Doctoral Thesis:
An Interpretative Phenomenological Study of Effective Individual Interventions by Live-In Residence Life Professionals

by
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to
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ABSTRACT

Conducting informal individual interventions with students is a professional expectation for residence life professionals in higher education who live in campus residence halls. Despite this expectation there is limited understanding about what constitutes an effective individual intervention, especially from the perspective of the person conducting the intervention, and how these experiences affect them. Studies of interventions in higher education that affect first-year students have traditionally only examined the retention effects of formal group activities such as new student orientation, first-year seminars, and residing in living/learning communities, as well as single instance individual counseling or substance abuse interventions. This interpretative phenomenological study focused on the perspectives, background, and practices that inform residence life professionals who have conducted effective individual interventions with first-year students. The results of this study found that residence life professionals made sense of the effective informal interventions they conducted through the care they showed to students and the values brought to the interventions, and through the values brought and the personal impacts that they felt.

Keywords: first-year students, intervention, residence life professional, interpretative phenomenology
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife Carmen and my children, William and Cristina, who have given me so much support and understanding throughout the classes, research, and writing processes. I could not have completed it without your patience, support, and love.

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CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The responsibilities of the residence life professional have evolved from ones that concentrated on student etiquette to ones which promoted student development, to ones that now center on educating and helping students succeed in higher education (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley, Mack, & Whalen, 2005; CAS Standards, 2012). As full-time employees within student affairs who live in on-campus residential communities, residence life professionals act as administrators, counselors, judicial hearing officers, and liaisons between the institution and the student. This puts the residence life professional in close administrative and physical proximity with residential students, who spend more time in their places of residence than in all other locations combined and are close to academic support and social networks of the institution (Riker & DeCoste, 2008; Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1977; Astin, 1985; Astin, 1999; Lopez Turly & Wodtke, 2010).

The role of the residence life professional is to support the success of students, especially first-year students, within a college residential community and one way in which they do this is through the use of informal individual interventions and other helping activities which complement the educational functions of the institution (Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Dusselier, et al., 2005; NASPA, 2010; CAS Standards, 2012). A recent review of professional residence life job descriptions on higheredjobs.com found that 48% ask for candidates to intervene, interact, advise, or counsel students individually within a variety of situations. This study focused on residence life professionals working at higher education institutions in the New England area who have the responsibility for and have conducted effective interventions with first-year students.
Context of the Study

The context of this study lies in the role that live-in residence life professionals have within their institution to intervene informally with students. In the early days of higher education, the role of the adult living in a household of students was to act as an authority (Mabel & Schroeder, 1994). Conversely, the role of the live-in residence life professional now centers on actively supporting student development through educational and helping activities which are grounded in professional competencies (CAS Standards, 2012; ACPA & NASPA, 2015). On-campus residences are a natural setting for residence life professionals to impact student development because of the informal relationships that naturally occur between staff and students (Bai & Pan, 2009; Riker & DeCoster, 2008; Whitt, 2005; Clark, 2009; Martin & Seifert, 2011).

In 2015, the College Student Educators International, known as ACPA, and the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, known as NASPA, published a list of ten competency areas of best practices at which student affairs practitioners, including residence life professionals, should be adept. One of the competencies listed is Advising and Helping (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). One of the basic helping competencies under the Advising and Helping competency is that student affairs professionals should be able to “identify when and with whom to implement appropriate crisis management and intervention responses” (p. 6).

In a 2012 report from the U.S. Department of Education about persistence in higher education, 53.4% of the students who had been asked to identify reasons why they did not persist through their first year of higher education cited a personal reason for leaving; 16.7% responded that they left because of not being “satisfied” with the school, and 30.8% responded that they left for financial reasons (Ross, Kena, Rathbun, Kewal, Ramani, Zhang, Kristapovich, & Manning, 2012). When asked to identify the most frequent concern encountered when working
individually with students, student affairs professionals found that personal issues such as stress management, time management, anxiety, and transitioning to college as the top concerns (Reynolds, 2013).

As opposed to academic difficulties or financial concerns, personal reasons were more influential for first-year students as the reason for leaving higher education (Ross, et al., 2012), as well as the most frequently identified student concern of the student affairs professionals with whom they worked (Reynolds, 2013). These two findings stress the importance of interventions by the residential life professional with students in their first year (Arboleda, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2003; Sheeley, & Whalen, 2005; Schudde, 2011) where they face a number of personal issues which may impede transitional and developmental progress (Reynolds, 2013). Discovering the experiences during an effective intervention focused on helping students persist is anticipated to support residence life professionals foster learning through informal interventions.

