVic’s Residence Life team seeks to give its incoming RAs an opportunity to “step out of their comfort zone” by imitating the “other” and setting aside their own social and personal beliefs. RAs are divided into groups based on cultural stereotypes and the success of the activity is dependent upon the degree to which participants experience feelings of exclusion, discomfort, and even embarrassment. Only then can students truly become “aware” of their surroundings and accepting of other cultures. Despite the good intentions

³⁴ The idea that culture can be used to “clump” people into various groups based not on individual interests but on group membership is illustrated in discussions of the “Korean problem” as well as relationships between exchange and non-exchange students.

behind these exercises, there is much awry with this approach. Again, the problem resides primarily in limited views of culture or, in this case, diversity. Here, “diversity” becomes equated with having representation from a relevant set of groups. Viewing diversity as sets of group membership recognizes certain individuals and neglects others, while at the same time continually perpetuating the very stereotypes they seek to abolish. Secondly, cultural and diversity training often denies individual identity and responsibility. Lastly, it assumes that nothing ever changes. Culture, society, and politics are perceived as static rather than as dynamic and shifting processes.

The link between definitions of culture and effective conflict management is also evident in what the RAs defined as “the Korean conflict.” In this particular case, nationality was a determining factor in how the issue was resolved. The way in which this particular conflict was perceived as something “cultural,” a fact revealed in the national division of the two groups, greatly impacted the way in which the disputants were treated. As noted in *Chapter Five*, there was obvious disparity in the amount of attention paid to the Korean exchange students and to the other residents involved in the conflict. Including half of the disputants in the conflict management process only serves to reinforce the separation between the two groups, thereby reproducing a system of inequities from the onset. While RAs evidently had an inherent sense these conflicts were the result of a variety of factors including gender, age, status, and profession, the policy and procedures for which they were expected to follow did not reflect their way of thinking. As such, these issues were left to the wayside and the resultant damage included a constricted view of the dispute and its origins. As well, RAs' recognition of the need to go against policy in order to look at the conflict as a whole was not illustrated in practice.

Instead, meetings focused on a resolution by examining the conflict incidents themselves rather than the implied underlying issue of racism.

It is possible that RAs were not prepared for a dispute of this nature because of their positive experiences from the year before. Despite the fact that the individuals from the year before were completely different from the individuals this year, the reputation of Korean exchange students at UVic remained the same. One wonders whether the faulty designation of rooms would have had a similar impact on residents if exchange students were not in the picture. Would the RAs still consider the conflict cultural? If not, in what ways would the conflict management process change? In other words, how does their definition of the issue as something “cultural” influence their conflict management decisions? It seems likely that if no nationalistic distinction was made, this particular case would have been managed quite differently. Perhaps not only would all of the parties have been involved in the conflict management process, but on a more even playing field. Such an occurrence would have made the factors which propelled the dispute more explicit leading to a more positive outcome.

The practice of dispute resolution has typically been culturally situated within a North American (Canada and U.S.), male, white, and middle-class world (Avruch 2000:343). As such, certain ways of viewing and managing conflict are often exported or imposed on disputants with little awareness of its one-sidedness. The fact that the University of Victoria’s policies and guidelines for resolving conflict are situated within a Canadian context certainly comes into play here. This is demonstrated most explicitly in RAs' perceptions of their role as mediator in the conflicts between residents.

While there were few examples of an actual mediated case, concerns over neutrality were expressed frequently during interviews. First, RAs found it exceptionally difficult to separate self from circumstance and to ignore their own personal biases and preferences when it comes to resolving disputes. Moreover, the role of the mediator as a neutral third party who simply guides the discussion along does not allow RAs the flexibility and freedom to incorporate their own personalities and experiences into the process. This is unfortunate considering that RAs found these skills most valuable for effective management of disputes. Mediation was identified by RAs as a single occurrence that does not normally include follow-up. In UVic residences, follow-up is only used when the safety of an individual is being threatened. However, according to RAs, follow-up is extremely important to effective management of disputes, particularly when cultural values and beliefs are at the forefront. Another problem with mediation is that, like policy, the focus is on resolution. While it may give conflict parties an opportunity to speak about their feelings and opinions, it assumes that all conflicts can (and must) be resolved. In many cases where culture or power is a factor, the issue is never fully resolved.

