But How Do You Feel?

Mr. Werner Zorman, Harvey Mudd College

Werner Zorman is the Associate Professor and Annenberg Chair of Leadership at Harvey Mudd College. Before he joined Harvey Mudd, he was the Associate Director of Leadership Programs at Cornell’s College of Engineering from 2012 to 2016.

Mr. Zorman received his M.S. degree in computer science from the University of Technology in Vienna. He worked for 23+ years in the telecom industry in Europe and North America as engineer, leader, mentor, coach and leadership development professional.

After a long and fulfilling customer-facing career, Mr. Zorman decided in 2007 to change his career direction and to focus on leadership development, mentoring and coaching to support engineers on their journey to become effective and successful leaders. He designed and delivered programs in the area of leadership- and team development addressing areas like authentic leadership, effective communication, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and customer service excellence.

It was during those five years when he realized that supporting young professionals with their leadership development is his life calling. He decided to leave corporate business and accepted a position at Cornell’s College of Engineering.

During the last years, Mr. Zorman has focused on the design and implementation of a student-driven laboratory method which supports the development of authentic leadership skills.
But how do you Feel?

*Authentic Leadership Development for undergraduate students through a student-driven, experiential, and emotion-laden course using a laboratory method addressing the whole person.*

**Abstract**

Based on 324 reflections written by 27 undergraduate students from two independent cohorts, this study examines the effectiveness of a semester-long authentic leadership development course which is based on a student-driven, student-centered, and experiential laboratory method. This study shows firstly that this course enabled the students to develop their authentic leadership skills, secondly, that emotions play a very important role in the process of developing authentic leadership skills, and lastly, that specific attributes of this course fostered the development of authentic leadership skills.
Introduction

Transforming our current world into a more just, more inclusive, and more compassionate world requires authentic leaders who know their values and act in alignment with those values. Therefore, the mission of Harvey Mudd College’s leadership program is to develop authentic leaders who have a positive impact on the world.

Since Bill George [1] published his book Authentic Leadership (AL) in 2003, many leadership experts have researched the conceptual definitions (e.g. self-awareness, optimism, resilience, relational transparency, etc.) [2][3][4][5][6][7] and benefits (e.g. work engagement, trust in leadership, job satisfaction, organizational performance) [8][9][10][11][12][13] of authentic leadership. Gardner [14] offers an excellent literature review of AL, including the results of a content analysis of 91 publications that focus on AL.

Much less research has been done on Authentic Leadership Development (ALD), yet leadership experts agree that a regular training or lecture will not be enough and that a student-centered experiential learning approach is required [15][16]. Eich [17] emphasizes that an effective leadership development program must have the following attributes:

- participants are engaged in building and sustaining a learning community focused on the development of each member (also emphasized by Baron in his study about developing AL [18])
- student-centered experiential learning experience [19]
- research-grounded continuous program development

The author agrees with Eich’s findings whole-heartedly and argues that in addition to those attributes the role of emotions must also be considered when designing an ALD program. Jennifer M. George [20] suggests that “…feelings play a central role in the leadership process.” and de Vries [21] points out in his study about transformational education programs, that “cognitive and emotional processes need to be taken into consideration to create changes in behavior” which are an essential part of developing authentic leadership skills. York claims that “in contemporary English-speaking society, there is a cultural bias towards the cognitive and conative aspects of learning. The development of affect is inhibited…leading to a lack of emphasis on people as whole persons.” [22]. The author resonates with York’s assessment and decided to design a leadership development course which enables the participants to engage with both “their own whole-person knowing and the whole-person knowing of their fellow learners” [22].

The course described in this study was designed with the objective to support the participating students with the development of their authentic leadership skills while also addressing the whole person and possessing the attributes described in Eich’s study. With the help of previous studies [15][23], existing leadership programs at undergraduate colleges were evaluated but only when the search was extended to graduate-level leadership programs, the T-Group method was identified as a promising candidate, which seemed to meet all defined requirements (ALD, whole person approach, Eich’s study attributes). A T-Group is a type of experienced-based learning
where the participants work in small groups of 8 to 14 people, over an extended period of time to learn and practice new skills and behaviors.

The Stanford Graduate School of Business uses the T-Group method as the core of their Interpersonal Dynamics course. “(known colloquially as “Touchy Feely”)”, which has been the school’s most popular elective for 45 years. The objective of this course is “…to improve [the students’] abilities to authentically engage, communicate, and influence.” The Yale School of Management offers a course with the same name, which is also based on the T-Group method and aims “…to use interpersonal communication skills to influence and lead the building of more open, effective, and rewarding relationships, even with people whom you may initially experience as difficult.”

Research into the history of the T-Group method reveals contradictory opinions about its effectiveness in changing behavior. Carl Rogers [24][25] describes T-groups as ”...the most significant social invention of the century.” Alternatively, Scott Highhouse [26] claims that the T-group “is commonly dismissed as a management Fad.” Additionally, Odiorne [27] argues that “T-groups lacked any research to support their effectiveness in changing behavior and that trainers conducted the interventions without any notion of the outcomes they wished to achieve.” [27].

On the other hand, Robert P Crosby [28] praises the T-Group method as “cutting edge”, Chris Argyris [29] argues that “one of the learning consistently reported by people who have completed a laboratory [T-Group] is that the trust, openness, leveling, risk-taking (and others) take a new meaning – a meaning that they had not appreciated before the laboratory.”, and Jerry Porras, co-author of Build to Last [30], shares in an interview with David L. Bradford “So I took the T-group section and much to my surprise, found that it opened up a whole new life to me. It exposed me to experiences that I had never had before or for that matter had never even understood existed.” [31].

With the help of faculty members from the Stanford Graduate School of Business, who have led hundreds of T-Groups, the author created a modified version of Stanford’s Interpersonal Dynamics course, considering the needs of an undergraduate student population. This newly designed course, with the T-Group method as its core element, was offered to the undergraduate students of Harvey Mudd College during the spring semester 2017 as a pilot and after a very positive reception (course evaluations 6.77 out of 7) again during the fall semester 2017. Due to increasing demand, two courses are offered in Spring 2018. The author sought IRB approval and student consent to be allowed to use the student reflections for this study with the aim to analyze the effectiveness of this new course.

The following sections introduce the authentic leadership model, explain the T-Group method, describe the course and research methods, explain the nature of the qualitative data, present the findings, and end with a discussion about transference, limitations, risks, and future research suggestions.
Theoretical Framework

In this section the multi-dimensional authentic leadership model is introduced, which was used to test the effectiveness of the course, as well as the T-Group method, which is the core element of the course.

Authentic Leadership

Walumbwa’s [32] multidimensional model of authentic leadership was used to measure the effectiveness of the course in this study. Walumbwa’s model includes the four dimensions of self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective.

- **Self-awareness** refers to demonstrating an understanding of how one derives meaning from and makes meaning of the world, as well as how that meaning-making process impacts the way one views himself or herself over time. It also refers to gaining insight into the self through exposure to others and cognizance of one’s impact on other people.
- **Relational transparency** refers to presenting one’s authentic self (as opposed to a fake or distorted self) to others. Such behavior involves openly sharing information and expressions of one’s true thoughts and emotions, while trying to minimize displays of inappropriate emotions.
- **Balanced processing** refers to leaders who show that they objectively analyze all relevant data before coming to a decision. Such leaders also solicit views that challenge their deeply held positions.
- **Internalized moral perspective** refers to an internalized form of self-regulation, which is guided by internal values and results in behavior that is consistent with these internalized values.