As members of the student affairs profession, residence life professionals have the opportunity to impact student success with effective interventions. (Vygotsky, 1978) defined the distance between a student’s developmental level and potential for development under adult guidance as the student’s zone of proximal development. A key factor in student development is the role that Vygotsky highlighted regarding adult guidance in the developmental process.

Martin and Seifert (2011) found that interactions with student affairs professionals were positively associated with an increase in academic motivation, attitude toward literacy, and growth of students’ cognition skills at the end of their first year of college, and that these affects occurred “irrespective of whether or not first-year students participate in activities which increased their opportunities to interact with student affairs professionals” (p. 402), suggesting that informal activities have a role in the positive cognitive gains made by first-year students.
Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, and Cantwell (2011) also found that the relationships that students have with professional staff makes a significant difference in the students’ abilities to persist. These findings demonstrate that student success indicators may be enhanced through closer relationships between residence life professionals and students.

The link between several student success indicators and living on campus is well established (Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1973, 1977, 1985, 1999). Living on the college campus has been shown to be one of the most influential factors in integrating students into the social and intellectual fabric of an institution of higher education (Astin, 1973; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994; Inman, & Pascarella, 1998; Schudde, 2011). In Pascarella, Terenzini and Blimling’s (1994) review of research related to the “educational impact of a student’s place of residence during college” (p. 22), they found that living on-campus leads to student success through significantly higher student involvement and satisfaction, and, better persistence and graduation rates, (Astin, 1977) concluded that living in a residence hall increases a student’s chance of persistence by approximately 12%.

There are clear indications that living in a residence hall community, close to residence life professionals who can intervene, is beneficial to student success. Understanding how residence life professionals experience effective interventions would provide more knowledge about these crucial interactions.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Despite the widespread use of interventions to address student success in higher education, knowledge regarding what constitutes an effective intervention in terms of both activities and outcomes is very limited (Robbins, Le, Oh & Button, 2009). Robbins, Le, Oh & Button (2009) note that there is little knowledge regarding “the operating mechanisms through
which interventions may lead to college outcomes” (p. 1166). Even less is known about how residence life professionals experience effective informal interventions.

The focus of this study was to discover how live-in residence life professionals working at higher education institutions in the Northeastern United States make meaning of actual experiences of conducting an effective informal intervention with first-year students. Within this study an effective intervention is defined as one which led to a first-year student finding success through being able to operate more competently (Argyris, 1970; 2006) within the institution from the point of view of the residence life professional.

As expectations to undertake informal individual interventions are explicit within professional practice, it should be known how live-in residence life professionals experience individual interventions (CAS Standards, 2012; ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Understanding how residence life professionals experience the effective interventions that they have conducted with first-year students has the potential to contribute to the knowledge about how to best support individual student development in the residential community, and how to support the professional and developmental needs of the live-in residence life professional.

A specific need exists for further research into how live-in residence life staff make meaning of the effective interventions that they experience. The most prominent model of intervention within the student affairs profession is the (AISP) Assessment-Intervention Model for Student Problems (Delworth, 2009). In the AISP model, Delworth categorizes students who needed interventions into two categories – the disturbing student and the disturbed student – and indicated that the proper intervention for a disturbing student is into the disciplinary system, and a proper intervention for a disturbed student is into the mental health system. While the AISP model discusses individual student interventions; it does not discuss intervention effectiveness,
meanings that the professionals might make of them, or which activities should support the professional within the intervention except referral to a mental health or disciplinary system.

Delworth (2009) recognized, but did not discuss, interventions which should occur when students “experience some sort of skills deficits as they attempt to adjust to the college or university environment” (p. 20), and defines these common skills as academic and study skills, career decision-making skills, interpersonal skills, and behavioral coping skills. The AISP model does not discuss interventions related to student success skills except to suggest that campus staff “…needs to fill the role of temporary significant other for the student as he or she struggles to find a place in the campus environment” (p. 21).

Knowing how residence life professionals experience effective individual interventions as related to student success indicators, such as academic skill, self-management, socialization, or grade point average, will help with the important function of supporting first-year students as they transition into college (Astin, 1973; Astin, 1986; Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Schudde, 2011; Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012; Giuffrida, Lynch, Wall & Abel, 2013; Robbins et al., 2009). This knowledge will in turn add to the understanding of the operating mechanisms of effective informal interventions (Robbins et al., 2009). The focus on the perspectives, background, and practices that inform residence life professionals who act in the temporary significant other role (Delworth, 2009) and who conduct informal interventions with first-year students the campus environment was the focus of this study.