A sub-question of this research related to how RAs define cross-cultural conflict and how this definition either informs or influences their management of a particular cross-cultural dispute. Almost every cross-cultural conflict example provided by RAs met the criteria outlined by Williams (1994) in *Chapter Three* which states: cross-cultural conflict usually has complicated dynamics, it cannot always be resolved by addressing content and relational issues, and it often reoccurs or arises strong emotions even when the disagreement seems trivial. While RAs definitions of cross-cultural conflict varied

substantially, their examples were quite similar in that they focused specifically on nationality. This is reflected in the study's major themes: international floor, Korean exchange students, racial slurs and discriminatory words. The relationship between cross-cultural conflict and ethnicity are reiterated in *Chapter Six* where recommendations and alternatives to training centre on conflict cases regarding students studying from abroad.

Two exceptions to the themes outlined above are cross-cultural conflicts associated with marijuana and alcohol. These were cited as two of the most common and problematic disputes in residence. One of the sub-questions created out of these responses was: "What are the most common disputes in residence and how do they relate to differing cultural norms, values and beliefs?" According to RAs, the use of marijuana and alcohol in university residences are still considered cultural in the sense that ethnicity is often a factor. RAs argue that ethnicity has an impact on the perceptions, attitudes and use of alcohol and drugs. Ethnic background can influence under what conditions such behaviours are socially accepted and for what purpose, time or place people use them.³⁵

As indicated in *Chapter Five*, RAs found that none of the university policies were effective in resolving cultural disputes; however, there was also strong disagreement towards establishing a policy for managing cross-cultural conflict in residence. Policies provide ways to penalize conflict cases but not how to resolve them. RAs found that cultural conflicts varied substantially in both content and setting; therefore, it would be impossible to create a single policy that reflects this. They also viewed the Residence Life policies as a "quick fix" to conflict and inappropriate for culturally sensitive issues. This was due to the fact that policies tend to be "resolution-centric" in that the aim is to fix the

³⁵ One could argue of course that not only ethnicity but gender, age, profession, etc. could influence such behaviours as well.

dispute in a quick and tidy fashion through the use of fine or penalty. RAs found that this was not appropriate for cross-cultural disputes where emotions are involved.

When asked about training, RAs cited several skills they found the most conducive to resolving cross-cultural conflict in residence. What is interesting, however, is that basic dispute resolution skills were favoured over cultural awareness and diversity training. RAs thought that the “cultural training” provided by Residence Life was geared more towards awareness building and prevention rather than actual hands-on skills training. When it came to practise, basic dispute resolution skills such as proactive listening, responsive feedback, open language, and follow-up were the most effective in terms of the actual management of cultural disputes.

RAs noted that the majority of policies regarding conflict in general were not always followed. RAs depended upon their own common sense, personality and prior experience for effective management of disputes of every size and nature. Common sense, personality and experience were described as integral to the RA role in that they provided RAs with the flexibility and freedom to manage disputes on their own. For most, effective management of conflicts (especially cultural ones) requires flexibility as well as a diversity of skills and knowledge. Though policies are often helpful in providing suggestions on where to begin in the dispute resolution process, whether that policy is followed from start to finish is ultimately the responsibility and decision of the RA.

As noted, most of the recommendations and alternatives to training provided by RAs during the focus group sessions addressed cultural conflicts involving exchange students. Changing the structure of UVic residences, creating more detailed residence application forms, and speaking to the exchange program coordinator were the top three

recommendations cited by RAs. These recommendations were identified as the most needed, pressing and realistic way to improve the management of cross-cultural conflict in residences. Other recommendations included: shortening seminars/workshops during training, providing seminars/workshops on cultural awareness and language barriers for RAs working with students from abroad, and providing general (and flexible) guidelines for RAs on how to manage conflict.