T-Group

The T-Group method was invented by National Training Laboratory (NTL) members Kurt Lewin, Ken Benne, Leland Bradford and Ronald Lippitt in 1947 and is explained in much detail in articles and studies about the history and nature of T-Groups [33][34][26] [28] [35]. Charles Seashore [36] describes T-Groups as a “…type of experience-based learning. Participants work together in a small group over an extended period of time, and learn through analysis of their own experiences, including emotions, reactions, perceptions, and behavior.”

The major differences between the T-Group method and other experience-based learning models are described by Chris Argyris [29] as follows:

- There is no agenda, except as the group provides it.
- There are no pre-defined norms of group operations.
- For some time, the experience is confusing, tension-laden, and frustrating for most participants.
- The educator doesn’t provide the leadership, which a group of students would normally expect and stays, beside occasional interventions, most of the time quiet.
This unconventional learning model requires the students to re-learn their approach to learning. Seashore [36] highlights the following assumptions about the nature of the learning as essential to T-Group training:

- **Learning responsibility.** Each participant is responsible for his own learning. What a person learns depends upon his own style, readiness, and the relationships he develops with other members of the group.
- **Staff role.** The staff person's role is to facilitate the examination and understanding of the experiences in the group. He helps participants to focus on the way the group is working, the style of an individual's participation, or the issues that are facing the group.
- **Experience and conceptualization.** Most learning is a combination of experience and conceptualization. A major T-Group aim is to provide a setting in which individuals are encouraged to examine their experiences together in enough detail so that valid generalizations can be drawn.
- **Authentic relationships and learning.** A person is most free to learn when he establishes authentic relationships with other people and thereby increases his sense of self-esteem and decreases his defensiveness. In authentic relationships persons can be open, honest, and direct with one another so that they are communicating what they are actually feeling rather than masking their emotions.
- **Skill acquisition and values.** The development of new skills in working with people is maximized as a person examines the basic values underlying his behavior as he acquires appropriate concepts and theory and as he is able to practice new behavior and obtain feedback on the degree to which his behavior produces the intended impact.

The T-Group method used in the course in this study is very similar to the original T-Group method described above. The main difference is that traditional T-Groups are mostly offered as intensive, day-long seminars over 5 to 7 days, whereas the T-Groups in this course were held as weekly 2.5 hour sessions throughout the semester (14 weeks) and as 2.5-3 hour sessions during the 2-day intensive weekend retreat late in the semester.

**Methodology**

This study is based on student reflections collected from 27 students from two independent cohorts who participated in the semester-long, student-driven, experiential leadership course named Interpersonal Dynamics during the Spring 2017 semester and the Fall 2017 semester.

**Interpersonal Dynamics Course**

Interpersonal Dynamics is a semester-long leadership course for undergraduate students which is similar to the course *Interpersonal Dynamics* offered at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. The core component of the course is the T-Group method, which requires small class sizes of ideally 8 to 14 students. 13 students (11 seniors and 2 juniors) were accepted in the spring course and 14 students (11 seniors and 3 juniors) in the fall course. Students were selected through an interview process in order to guarantee a desired level of student diversity (e.g. race, gender, major) as well as student readiness for such an unconventional, intensive, and emotion-laden course.
The classes took place once a week for 2 hours and 45 minutes. The course included a 2-day off-campus weekend retreat late in the semester, and ended with a final class back on campus during the last week of the semester. In total, the students spent 50 hours together and about 40 hours in T-Groups.

The students received weekly reading assignments related to the topics of interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, diversity and inclusion, team development, and team dynamics. At the beginning of each class the students discussed the reading assignments and how they are relevant to the development of their leadership skills. After those 20 to 30 minute discussions the students spent the rest of the class in T-Group mode.

The students had to produce weekly reflection papers about their experience in the T-Group as well as a final paper at the end of the semester.

The students defined individual learning goals throughout the semester, which they shared with the facilitator, their classmates, and their learning partner. Each student had a learning partner with the purpose of supporting each other with their learning goals. In addition, support groups were formed shortly before the weekend retreat, which enabled the students in each group to support each other during the retreat.

The facilitator spoke very rarely in the T-Group but commented on all weekly student reflections. All facilitator interventions were motivated by maximizing student learning and maintaining safety.

When the class was in T-Group mode the facilitator spoke only to:

- help students develop their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.
- make group-level observations to help the group get unstuck or to help the group develop group norms which support the learning process.
- support a student who seems to be experiencing emotional distress.
- model authentic engagement by sharing thoughts and emotions genuinely.

When commenting on the students’ weekly reflections, the facilitator intended to:

- Praise the students for gaining insights, taking risks, experimenting, trying out new behaviors, and achieving learning goals.
- Hold the students accountable by encouraging them to take risks, to step out of their comfort zone, and to work on their learning goals.
- Challenge the students by suggesting changed behaviors and new learning goals based on the students’ reflection and their behaviors in the previous T-Groups.

In addition, each student had a coaching session with the facilitator at the half-point of the semester to discuss the progress with their learning goals and explore potential new learning goals.
Qualitative Data

A total of 297 weekly reflection papers and 27 final papers from 27 undergraduate students across two independent cohorts served as the source of data for this qualitative research study.

For the weekly reflection papers, the students were asked to reflect on their experiences during the weekly T-Group. The students were asked to write a reflection about situations which had a significant impact on them. The weekly reflection papers enabled the author to perform a longitudinal analysis in regards to the student’s development of their authentic leadership skills and to conduct triangulation of the data between individuals, peers, and facilitator.

For the final papers (min. 3,500 words), the students were asked to elaborate on their course experience and the impact it had on them inside and outside of the T-Group.

Data Analysis

Based on the weekly reflection papers and final papers of the 27 undergraduate students from two independent cohorts, this study aims to answer three research questions:

1. RQ1: Does the course in this study foster the development of authentic leadership skills?
2. RQ2: What is the role of emotions in the process of developing authentic leadership skills?
3. RQ3: What attributes of the course foster the development of authentic leadership skills?

To answer the first question, a deductive approach was used to examine whether the course had indeed fostered the development of the students’ competences in the four dimensions of authentic leadership (i.e. self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective) defined in Walumbwa’s (2008) multidimensional model of authentic leadership. To ensure the accuracy of the study, triangulation of the data between individuals, peers, and facilitators was conducted. If, for instance, a student described in their weekly reflection paper that they overcame their fear of sharing what they really think and feel, supporting statements in the peer and facilitator reflections were found frequently, which confirmed the individual’s self-assessment.

To answer the second question, an inductive approach was used, analyzing the student reflections using thematic content analysis to identify emerging themes. Each reflection was first analyzed individually to provide a vertical analysis by using a combination of Emotion coding and In Vivo Coding [37], which produced 31 categories. Theoretical Coding was used as the second-cycle coding method which produced 4 attributes describing the role of emotions in ALD.

To answer the third question, an inductive approach was used, analyzing the student reflections using thematic content analysis to identify emerging themes. Each reflection was first analyzed individually to provide a vertical analysis by using a combination of Structural coding and In Vivo Coding, which produced 14 categories. Theoretical Coding was used as the second-cycle coding method, producing a list of course attributes which supported the students’ development of authentic leadership skills.
Findings

RQ1: Does the course in this study foster the development of authentic leadership skills?

The content analysis of the students’ weekly reflection papers and final papers shows that the course in this study, based on a student-driven laboratory method (i.e. T-Group method), indeed enabled participating students to develop competences related to the four dimensions of authentic leadership, defined by Walumbwa (2008). The effects of the course on the development of the four dimensions of authentic leadership are illustrated with student quotes in Table 1-4.

When it comes to self-awareness, all students reported in their reflection papers an increased awareness of their specific thoughts and emotions in a given moment, as well as what caused these thoughts and emotions. The students also reported that they understand the impact of their actions on others, as well as others’ impact on them to a greater degree. Students were also more frequently asking for feedback and were more willing to re-evaluate their position on important issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 – Student Quotes in regards to Self-Awareness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m more in touch with myself. I’m better at checking in with how I’m feeling, and with investigating why I feel what I do. This helps me understand how specifically other people impact me on an emotional level. It also lets me take a step back if I’m feeling particularly affected by something and recognize that I need time to cool down or process things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I also learned about the impact several of my nonverbal behaviors had on others. For example, many people expressed frustration about when I laugh in inappropriate moments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel that it is better to seek out feedback from others and be aware of the wide variety of emotions that my actions may elicit within other people.</td>
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<td>I’m calling them my “buttons”, the things that I’m most sensitive about. One of these is not feeling heard. Another “button” of mine is feeling invalidated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I received a lot of direct feedback about how my lack of talking was impacting people and I believe that feedback was important to hear; otherwise I would not have changed my behavior and would not have known I was negatively impacting many people in the group. Now, when I am quiet in situations outside of the T-Group, I am more aware of my impact on people and I am observant to see if anyone is responding negatively via facial expressions, body language, or verbal cues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In most situations it is not helpful to be defensive, because you might block out the feedback people are trying to give you. It is good to try to take a few moments to reflect on the comments before responding. I will certainly keep this in mind for the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I also learned that I’m afraid of being judged as a person. Maybe this is related to my self-consciousness, but I really do care what other people think, and I’m afraid that they’ll think negatively of me.</td>
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In regards to the AL dimension relational transparency, the students reported that they learned to speak more openly about their thoughts and emotions, while also considering their impact on others. Students also reported that they were motivating other students to speak authentically. Many students reported that they were more willing to admit mistakes and to apologize for hurting others.
Table 2 – Student Quotes in regards to Relational Transparency

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<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>I am very happy that this class has taught me how to share more about myself because I have noticed that I have been able to strengthen a lot of my relationships by constantly challenging myself to share more.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I felt my openness with the group allowed me to help others gain an understanding of my feelings and thoughts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I learned that it is important for me to share how someone’s behavior makes me feel because it helps the other person understand what their impact is on me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When being given feedback, I want to make direct eye contact, repeat back the essence of what has been said to me, acknowledge the other person and their feelings, apologize if necessary, reflect on it, and eventually incorporate it if desired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I shared my struggles and passions, I built rapport.</td>
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<tr>
<td>So, I concretely developed and reinforced a new norm: I should speak up immediately to indicate how I feel in the moment. This would help others understand the impact they are having on me, and I can learn more about the impact I am having on them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found myself transforming throughout the semester, from a person that never said anything in relation to feelings to suddenly finding the courage to express my feelings more comfortably. The support of the group has allowed for a chance to really grow and feel comfortable with speaking up, all while understanding how feelings manifest within my body.</td>
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</table>

When it comes to balanced processing, the students reported increased willingness to consider other people’s perspectives, as well as to change their position. The students became more aware of their tendencies of making assumptions instead of keeping an open mind. They also identified situations in which they would become defensive and that they were able to regulate their emotions to stay engaged and keep an open mind.

Table 3 – Student Quotes in regards to Balanced Processing

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<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By sharing my opinion though, I wanted to lean into disagreement and be comfortable standing for what I believe in while still remaining levelheaded to be influenced by other people’s opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think one of my biggest take away is that our minds fill in so much between what we observe and what we think is happening. The saying from the reading we read about ‘holding a position gently’ really resonated with me. The only way to know for sure what someone is intending to do is to ask them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In many moments, my grudge against [named student] inhibited me from hearing what [they] had to say and interacting with people’s opinions that differed from my own such as theirs. I recognize this is a major hindrance and flaw in myself, as I believe one of the great problems of our world today is not listening and hearing what others have to say, which often differ than our own opinions. By the end of our class, I gained a new respect for [named student] and [their] viewpoints.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that the T-Group has helped me to become a significantly more effective leader, in that I’m attempting to more fully consider everyone’s needs and working styles as the project goes on.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is nice to know that I can be influenced in positive ways like that. That could also explain why I have influence in the group – I am willing to be influenced as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was humbling to remember how difficult it can be to enter a conversation and that what seems to work from one perspective isn’t necessarily the answer.</td>
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In regards to the Authentic Leadership dimension of internalized moral perspective, many, but not all students reported that they learned how to better stand up for their values, while also considering their impact on others. Many students experimented with different behaviors that were still aligned with their values, while also asking for feedback to understand their impact on others.
RQ2: What is the role of emotions in the process of developing authentic leadership skills?

When analyzing the student reflections with an “emotion lens,” it was found that in the process of developing authentic leadership skills the students reported frequently about their emotions and how specific emotions can potentially hinder, but also motivate them to experiment with new behaviors. The students reported that they became more aware of their fear of sharing, that they had to step out of their comfort zone to show their authentic self which led to more trust and connection. The students also wrote about their desire to be “seen and known” as their authentic selves and about being more willing to acknowledge the “endless complexity of humans.”

**Fear of Sharing**

Students reflected frequently on emotions that hindered them from sharing openly. They explored causes and triggers and identified a variety of reasons to explain their emotions. Some student quotes displaying this include:

- “I am always worried that if I tell somebody something they could improve on they won’t like me anymore.”

- “I also learned that I’m afraid of being judged as a person.”

Most of the reasons for their fear of sharing genuinely fell into one of the three following categories:

a) Fear of being judged

b) Fear of being disliked

c) Fear of hurting another student’s feelings

Many students identified hindering emotions being at least partly triggered by their upbringing:

Table 4 – Student Quotes in regards to Internalized Moral Processing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall, T-Group has had the impact of me thinking more about my life and the extent to which my behaviors, words, and actions match my values and have the impact I intend. This has been a semester which has tested that question again and again, but I think I have come out stronger and with a life better aligned to my values.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Also, when I am in a position of leadership on campus, I better understand the importance of making my values be known. For example, we had a few meetings with potential new [name of department] candidates and in those meetings, I asked questions that are important to me because it helped show others what I find important and that I care about the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I want to be a good leader, I have to be really solid in my values and confident in myself. I have to know what I’m about, what I stand for and show it vulnerably to people so they can feel comfortable with my leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have learned to be strong in who I am and faithfully fight my battles. To be fearless in the pursuit of what sets my soul on fire, to chase to be the remnants of what this oppressive world could not obliterate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I have a strong enough sense of my own values to not do something that explicitly contradicts them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really learned from the differences in my reactions that people have much bigger impacts on me when they speak about why their beliefs are informed by their personal experiences instead of speaking generally about morals or standards that everyone should uphold.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If I want to be a good leader, I have to be really solid in my values and confident in myself. I have to know what I’m about, what I stand for and show it vulnerably to people so they can feel comfortable with my leadership. If I want to be a good leader, I have to be really solid in my values and confident in myself. I have to know what I’m about, what I stand for and show it vulnerably to people so they can feel comfortable with my leadership.
“I think it’s partially because my dad and my ex often express anger very strongly, and in those situations I feel helpless.”