When it comes to culture, it is not simply the customs or beliefs that set people apart but definitions of these characteristics and how they are used to assign people to places in relation to others. Cultural characteristics or qualities often bestow minority status on individuals, limiting the access of specific groups to various privileges and resources. All of this adds up to inequalities and to unfair treatment of groups of people based not upon their abilities and skills but upon irrelevant qualities and characteristics which are provided by the dominant group. In terms of this particular study, the dominant group (the University of Victoria) has control over what types of dispute resolution methods were used and under what circumstances people (RAs) were able to negotiate their way through conflict.

So what does this mean for the future of conflict management in university residences? To begin with, discourse on culture and diversity in Residence Life policies and practices could be improved by emphasizing the context-specificity of these terms rather than treating them as a type of variable which determines people's behaviour. In other words, experiences of conflict may be connected with some group identities but they are never equivalent to them. Secondly, there needs to be more focus on the presence of multiple identities and the intersection of those identities in conflict management

processes. Lastly, in order to help eradicate notions of “us” and “them,” RAs and students should be reminded that they too have “culture.” This will lead to a much more reflexive approach to conflict management and the removal of unrealistic notions of neutrality in dispute resolution processes.

In sum, despite current theories of conflict as a holistic and dynamic process, much of U.S. and Canadian dispute resolution practices are guided by a fixed notion of culture. As revealed in the training and expected conflict management practices of RAs, this cultural discourse and its representation are not only a major part of the problem, but even a source of it. It is only by breaking away from this narrow conceptualization of culture that conflict management processes may be improved. Conflict managers can begin by finding ways to uncover how conflicting parties understand their world. This is a task that requires more than just awareness and sensitivity to different cultures; it includes incorporating various traditions and practices into the conflict management process itself as well as maintaining an inquiring mind. The act of always questioning and reflecting on our own preconceived notions and beliefs is a crucial component of peacebuilding and dispute resolution practices. Finally, being tolerant of ambiguity, or being comfortable with what you may not know or understand, can help conflict managers better assess the conflict issue and find new methods to resolve it.

Expansion on the role of the Resident Advisor in university residences is an important implication for future studies on this topic. While the role of the Resident Advisor may be typical for most U.S. or Canadian universities, it does not exist in many other parts of the world. In Norway, for example, residents are like tenants. They cook and clean for themselves and deal with conflicts and issues on their own. Disputes over

noise or alcohol seem to occur less frequently and to a lesser degree than those found in U.S. or Canadian university residences. In light of this, it would be interesting to see why the role of the Resident Advisor is considered valuable in one culture and not in another. More explicitly, how does the presence of RAs either change or affect the management of conflict? As a second point, how do RAs' preconceived notions about residents affect the management of conflict in residence? This comment refers primarily to dealings with exchange students in residence. Future studies could also include differing perceptions of alcohol and drugs as well as differing perceptions of residence life as a place to party or a place to study.

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APPENDIX 'A'

RESIDENT ADVISOR PROFILES

The following is a list of Resident Advisors interviewed in the one-on-one, group interview, and focus group sessions. Included are their pseudonym, months of RA experience, age, gender, place of origin, their stated ethnic affiliation, as well as year and field of study.

NICOLE:

Repeat RA (approximately 11 months); 19 years; female; Vancouver; Canadian; 3rd year Psychology.

PENELOPE:

New RA (approximately 2 months); 20 years; female; Edmonton; East Indian (Hindu); 3rd year Psychology/Business.

BLUE:

Repeat RA (approximately 7 months); 20 years; male; India; East Indian; 3rd year Engineering.