Once the students became aware of their emotions, the causes of their emotions, and the associated beliefs that hindered them from interacting with other group members genuinely, they defined learning goals to share their thoughts and emotions more openly and genuinely.

“…when I am uncomfortable, unhappy, or annoyed, I should find a way to communicate that.”

“In the future, I will explain my whole thought/emoting process—where I am in the moment with my emotions. I will work to accept if I am irritated and let it be so. I will try hard not to artificially “move on” because I realize now that this hurts others more than helps. I want to better communicate my feelings in order to show people my authentic self.”

More student quotes illustrating the fear of sharing can be found in Table 5 in the appendix.

**Openness**

Motivated by their increased awareness of hindering emotions, by their ambitious learning goals, and the encouraging interventions from their learning partner and the facilitator, the students started experimenting with new behaviors. It was at least uncomfortable for most students and anxiety inducing for many to start sharing their thoughts and emotions more openly and candidly. Students reported that they had to take risks, step out of their comfort zone, be courageous, and push themselves.

“… needed an even larger level of risk-taking, fearlessness, and ambition, I decided to speak up as soon as I could when something bothered me.”

But once they started sharing their thoughts, emotions, and beliefs with other students in a genuine and authentic manner, they received mostly positive and encouraging feedback.

“One of the big changes I made in my behavior was speaking more. After it became apparent to me that I was not contributing frequently enough, I pushed myself to talk more and say what was on my mind. This went really well for me.”

What also helped students drop their façades and behave genuinely was the positive impact other students had on them by sharing more genuinely and behaving more authentically.

“When she finally felt comfortable sharing about her upbringing, her friends, and her emotions it was the first real time I was able to experience real compassion for her and be more understanding of her level of contribution. Knowing people’s pasts can have a tremendously positive impact on me for empathizing with their current behaviors and situations.”
While analyzing the student reflections it became clear that the students experienced a positive feedback loop which led to increased openness among the group members. A student started sharing more openly and received positive feedback from others, which connected that student more with other students and motivated that student to encourage other students to share more openly, resulting in positive feedback for the other students, and so on.

What students shared fell into one of three main categories:

1. Students shared their genuine thoughts and emotions about something that happened in the T-Group and the impact it had on them.

   “I’ve become much more in touch with my feelings and reactions, as well as the reasons for them, as the weeks have progressed. This allows me to actually express the impact people have on me. I’m also now more comfortable being vulnerable (exposure therapy I guess) and sharing how I feel.”

   “I know that I have become more brave in communicating my personal needs to others, because I have reassurance that I can communicate my perspective and context clearly in a calm, collected, and intentional way.”

2. Students shared their beliefs, values, and what they stand for.

   “If I want to be a good leader I have to be really solid in my values and confident in myself. I have to know what I’m about, what I stand for and show it vulnerably to people so they can feel comfortable with my leadership. “

   “Another behavior I tried to do more of in the T-Group was sharing more details about why I act the way I do.”

3. Students shared their “life stories” often heart-breaking experiences from their past including domestic abuse, parental neglect, and suicide of a close friend.

   “I recall from the beginning of this course there was concern that emotions in the T-Group would lead into group therapy, but I am a strong believer that in order to have open and honest conversations in a group, people need to understand where others are at in their emotional well-being and what experiences they bring with them into their interactions.”

   “I had no clue that my life-story could interest so many people from different backgrounds. [named student], [named student], and [named student] felt a deeper connection to my story. When they expressed their feelings, I immediately felt much closer to the entire group. I felt more comfortable with them because I felt like they had a deeper understanding of me as a person.”
More student quotes illustrating increased openness can be found in Table 5 in the appendix. Aside from feeling closer to and more comfortable with each other the students mentioned frequently that sharing their true self created trust.

**Vulnerability and Trust**

Students reported that openness made them feel vulnerable and that being vulnerable was scary because it put them at risk of getting hurt.

“Vulnerability is about opening yourself to the possibility of being hurt. Vulnerability is what happens when I take down the filters and the armor and just be me. That’s a super scary thought, and it was really difficult to make myself do, but after the first few times, I kind of got used to it.”

“In the first T-group when I tried out being vulnerable, I was super uncomfortable and nervous.”

But when students started sharing their thoughts and emotions more openly, including feelings of vulnerability, other students told them that they trusted them more because of that.

“In one of the first few sessions, I took a risk by sharing my frustrations with [named student]. I think that sharing led to others trusting me more. In that instance, risk bred trust.”

“People in the group expressed their gratitude for me being vulnerable and said that they felt like they trusted me more. [named student] has pushed me to step outside my comfort zone, which has made others trust me more and build deeper, more meaningful relationships.”

The students realized that the vulnerability/openness/trust relation was at work in both directions. When they shared openly, others expressed greater trust towards them.

“The most tangible and applicable positive feedback I’ve gotten is that, when I share about myself and make myself vulnerable, it helps other people come to know, trust, and relate to me.”

When another student shared openly, they experienced an increase of trust in themselves with that student.

“Another thing I learned was that others vulnerability and authenticity has the impact of me feeling warm and connected and trusting.”

This climate of trust was neither created easily nor quickly. It took many T-Groups, many moments of frustration, anger, and fear, many set-backs, and many situations in which students decided to become vulnerable and show their true self
“The people I’ve met in this class have encouraged me to take risks and strive to be my authentic self, and I’m extraordinarily grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of such a great group.”

“The increase in amount of conflict over time is a sign of how the trust among members of the group slowly grew. In one sense, this is unsurprising: time creates bonds. For us, those bonds strengthened 2.5 hours at a time.

More student quotes illustrating the vulnerability/trust relation can be found in Table 6 in the appendix.

**Being Seen and Known**

“I’m very grateful for the way that the skills I’ve learned in the T group have helped me move closer to being fully known and truly loved by others.”

Students described in their reflections feelings of gratitude for being seen and known for who they really are when they were showing their authentic self. When students experienced that showing their true self was not only appreciated, but also led to trust and connection, they were much more willing to take off their masks.

“I’m much more willing to be myself in general. This means not having a guard up or “putting on a mask” or anything like that, as well as allowing myself to be “seen and known”. I want people to know who I am as a person so I can actually connect with them.”

Students recognized that they wanted to be seen as complex persons with complex thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs, and a unique upbringing instead of being judged on a mistake they made or something offensive they said.

“I have so much to tell people when they try to fit me into one box. I am a complex person! I have multiple abilities, the ability to be sweet, loving, giving, and happy but also the ability to be firm, strong, and respected. T-group helped me figure out how I can explain myself to people who don’t understand me.”

Once students experienced the impact of being truly seen and known, they felt the need to reciprocate and started appreciating the complexity of others.

“One of the biggest lessons I take away from this class is the endless complexity of humans. Every person will surprise you, can change and take risks, can make you proud and disappoint you.”

“The T-Group and its experiences have also made me a more understanding person. Before, when people who I did not like would come into my life, I would find reasons to not like them and I would generally choose not to get to know them further. Now, I am much more willing to take a step back and recognize that
I may have differences with someone, but to look beyond those and give the person a chance.”

“I have learned to treat others as fully present and complex human beings before anything else.”

The students reported feeling connected, trusted, and even loved when they allowed their true self to be shown while simultaneously encouraging others to take off their masks and show their authentic self as well. The students of one of the cohorts frequently used the slogan “to be seen and known” to describe that “happy feeling” when they felt being appreciated as their authentic self. The other cohort’s slogan was “But how do you feel?” representing their longing to understand each other as whole persons, including thoughts and emotions.

More student quotes illustrating the student’s desire to be seen and known as their authentic self can be found in Table 6 in the appendix.

RQ3: What attributes of the course foster authentic leadership skills?

To answer the third question, a content analysis was performed, looking for those attributes of the overall course design in general and the T-Group method specifically, which fostered the development of the students’ authentic leadership skills.

No topic, no leader, no rules

The T-Group method differs from other experiential learning methods in three major ways:

a) a lack of discussion topics
b) a lack of pre-defined rules
c) a lack of a discussion leader

This unconventional approach created on the one hand anxiety, disorientation, and frustration among most students during the first few T-Groups, but on the other hand, it forced the students to re-learn how they learn. Instead of relying on the educator to provide content and guidance, the group had to work out a myriad of issues on its own. Issues like how to get to know each other, what to talk about, how to openly share one’s thoughts and emotions, what rules of engagement to agree on, and how to improve one’s interpersonal skills, the last one being the objective of the course defined in the syllabus.

Working through these issues, with rare interventions by the facilitator, was often frustrating, anxiety inducing, angering and at times just boring for the students. The students had a rollercoaster-like experience including major breakthroughs, disappointing set-backs, and plenty of emotional outbursts, but eventually this student-driven laboratory method led to a climate of trust and connection which allowed the students to take off their masks and be their true selves.

The lack of pre-defined topics does not mean that the students avoided to tackle tough topics. Both cohorts discussed sexism, racism, and other types of discrimination in a very real and challenging way by talking about student’s past experiences as well as students’ behaviors in the
T-Group. This was an expected effect of the T-Group method which has been used in sensitivity trainings to “make people more aware of their own goals as well as their prejudices, and more sensitive to others and to the dynamics of group interaction.”[33]. Religion, death, addiction, domestic abuse, god, and love were also topics that were discussed. Those conversations helped the students get to know each other more profoundly and deeply.

Conceptualizing Experiences

There are no pre-defined topics given to the students to be discussed during the T-Group, but before each T-Group, the students discuss weekly reading assignments about theories, models and concepts related to intrapersonal and interpersonal skill development, diversity and inclusion, group dynamics, and group development.

The students frequently reported how concepts like the SBI feedback model [38] have supported them greatly with the development of their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. The SBI model helps deliver more effective feedback because the students focus their feedback on specific situations (S) and behaviors (B), and then outline the impact (I) that these behaviors had on them.

“I adore the SBI model. Using it forces me to rethink the situation before sharing feedback which gives me an opportunity to evaluate exactly what the impact on me really was. Secondly, I have found that people are more receptive to the feedback and react less defensively.”

“I now feel comfortable I can enter conflict armed with the SBI model and be able to articulate my emotions and reactions in the context of actions rather than judging the person as a whole.”

Students also reported that they appreciated the timeliness of the assigned reading material, which can be explained by the facilitator’s flexible approach of assigning the reading material. What happens in the T-Group each week helps the facilitator select the most appropriate and effective reading assignment, which enables the students to make sense of what they experienced, to conceptualize it, and use it to inform their future actions.

Individualized Learning Goals

All students generated individual learning goals, which they shared with the facilitator, their learning partner, and the other group members. The T-Group method allows each student to have different and personalized learning goals.

For instance, one of the students had a learning goal “to give more timely feedback to people rather than worrying about how to phrase what I want to tell them and having the moment pass me,” whereas another student had a learning goal “to think more about the impact I’ll have on others before I speak”.

The students receive feedback from their peers, their learning partners, and the facilitator throughout the whole semester and from the members of their support group during the retreat.
This process loop of defining learning goals, working on them by experimenting with adapted behaviors, receiving feedback about the impact of their behaviors, and back to re-defining and modifying their learning goals seems to greatly support the students with the achievement of their learning goals.

**Weekend Retreat**

All students commented on the positive impact of the weekend retreat, with specific regards to how it supported them in achieving their learning goals. Most of the students enjoyed the intensive experience but a few reported that they were underestimating the intensity and that they felt exhausted after returning to the campus.

Many students wrote about the increased intensity and emotional labor during the intensive retreat compared to the weekly T-Group sessions. During just two days, the students experienced six T-Groups (2.5 to 3 hours each). The students showed increased willingness to self-disclose more personal stories from the past which strengthened their bond and connectedness, but also led to stress in a few students who did not want to share stories from their past and interpreted the increased willingness from others as pressure on them.

The students commented positively on the timing of the weekend retreat late in the semester because they had gone through lots of conflicts, sharing, and bonding during the 12 weeks leading up to the retreat, which led to a climate of trust and connectedness.

**Discussion**

The mission of Harvey Mudd College’s leadership program is to develop authentic leaders who have a positive impact on the world. Thus, this study is invested in understanding whether the student-driven, experiential, semester-long course in this study indeed fosters the development of the participating students’ authentic leadership skills. In addition, the aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the role of emotions in the process of developing authentic leadership skills. Lastly, this study sought to identify course attributes which were responsible for the development of authentic leadership skills.

The results of the qualitative analysis in this study suggest that the course indeed fosters the development of authentic leadership skills. A summary of the findings is given in Figure 1.
In regards to the second research question in this study, about the role of emotions in the process of authentic leadership development, students reported an increased awareness of emotions that hinder authentic behavior, an increased willingness to be open, a newly gained awareness of the relation between vulnerability and trust, and a desire to see others and to be seen by others as complex human beings. A summary of the findings is given in Figure 2.