SAIL:

New RA (approximately 2 months); 20 years; male; Newfoundland; Canadian/Greek/Australian; 2nd year Political Science.

PARIS:

New RA (approximately 2 months); 19 years; female; Canada; Irish/Canadian; 2nd year Social Work.

KENT:

Repeat RA (approximately 11 months); 21 years; male; Vancouver; Caucasian/Irish; 4th year Biology.

EVERLAST:

Repeat RA (approximately 6 months); 19 years; male; Dubai; Persian/Arab; 2nd year Geography.

JACK:

New RA (approximately 2 months); 18 years; male; Canada; Jewish; 2nd year Biology and Environmental Science.

OAK:

Repeat RA (approximately 11 months); 21 years; female; Canada; N/A; 3rd year Marine Biology.

STACEY:

New RA (approximately 2 months); 19 years; female; Ontario; Caucasian; 3rd year Geography (Education).

TOD:

New RA (approximately 2 months); 19 years; male; Vancouver; Caucasian; 2nd year Chemistry/Psychology.

OLIVIA:

Repeat RA (approximately 6 months); 23 years; female; Victoria; Caucasian; 4th year Elementary Education.

APPENDIX 'B'

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

*Please note that this email has been sent to you on my behalf by the Manager of Residence Life, as UVic cannot release your contact information.

Lindsay McDonough is a graduate student supervised by Dr. Peter Stephenson in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Victoria. For her Masters thesis, she is conducting a research study to explore the management of cross-cultural conflict by Resident Advisors (RA) at UVic. Residential Life and Conference Services supports this research and welcomes any feedback on the current policies and expected practices of RAs. It is hoped that this research will aid in providing up-to-date training for RAs on issues of diversity and dispute resolution.

She is recruiting RAs for a one-on-one confidential interview which will take one hour (depending on the participants' willingness and interest) and later she hopes to conduct group interviews of 6-8 RAs for a period of up to two hours. Participants in this study will be asked to discuss their experiences of cross-cultural conflict in residences with particular emphasis on the policies and practices used by RAs. While several

prepared questions will be used to initiate conversation on this issue, participants are also invited to develop their own questions and topics of discussion. We value the goals of this research, but emphasize that your participation is entirely voluntary. If you are interested in volunteering for this study or have any questions concerning the research, please contact Lindsay McDonough at 483-5042 or e-mail to linzmcd@uvic.ca.

APPENDIX ‘C’

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Perspectives on the management of cross-cultural conflict in university residences

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Perspectives on the management of cross-cultural conflict in university residences” that is being conducted by Ms. Lindsay McDonough.

Lindsay McDonough is a graduate student in the department of Anthropology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by phone (250) 483-5042 or e-mail, linzmcd@uvic.ca.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Anthropology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Peter Stephenson. You may contact my supervisor at (250) 721-7351 and pstephen@uvic.ca if you have any questions or concerns.

The purpose of this research project is to explore the management of cross-cultural conflict by Resident Advisors (RA) at the University of Victoria. At this stage in the research, cross-cultural conflict will be generally defined as cultural differences which occur out of a clashing of identities, meaning-making, worldviews and territories. Your participation in the one-on-one interviews will aid in exploring the policies and expected practices of RAs, how these policies are implemented and whether these policies are effective in resolving cross-cultural conflict.

Most University residences bring together diverse groups of students who interact daily with those who differ from themselves and when students live in close proximity to one another, misunderstandings and disharmonies are bound to arise. It is therefore