**RQ1: Does the course in this study foster the development of authentic leadership skills?**

**Figure 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self Awareness</th>
<th>Relational Transparency</th>
<th>Balanced Processing</th>
<th>Internalized Moral Processing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students reported an increased awareness of:</td>
<td>All students reported:</td>
<td>All students reported:</td>
<td>Many students reported:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• their specific thoughts and emotions</td>
<td>• that they learned to speak more openly about their thoughts and emotions while also considering their impact on others</td>
<td>• increased willingness to consider other people’s perspectives</td>
<td>• that they learned how to better stand up for their values, while also considering their impact on others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• what caused their thoughts and emotions</td>
<td>• that they were motivating other students to speak authentically</td>
<td>• more willingness to change their position</td>
<td>• that they experimented with different behaviors which were still aligned with their values while also asking for feedback to understand their impact on others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the impact of their actions on others</td>
<td></td>
<td>• increased awareness of their tendencies of making assumptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• others’ impact on them</td>
<td></td>
<td>• a better ability to regulate their emotions to stay engaged and keep an open mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students were more frequently asking for feedback and were more willing to re-evaluate their position on important issues.</td>
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</table>

**Figure 2**

**RQ2: What is the role of emotions in the process of developing authentic leadership skills?**

**Figure 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fear of Sharing</th>
<th>Openness</th>
<th>Vulnerability and Trust</th>
<th>Being Seen and Known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students reflected frequently on emotions that hindered them from sharing openly. They explored causes and triggers and identified a variety of reasons.</td>
<td>Motivated by the increased awareness of their fear of sharing, the students started sharing their thoughts and emotions more openly. What students shared fell into one of three main categories:</td>
<td>Students reported that openness made them feel vulnerable and that being vulnerable was scary because it put them at risk of getting hurt. But when students started sharing their thoughts and emotions more openly, including feelings of vulnerability, other students told them that they trusted them more because of that. This worked in both directions because when another student shared openly, they experienced an increase of trust in themselves with that student.</td>
<td>Students described in their reflections feelings of gratitude for being seen and known for who they really are when they were showing their authentic self. Once students experienced the positive impact of being truly seen and known, they felt the need to reciprocate and started appreciating the complexity of others. The students reported feeling connected, trusted, and even loved when they allowed their true self to be shown.</td>
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<td>Most of the reasons for their fear of sharing genuinely fell into one of the three following categories:</td>
<td>• their beliefs, values, and what they stand for</td>
<td>• their “life stories” from their past</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fear of being judged</td>
<td></td>
<td>• their genuine thoughts and emotions about something that happened in the T-Group and the impact it had on them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fear of being disliked</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fear of hurting another student’s feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1

In regards to the second research question in this study, about the role of emotions in the process of authentic leadership development, students reported an increased awareness of emotions that hinder authentic behavior, an increased willingness to be open, a newly gained awareness of the relation between vulnerability and trust, and a desire to see others and to be seen by others as complex human beings. A summary of the findings is given in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

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</tbody>
</table>
The aim of the third research question in this study was to identify course attributes which were responsible for the development of authentic leadership skills. The unorthodox nature of the T-Group methodology, the content and timing of the assigned readings, the personalized learning goals, and the intensive weekend retreat were identified as potent enablers of the development of authentic leadership skills. A summary is given in Figure 3.

**RQ3: What attributes of the course foster the development of authentic leadership skills?**

**T-Group Methodology**
The T-Group method differs from other experiential learning methods in three major ways:
- lack of discussion topics
- lack of pre-defined rules
- lack of a discussion leader

Instead of relying on the educator to provide content and guidance, the group must work out a myriad of issues on its own. Issues like how to get to know each other, what to talk about, how to openly share one’s thoughts and emotions, what rules of engagement to agree on, and how to improve one’s interpersonal skills.

**Conceptualizing Experiences**
The students discuss weekly reading assignments about theories, models and concepts related to intrapersonal and interpersonal skill development, diversity and inclusion, group dynamics, and group development.

The students frequently reported how those concepts have supported them greatly with the development of their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.

**Learning Goals**
The T-Group method allows each student to have different and personalized learning goals which they share with the facilitator and their learning partner.

The process loop of defining learning goals, working on them by experimenting with adapted behaviors, receiving feedback about the impact of their behaviors, and back to re-defining and modifying their learning goals seems to greatly support the students with the achievement of their learning goals.

**Weekend Retreat**
All students commented on the positive impact of the weekend retreat, with specific regards to how it supported them in achieving their learning goals.

The students commented positively on the timing of the weekend retreat late in the semester because they had gone through lots of conflicts, sharing, and bonding during the 12 weeks leading up to the retreat, which led to a climate of trust and connectedness.

*Figure 3*

**Transference of Skills**

In regards to *transferring the acquired skills* to their lives outside the T-Group, the students reported frequently that they have also applied the acquired skills with friends, family, and in student teams.

“I practiced being more open about my day-to-day or moment-to-moment emotions with my own friends, which helped me feel more supported and helped them feel closer to me.”

“I also noticed my change of behavior in my deeper relationships outside the T-group, specifically with my closest group of friends. I developed a culture of sharing more emotions with them, and talking to each other honestly and respectfully when a difficult situation arises. I feel more comfortable talking to them about issues now, because I am confident they will reply in a caring and authentic way.”

“SBI is magical. I’ve started using it when talking to my parents and it is helping us solve conflict that never was mendable before.”
When it comes to the transfer of skills over time, students who had completed the course in April 2017 were contacted eight months later which led to very encouraging responses when asked if and how they still apply learnings from the course in their life after graduation.

“I’m much more confident confronting people about their behaviors and talking openly about how it impacts me.”

“Outside of work, I feel that I’ve strengthened my relationships with family and friends by being more authentic and vulnerable. This is a work in progress, but it’s been very rewarding so far.”

“For example, every Thanksgiving my family goes around the table and says what they are thankful for. I used to be embarrassed by the activity and struggled to give emotional thanks. This year however, I felt the compliments flow easier, emotions were easier to access and articulate and the response to opening up was very positive by my siblings and parents.”

Table 7 in the appendix provides more examples of responses which support that the students keep applying learnings from the T-Group long after they have completed the course.

**Limitations of the Study**

One major limitation of this study is the fact that the student reflections were analyzed by only one researcher who was also the facilitator of the T-Groups of both cohorts including the T-Groups during the weekend retreats. There is a high risk of implicit biases and the plan is to have additional researchers analyze the data. Additional data from 25 students, enrolled in two independent courses which are offered in Spring 2018 at Harvey Mudd College, will be used to assess whether the findings in this study can be replicated.

The selection of the participants was performed through interviews of students who had voluntarily applied to this course. The selection criteria (alignment of student expectations and course objectives, level of maturity, emotional stability) had likely a substantial impact on the results, and the level of student commitment and skill development may well be higher than that of a random sample of students.

In regards to developing authentic leadership skills, this study shows that not all students reported improved skills in the authentic leadership dimension internalized moral perspective and the author plans to include reading assignments about values and ethics to help students direct their attention to this important AL dimension. The level of skill development in the three other AL dimensions (Self-Awareness, Relational Transparency, and Balanced Processing) varied between the students. Although all students reported some skill development in these three dimensions, the frequency and depth of the reported skill development varied and seemed to correlate with the level of engagement (verbal contributions, risk-taking, and willingness to experiment). A comparative analysis of the AL skill development between the students would be beneficial to understand better what attitudes and behaviors in the T-Group benefit the AL skill
development. The author plans to perform such an analysis using data from all 52 students from all four cohorts.

This study focused on the development of authentic leadership skills within the context of a semester-long course. The author is confident in the results in regards to the observed development of authentic leadership skills during the T-Group because triangulation of the longitudinal data between individual, peers, and facilitator was conducted. In regards to transferring the acquired skills to the student’s lives outside the T-Group as well as to longer term student development, the above described claims were subjective perceptions from the students without confirmation from others and require a more solid data collection and analysis.

*Potential Risks and Challenges*

As described in the theoretical framework section, the T-Group method has a mixed reputation and is known to have caused great emotional distress in some participants [39], especially when the T-Group transgresses into a therapy group [40]. This emphasizes the extreme importance of using qualified T-Group facilitators who are ideally coached by experts that have led tens, if not hundreds of T-Groups and are experienced in developing T-Group trainers.