surprising that very little research has been conducted on cross-cultural conflict in University residences, including virtually nothing in Canada. Although most universities in North America provide training for RAs on cultural diversity, the majority of mediation policies implemented by universities are culture-specific. This research is therefore important in illustrating how understanding, preventing and managing conflict varies across cultural boundaries.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your position as an RA has made you the best candidate for providing information on the management of cross-cultural conflict in residences. This is based on the role and expectations of RAs outlined in the Residential Life Handbook which states: (1) complaints and issues arising between residents are dealt with and documented first and foremost by RAs; (2) participation in training on issues of preventing and managing all types of conflict are required by RAs at the beginning of each year; (3) RAs are responsible for promoting diversity on campus by organizing workshops and presentations for residents.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a series of face-to-face, one-on-one interviews (number of interviews to be determined by the participant) in order to elicit your views and experiences of the management of cross-cultural conflict in residences at UVic. Ideally, interviews will last one hour and will be conducted at the participant's residence on campus. In the event of time and/or location inconveniences, alternative plans will be made, subject to the consensus of all parties.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include increasing knowledge and awareness of diversity issues on campus, providing more effective management of cross-cultural conflict in residences, and implementing alternative forms for preventing cross-cultural conflict among resident students. This study will also provide participants opportunities to voice their opinions, concerns and experiences of issues normally limited to residential life management and staff.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, your participation means that you are giving me permission to use data collected during the interview in my study and final report. You may withdraw from the project at any time without any consequences or any need for explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your data will only be used with your permission

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data used in this project will also be protected. Your name will not appear in any part of the project, even the final copy. Instead, you will be assigned a pseudonym (nickname) at the beginning of the study that will be used instead. All data, including the consent letters, interviews, written notes, and audio recording will be kept in a locked filing cabinet either at my office or at home and any data which has been transcribed onto a computer will be password protected. The data will be held for up to two years after completion of the study, at which time it will be destroyed. Any computer files I have regarding this project will be erased, paper data will be shredded and all audio tapes will be destroyed.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: (1) results will be presented in person to participating RAs as well as members, staff and management of Residential Life and Conference Services; (2) results will be

compiled into a document which will be reviewed and assessed by both my primary project supervisor and secondary graduate committee members; (3) it is hoped that the findings of this project will also be published in a peer reviewed journal such as *The Journal of College and University Student Housing*; (4) for those established outside the academic community, excerpts and information on the research proposal and findings may be communicated through local newspapers, magazines and public conferences.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Sincerely,

Ms. Lindsay McDonough
Project Researcher and MA Candidate
University of Victoria

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

APPENDIX ‘D’

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM: FOCUS GROUPS

Perspectives on the management of cross-cultural conflict in university residences

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Perspectives on the management of cross-cultural conflict in university residences” that is being conducted by Ms. Lindsay McDonough.

Lindsay McDonough is a graduate student in the department of Anthropology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by phone (250) 483-5042 or e-mail, linzmc@uvic.ca.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Anthropology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Peter Stephenson. You may contact my supervisor at (250) 721-7351 and pstephen@uvic.ca if you have any questions or concerns.

The purpose of this research project is to explore the management of cross-cultural conflict by Resident Advisors (RA) at the University of Victoria. At this stage in the research, cross-cultural conflict will be generally defined as cultural differences which occur out of a clashing of identities, meaning-making, worldviews and territories. Your participation in the focus group interview will aid in making recommendations for policy makers on how to effectively manage cross-cultural conflict in residence.

Most University residences bring together diverse groups of students who interact daily with those who differ from themselves and when students live in close proximity to one another, misunderstandings and disharmonies are bound to arise. It is therefore surprising that very little research has been conducted on cross-cultural conflict in