The T-Group method is unconventional, messy, and emotion-laden. Feelings of anxiety, anger, boredom, and frustration seem to be the price that participants must pay to re-learn their ways of learning and to become a self-sufficient learning community in which the members challenge and support each other which leads to trust, connection, and a longing in the participants to see the whole person.

It is likely that some students will not benefit from the T-Group methodology, but the findings of this study suggest that with a good selection process, a well-designed course, and qualified facilitators, the participants do indeed develop their authentic leadership skills.

The T-Group methodology requires a small group size (max. 14 students, ideally not more than 12) as well as qualified and well-trained facilitators. This presents a major challenge in regards to scaling the course to offer it to a bigger number of students. The cost of the weekend retreat is an additional challenge. As of now, Harvey Mudd College offers this course as an elective to about 24 students per semester but the author is working on scaling this course by raising funds and by developing additional faculty members as course facilitators.

*Future Research*

The author hopes that this study will spark discussions among researchers and practitioners who are invested in the advancement of authentic leadership development for undergraduate students. The author who is a member of the National Training Laboratory (NTL), the originator of T-Groups, hopes that the findings of this study will encourage other NTL members to share their experiences with T-Groups and their research on T-Groups.
In addition, the author hopes to hear from educators from other undergraduate universities who are using the T-Group method. The author knows only about the Stanford School of Business, the Yale School of Management, and the Muhlenberg College where the T-Group methodology is used to help students improve their leadership skills.

The author plans to involve other researchers for an independent data analysis, to perform a more solid data collection and analysis for a better understanding of the longer term student development, and to analyze the data (reflection papers & final reports) collected from the 25 students during the Spring 2018 semester to assess whether the findings in this study can be replicated.

The author wants to close with two student quotes which are insightful examples of the impact the course in this study had on the participating students. Table 8 in the appendix provides more examples of student quotes illustrating their opinion on the course.

“I’ve been challenged in unimaginable ways and in the process have developed deeper, more meaningful relationships with the people in and outside of this group. I could not have asked for a better class during my last semester of college.”

“I will fight. I will make amends. And one day I will take all this knowledge and goodwill and disseminate it at the highest levels of our government and society. Thank you to everyone in this group. I’m ready to f... sh.. up--and always ready to answer the age old question…. But how are you feeling?”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Theme</th>
<th>Representative Excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fear of Sharing</strong></td>
<td>Students report that they became aware of specific emotions and their causes, hindering them from being authentic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples are fear of not being liked or fear of being judged but also feelings rooted in past experiences (upbringing).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am always worried that if I tell somebody something they could improve on, they won’t like me anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I also learned that I’m afraid of being judged as a person. Maybe this is related to my self-consciousness, but I really do care what other people think, and I’m afraid that they’ll think negatively of me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One of the first things I realized in the T group was my fear of anger and conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I felt overwhelmed and afraid of speaking. This stemmed from my “reasoning” that I would make a bigger fool of myself if I said something that nobody agreed with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am often afraid of the consequences of being critical towards others especially, worried that they will grow to dislike me for it.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This kind of comment, something along the lines of “stop talking” or “you talk too much/too loudly/too opinionated”, is typically very hurtful to me, because for my whole life my mother was constantly telling me to shut up or would simply be set into a rage by every other thing I said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think it’s partially because my dad and my ex often express anger very strongly, and in those situations I feel helpless to calm them down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am very glad that I did that little experiment because, while it brought up a lot of questions, I think it was one of the first things that helped me realize the extent of how much my upbringing effected what I thought and how I acted even if I didn’t realize it in full quite then.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think it hit me at that point that, although I might see my parents a lot less often since I left home for school, escaping their presence hasn’t made all the internalized effects of abuse go away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Openness</strong></td>
<td>Students reported that it took risk-taking and pushing themselves to behave more genuinely and share more openly their thoughts and feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Once the started doing it, they received positive feedback which encouraged more genuine behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behaving genuinely included sharing openly thoughts and feelings about other student’s behaviors or sharing believes, values and life-stories to make themselves seen and known.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I thought I could just “get over” bad things that happened in life because it would be better for me and because I did not want to make the people who cared about me worry. I now see how naïve I was. I need to be talking about my negative emotion and I no longer want to bottle it up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>… needed an even larger level of risk-taking, fearlessness, and ambition, I decided to speak up as soon as I could when something bothered me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I really want people to be straightforward with their thoughts and emotions. It really bothers me when I feel that people are playing games with me or tiptoeing around the issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want to work on contributing more emotional responses to the group when they come up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When she finally felt comfortable sharing about her upbringing, her friends, and her emotions it was the first real time I was able to experience real compassion for her and be more understanding of her level of contribution. Knowing people’s pasts can have a tremendously positive impact on me for empathizing with their current behaviors and situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Although difficult, it was tangible evidence of the benefit of disclosing about oneself, and the power within connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One of the most impactful takeaways from this class for me has been the power in sharing stories. As I’ve detailed above, seeing people share their own experiences and stories helped me feel closer to them, and encouraged me to try out that type of interaction in my day-to-day life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Another behavior I tried to do more of in the T-Group was sharing more details about my past or why I act the way I do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One of my biggest points of learning this semester has been understanding how people respond when I share more about myself. I noticed that the more that I shared, the more people spoke to me in a more comfortable and trusting way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified Theme</td>
<td>Representative Excerpt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Vulnerability and Trust  | Students reported that showing vulnerability, sharing thoughts and feelings openly, fosters trust. They observed that phenomenon in both directions:  
  - when they shared openly, others told them that they trust them more  
  - when others shared openly, they experienced an increase of trust in the student who shared  
  Students reported that they found it very challenging to be vulnerable, to share openly, and that it took courage and practice.  
  The most tangible and applicable positive feedback I’ve gotten is that, when I share about myself and make myself vulnerable, it helps other people come to know, trust, and relate to me  
  Vulnerability isn’t about sharing things; it’s about opening yourself to the possibility of being hurt. Vulnerability is what happens when I take down the filters and the armor and just be me. That’s a super scary thought, and it was really difficult to make myself do, but after the first few times, I kind of got used to it.  
  Once I began to share more of my immediate thoughts and feelings, even when they were negative, or I thought they might be perceived badly, I received feedback that I seemed trustworthy and brave.  
  I found myself transforming throughout the semester, from a person that never said anything in relation to feelings to suddenly finding the courage to express my feelings more comfortably.  
  In one of the first few sessions, I took a risk by sharing my frustrations with [named student]. I think that sharing led to others trusting me more. In that instance, risk bred trust.  
  I learned from this experiment that sharing my feelings, even if they seem like weak feelings, doesn’t necessarily make people think I am weak. I also learned that it can feel very relieving and can build trust and connection to be honest, especially about difficult things.  
  One version of this, which I’ll talk about more later, is how much I appreciate people’s direct but not angry feedback towards me. This feels like an act of trust towards me, and so I often feel warmer towards them.  
  I’ve been more vulnerable around people. From just casual conversations with people admitting anxiety about something to more in depth conversations with family and friends, I’ve noticed myself buying into the power of vulnerability. I saw and experienced first-hand what being vulnerable can do for a relationship. I can be a better leader being vulnerable and form deeper relationships. |
| Being Seen and Known     | Students reported gratitude for being seen and known as complex humans when they showed their authentic self.  
  Students reported that they had learned to treat others as complex human beings with complex thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs, and a unique life story.  
  I have so much to tell people when they try to fit me into one box. I am a complex person! I have multiple abilities, the ability to be sweet, loving, giving, and happy but also the ability to be firm, strong, and respected. T-group helped me figure out how I can explain myself to people who don’t understand me.  
  I’m much more willing to be myself in general. This means not having a guard up or “putting on a mask” or anything like that, as well as allowing myself to be “seen and known”. I want people to know who I am as a person so I can actually connect with them.  
  I have learned to treat others as fully present and complex human beings before anything else.  
  I learned that having conversations based in our feelings, rather than just our thoughts, is something I want to strive towards. Upon reflection, I realized that I often keep things at an intellectual or distanced level when interacting with people; I imagine this limits the extent to which I can connect with people on a deeper level, and also as a leader.  
  The T-Group and its experiences have also made me a more understanding person. Before, when people who I did not like would come into my life, I would find reasons to not like them and I would generally choose not to get to know them further. Now, I am much more willing to take a step back and recognize that I may have differences with someone, but to look beyond those and give the person a chance.  
  One of the biggest lessons I take away from this class is the endless complexity of humans. Every person will surprise you, can change and take risks, can make you proud and disappoint you. |
### Table 7 - Examples of responses from students who completed the course in April 2017 who were asked 8 months later whether they still apply learnings from the T-Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m much bolder than I used to be.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My T-Group experience has impacted my behavior outside the T-Group by helping me be more honest, open, and vulnerable with people around me that I may not have otherwise shared my feelings with.</td>
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<td>I have more openly shared my emotions with the people closest to me, I have encouraged them to do the same, and I have deepened the intimacy in a number of my relationships. It has been hard and a little bumpy, but now that I have drunk the sweet nectar of good communication I cannot give it up.</td>
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<td>In T-group it was hard for me to be very assertive or directive and I made that a goal to work on. At least at work, I’ve definitely been more assertive than I used to be which is a huge challenge given the environment I work in. But the more I develop this skill the more confident I have felt being authentic too.</td>
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<td>I think that the greatest effect of my T group experience is that I’ve started to think more analytically about interpersonal interactions and my own emotions. This has been helpful professionally, because my first few weeks at work have frequently been overwhelming. I have been able to recognize my emotions, understand some of the causes, and set them aside to get work done. More importantly, I’ve been able to have good reflections about what I can do to manage emotions and stay calm in the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Just like we would write reflections every week and identify goals for the next T-group, I’ve been reflecting on my conversations with my family and setting concrete goals for the next. I’ve asked friends and my fiancé to hold me accountable to those goals and I’ve debriefed after they did or did not work the way I hoped to look for other improvements. SBI is still magical!</td>
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<td>I’ve been able to reconnect with old friends in a new and deeper way, form stronger friendships with the people I met during training over the summer, and build more confidence in my ability to speak directly with people.</td>
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<td>I’m much more conscious now of when I want to communicate a specific feeling directly with someone, and I’m more thoughtful of how I want that message communicated. I’m fortunate in that the people on the receiving end of those conversations have been really receptive to this behavior, which has encouraged me to continue practicing it.</td>
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<td>In terms of the professional world, I feel like my experience in the T-group has given me a feeling of having &quot;insider&quot; information. I look at my own company and I see many failures of communication on a micro level (between my coworkers and I) and on a macro level (company-wide). I want to be the type of person who disrupts this style of communication.</td>
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<td>All in all, I think about my T-group experience a lot. I wish more people could have done it!</td>
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<td>I’m much more confident confronting people about their behaviors and talking openly about how it impacts me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outside of work, I feel that I’ve strengthened my relationships with family and friends by being more authentic and vulnerable. This is a work in progress, but it’s been very rewarding so far.</td>
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<td>For example, every Thanksgiving my family goes around the table and says what they are thankful for. I used to be embarrassed by the activity and struggled to give emotional thanks. This year however, I felt the compliments flow easier, emotions were easier to access and articulate and the response to opening up was very positive by my siblings and parents.</td>
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<td><strong>Table 8 - Examples of closing statements written by students in their final papers describing the impact the course had on them</strong></td>
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<td>I’ve been challenged in unimaginable ways and in the process have developed deeper, more meaningful relationships with the people in and outside of this group. I could not have asked for a better class during my last semester of college.</td>
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<td>I was pleasantly surprised quite early in the semester to have one of my best friends make a comment along the lines of, “wow, this class is really changing you”.</td>
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<td>It has been one of the most transformative classes I’ve taken in college. Thank you and my class mates for challenging me, helping me grow, exposing me to new viewpoints, and being partners in my enduring quest for self-improvement. At the end of the day, self-improvement was what I was seeking to achieve and I believe I have done that.</td>
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<td>This class has proved to me that with enough grace, empathy, and conviction a group of people can coalesce and find ways to not only put aside difference but prosper because of them.</td>
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<td>Lastly, I feel like I have a better grasp of what it means to be a good leader. There’s the obvious stuff like good judgement and trustworthiness, but first and foremost, a leader has to be a person. As a leader, I need to show whomever I’m leading my true self, so they can know who they’re dealing with.</td>
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<td>Rather than exchange my wardrobe for shoes that better fit and shirts that aren’t too tight, I found myself exchanging old perspectives of myself and my interactions with others for a mindset of greater compassion for self and others, empathy, and honest authenticity.</td>
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<td>Overall, T-Group has had the impact of me thinking more about my life and the extent to which my behaviors, words, and actions match my values and have the impact I intend. This has been a semester which has tested that question again and again, but I think I have come out stronger and with a life better aligned to my values.</td>
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<td>In reflection over the past few months, I am in sincere awe over how far I have developed as a product of the safe and encouraging space provided by my T-Group. I would recommend this experience to anyone, and would be thrilled to take on even more T-Group experiences, myself.</td>
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<td>It was an especially tumultuous semester, but I think this class remained a bright light through the many weeks of darkness. It occupied my thoughts more than just about any other class I’ve taken, which speaks to the importance of having such a class at Harvey Mudd College. What a shame that it’s over – but also, in a sense my learning about interpersonal dynamics has only just begun.</td>
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<td>Fifteen weeks ago, I would have never guessed how much of a lasting impact a class would have had on my daily life. Fifteen weeks ago, I would have never thought of sharing my deepest feelings with a group of students I just met earlier that year. And fifteen weeks ago, I would have never imagined how much I would have changed as a result of being in a T-Group.</td>
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<td>It feels worth mentioning explicitly at this point, as something of a capstone on this endeavor, that I believe that the T-Group experience has had a significantly positive impact both on my behavior and relationships outside of it. It is quite possibly the most significant class I have taken at Harvey Mudd College, and I much appreciate the opportunity to be involved in it.</td>
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<td>I will fight. I will make amends. And one day I will take all this knowledge and goodwill and disseminate it at the highest levels of our government and society. Thank you to everyone in this group. I’m ready to fuck shit up--and always ready to answer the age old question…. But how are you feeling?</td>
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References