University residences, including virtually nothing in Canada. Although most universities in North America provide training for RAs on cultural diversity, the majority of mediation policies implemented by universities are culture-specific. This research is therefore important in illustrating how understanding, preventing and managing conflict varies across cultural boundaries.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your position as an RA has made you the best candidate for providing information on the management of cross-cultural conflict in residences. This is based on the role and expectations of RAs outlined in the Residential Life Handbook which states: (1) complaints and issues arising between residents are dealt with and documented first and foremost by RAs; (2) participation in training on issues of preventing and managing all types of conflict are required by RAs at the beginning of each year; (3) RAs are responsible for promoting diversity on campus by organizing workshops and presentations for residents.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a series of group interviews of 6-8 participants (number of interviews to be determined by the participant). Interviews will take place in a larger setting such as a classroom or student lounge and will last a maximum of two hours. In the event of time and/or location inconveniences, alternative plans will be made, subject to the consensus of all parties.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include increasing knowledge and awareness of diversity issues on campus, providing more effective management of cross-cultural conflict in residences, and implementing alternative forms for preventing cross-cultural conflict among resident students. This study will also provide participants opportunities to voice their opinions, concerns and experiences of issues normally limited to residential life management and staff.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, your participation means that you are giving me permission to use data collected during the focus groups in my study and final report. You may withdraw from the project at any time without any consequences or any need for explanation. Please note that it may be logistically impossible to remove individual data from the focus groups. If you do decide to withdraw from the study, it is unlikely that your data will be removed.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data used in this project will be partially protected. Although participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality, due to the public nature of focus groups, your confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. However, your name will not appear in any part of the project, even the final copy. Instead, you will be assigned a pseudonym (nickname) at the beginning of the study that will be used instead. All data, including the consent letters, interviews, written notes, and audio recording will be kept in a locked filing cabinet either at my office or at home and any data which has been transcribed onto a computer will be password protected. The data will be held for up to two years after completion of the study, at which time it will be destroyed. Any computer files I have regarding this project will be erased, paper data will be shredded and all audio tapes will be destroyed.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: (1) results will be presented in person to participating RAs as well as members, staff and management of Residential Life and Conference Services; (2) results will be compiled into a document which will be reviewed and assessed by both my primary project supervisor and secondary graduate committee members; (3) it is hoped that the findings of this project will also be published in a peer reviewed journal such as *The Journal of College and University Student Housing*; (4) for those established outside the academic community, excerpts and information on the research proposal and findings may be communicated through local newspapers, magazines and public conferences.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Sincerely,

Ms. Lindsay McDonough
Project Researcher and MA Candidate
University of Victoria

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

APPENDIX 'E'

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee (Code pseudonym and Gender):

Date and Time:

Introductory Protocol

I'd like to begin by thanking you for taking the time to help me with my research study. I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour, but it could be a bit longer if you want it to. During this time, I have several topics I'd like to cover and you can take as much, or as little time to answer as you wish.

If you agree, I'd like to audio tape our discussion so that I don't have to take a lot of notes. I'll take a few notes too, just to remind me of things to listen for on the tape. I will be the only person who will listen to the tape, and it will only be used to help me write my report on the findings from this study. As soon as I'm finished with my report, the tape will be destroyed. If for any reason you don't want to be taped, just let me know and I'll just take notes instead.

Our discussion today is also confidential in nature. No one will be advised of your specific comments. Rather, your comments will be combined with the comments from others that I interview in order to protect everyone's identity that is taking part in this study. Your real name will also never be used except on this consent form, which will be kept separately from the notes. In order to secure this confidentiality agreement, please

sign the form devised to meet our human subject requirements at the University of Victoria.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who might have something to share about cross-cultural conflict in residences on this campus. My research project focuses on the mediation policies and practices used by Resident Advisors (RA) at UVic and their conduciveness to resolving cross-cultural conflict among residents. This study does not intend to evaluate your personal dispute resolution or problem-solving skills. I am trying to learn more about how RAs are trained to deal with conflict between residents and to explore their own perceptions and experiences regarding the use and effectiveness of their training in resolving cross-cultural conflict.

A. Interviewee Background

How long have you been...

_____ a Resident Advisor?

_____ at this institution?

How old are you?

What ethnic group (or groups) do you affiliate with, if any?

Where are you from? (i.e. where did you grow up)?

What year of study are you in?

What is your field of study?

B. These questions deal with Policies and expected practices

1. Based on your experiences as an RA, how would you define a “dispute”?

2. How often do disputes arise in residence?

- Probes: How often would you say *you* deal with disputes between residents? (Daily? Weekly? Monthly?)

- Probes: Are disputes more common at certain times? Weekends? During Exams? Early in term or late in term?

3. Briefly describe how you would go about resolving a dispute in residence.

- Probes: Do conflicts vary a good bit? What are most of them about or are they all quite different?
- Probes: How are the expectations of dispute resolution communicated to you? (e.g. Training week? Manuals? Meetings?)
- Probes: Are these policies and practices reviewed? If so, do you know how they are reviewed?

3. Do you know what policies are in place for dealing with disputes between residents?

- Probes: Can you describe the stages a resident involved in a dispute might go through?
- Probes: Who would the resident be expected to be in most contact with and why? (e.g. RA? Don? Community Coordinator? Campus Security? Other?)
- Probes: At what point in the process would your involvement in a dispute formally end? In other words, when are others supposed to take over—if they are expected to take over? Does this seem reasonable to you?

C. The next section deals with how policies are actually implemented

1. The previous questions dealt with expectations of dispute settlement, next I would like to ask you how you are actually involved in resolving disputes in residence and how this might or might not differ from expectations and policies. Can you describe any disputes which followed or didn't follow the expected resolution path?

- Probes: Are the policies and practices followed or do events tend to dictate the response people make to troubles?
- Probes: What factors do you think might make it difficult to follow such policies?
- Probes: Have there been any consequences of not following such policies?

2. What individual skills do you use when resolving disputes between residents?

- Probes: From where did you learn these skills?
- Probes: In your opinion, what skills and/or techniques could be added to Residential Life training sessions and manuals?
- Probes: Do you think any skills and/or techniques should be omitted from Residential Life training sessions and manuals? In other words, are any of them misleading or really useless?

D. Cross-cultural conflict

1. How would you define “cross-cultural conflict”? [If the RA is having difficulty defining cross-cultural conflict, I may provide my own definition to see if they are in agreement. This would include *disputes which occur out of a clashing of cultural norms and practices*].
2. You were just asked to define cross-cultural conflict in your own terms. Keeping that definition in mind, how often are cultural differences a factor in conflicts between residents? Is this usually overt, or is it just one of a number of background factors?

Often/Sometimes:

a. Please give an example without using names or specific details.

- Probes: What cultural differences did this particular dispute include?
- Probes: In your opinion, why did those cultural differences result in a dispute?
- Probes: Do you think the conflict was satisfactorily resolved?
- Probes: Why or Why not?
- Probes: Do you feel that you have any particular skills or training to address such sorts of conflict?

Often/Sometimes or Never:

a. Do you know if other RAs have been involved in conflicts regarding cultural differences?

If yes, can you comment briefly on their experience?

- Probes: Do you know if the conflict was resolved?

- Probes: Do you know how the conflict was resolved? Or, if not, why it was not?
- Probes: How might you attempt to resolve a cross-cultural conflict?
- Probes: What skills and/or techniques would you use?

3. How often do you think racial/ethnic differences are causes of conflict?

Often/Sometimes:

a. Do you find these types of disputes any more difficult to handle than others?

If yes, what is it about conflicts over cultural differences that make it difficult to resolve them?

- Probes: Does the training offered by Residential Life prepare you for dealing with conflicts over cultural differences? If so, how?

If no, can you tell why you think they are no more difficult than other conflicts?? What specific skills/techniques that have been helpful in addressing conflicts over cultural differences? Or, do you just use the same techniques for all conflicts?

- Probes: From where did you learn these skills and/or techniques?

Never:

a. Are cultural differences not a concern—or at least not a major concern-- for UVic residents?

- Probes: What factors do you think have helped prevent such conflicts from occurring?
- Probes: What residential programs and/or initiatives (if any) have helped prevent such conflicts from occurring?

4. Do you know if there are specific policies at the University of Victoria for dealing with cross-cultural conflict?

If yes, what do you think they are?

- Probes: According to policy, how should disputants communicate their concerns to each other? Verbally? Face to face? In a letter?

- Probes: How are you trained to deal with the presence of language barriers in cross-cultural disputes?
- Probes: What role does your training allow you to most closely identify with when dealing with cross-cultural conflicts? A mediator? Facilitator? Negotiator? Translator? Judge?
- Probes: Does this role ever change and if so, under what circumstances?
- Probes: What *tactics*, if any, are taught for dealing with cross-cultural conflict? Cooperation? Compromise? Competition? Avoidance?
- Probes: What *tools*, if any, are taught for dealing with cross-cultural conflict? Listening skills? Narrative/story? Metaphors? Ritual and myth?
- Probes: Could art ever be used as a tool for resolving cross-cultural disputes between residents? How about drama or dance?

If no, do you think there should be? Why or why not?

E. Evaluation of Residential Life policies and practices

1. Were the policies and practices offered by Residential Life helpful in preparing for cross-cultural conflicts?

If yes, what (in your opinion) made them helpful?

If not, what changes could be implemented to improve the dispute resolution practices and policies at UVic?

2. In your experience, was the training helpful in preparing for cross-cultural conflicts?

If yes, what (in your opinion) made it helpful?

If partially, what were the most helpful parts?

If not, what changes do you think could be implemented to improve the training sessions offered by Residential Life?

APPENDIX 'F'

GROUP INTERVIEW: TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. Feedback from first meeting with Korean exchange students

1. Have the number of noise violations decreased since your meeting with the Koreans?
2. Have any other acts of vandalism or disrespect occurred since meeting with the Koreans?
3. What measures have been taken to deal with the communication barriers? (e.g. smiling and speaking too fast)
4. How has the power issue been addressed?
5. Have any other actions been taken to address the other residents?

B. Feedback from second meeting with Korean exchange students

1. Who attended the second meeting? (Was the third RA there)?
2. What issues did the RAs bring to the table?
3. What other issues did the Koreans bring to the table?

C. Miscellaneous

1. How has Res. Life attempted to resolve the situation?
2. Could you tell me a little about the translator?
3. Do the other residents know about the meetings with the Koreans now? Has it been made public?
4. Is it true that few Korean exchange students attend the Sunday night meetings? If so, why?
5. Have any measures been taken to deal with residents who don't have phones in their rooms?

D. Programming

1. Have any measures been taken to get the two groups intermingling? (e.g. more involved in social gatherings and events)
2. Stacey: Holiday Pot-luck, Tod: Video Game Night or Poker Night
3. Tod mentioned combining programming initiatives (creating Res. Wide programming), any updates?

E. Recommendations

1. Have either of you made any recommendations to Residence Life in response to this incident? Would you like to?

APPENDIX 'G'

FOCUS GROUP: TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. Recommendations for RA Training

1. What is your opinion on implementing workshops on cross-cultural awareness and communication for residents? How about for RAs?
2. How do you feel about implementing a workshop on RA self-care?
1. How do you feel about using art or theatre as a method for resolving disputes between residents? Should it be included in training?
2. Do you think more conflict management skills should be provided in training? Why or why not?

B. Recommendations for Policy-makers

1. Do you think there should be a specific policy or guideline for resolving cross-cultural conflict in residence? Why or why not?
2. Do you think there should be a policy for dealing with language barriers in residence? Why or why not?

C. Recommendations for Residence Life and Conference Services

1. How would changing the structure of UVic residences aid in the management of cross-cultural conflict?

D. Prevention

1. What changes can be made to programming to aid in the prevention of cross-cultural disputes?
2. How do you feel about incorporating a “no tolerance” rule in residence?
3. How do you feel about incorporating roommate contracts in residence?

4. In what ways can RAs prevent bad traditions from occurring in residence?

E. Other

1. What recommendations would you make to remedy the problem with maintaining inconsistency in residence?

APPENDIX 'H'