Professional organizations and accreditation agencies within higher education both explicitly and implicitly state that intervening with students in a variety of informal educational situations is an expectation for those working as residence life professionals (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Bondi, 2011; CAS Standards, 2012). Despite this expectation, graduates from student affairs preparation programs whose typical first job may be that of residence life professional
report feeling unprepared to conduct individual interventions (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Young and Dean (2015) pointed out that since interventions which happen individually involve using skills that are different than interventions which happen in groups, individual intervention skills should be taught separately.

This study will use (IPA) interpretative phenomenological analysis (Reid, Flowers, & Larkins, 2005; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Gill, 2014) to understand the experiences of residence life professionals who have conducted an effective informal individual intervention with a first-year student.

**Research Purpose and Question**

The purpose of this study was to understand the meaning that live-in residence life professionals made of the effective individual interventions that they experienced with first-year students. The central research question that this study asked was: “How do residence life professionals make sense of the effective informal interventions they have conducted with first-year students?” Moustakas (1994) suggested that phenomenological questions examine both the experiences that the subject has with the phenomenon as well as the contexts, which have influenced those experiences. In this case, knowing about how residence life professionals view the effective informal individual interventions that they have experienced is how this can be done.

The Argyris Intervention Theory (Argyris, 1970) was used as a theoretical framework and acknowledged the influences that inform the concepts in this study, as the theory focuses on the both the tasks that an intervener must accomplish, as well as elements of effectiveness regarding interventions at the individual level (Argyris, 1970; 2006).

The subjects of this study were live-in residence life professionals in the Northeast United States who have intervened effectively with first-year students. Because of the
researcher’s professional affiliations, the participants were recruited from the live-in residence life professionals working in higher education institutions located in Massachusetts and New Hampshire who live in residence hall communities with first-year students.

**Significance of the Study**

Understanding the answer to the research question is important because live-in residence life professionals are more likely to have contact with students when they experience difficulties on campus (Gold, Neururer & Miller, 2000) than any other professional staff. Research on residential life professionals have focused on their developmental needs (Henning, Cilente, Kennedy & Sloane, 2011), however there is little research regarding the meaning that live-in residence life professionals make of the work they do. This study has the potential to address the meanings that these critical institutional staff make of their professional functions.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards [CAS Standards] (2012) defined six specific dimensions of student learning and development which residence life professionals should provide through their individual informal interactions with students. These student learning dimensions include knowledge acquisition, integration, construction and application, cognitive complexity, intrapersonal development, interpersonal development, humanitarianism and civic engagement, and practical competence. The emphasis that the CAS Standards place on residence life professionals fostering learning through individual informal interactions places the residence life function as a critical component to the undergraduate educational experience (CAS Standards, 2012). The function of these staff is especially important when considered that live-in residence life professionals both live and work within a residential community, making them the only staff who may be on campus during the 24 hours in a day.

This research is significant to the researcher’s practice as the Director of Housing and Residential Life. Live-in residential life professionals are often asked to follow up or intervene
with the many first-year students experiencing significant transition issues within their first semester or year. This is true of the staff who work for the researcher, and the findings of this research will be used to better understand the developmental needs of these live-in residence life professionals. The findings of this research can also be used to find what training may need to be provided regarding conducting individual interventions. There may also be ancillary issues regarding how the live-in residence life staff perceive the interventions they conduct and a need to offer support outside of normal training activities. As a supervisor of these staff within his institution, the researcher has a duty to support their efforts when they are intervening with students throughout the academic year.

This study is significant to the field of student affairs and residential life in that it explores the lived experiences of the live-in residence life professional. Riker and DeCoster (2008) found that residence life professionals who know students on an individual basis can have a potent impact upon the quality of that student’s “interpersonal environment” (p. 82). It is anticipated that the findings from this research will be specifically focused towards discovering the lived experiences that life in-residential life staff have surrounding effective interventions and uncovering the perspectives, background, and practices which help support the basic competency of implementing appropriate intervention responses. There may be competencies that are especially beneficial for both live-in residence life professionals and entry level student affairs staff which impact the student’s impersonal environment that may be uncovered through this study, but may not be addressed fully in professional preparation.

**Positionality Statement**

As the director of an office of housing and residence life in the Northeast United States over the past 16 years, I have observed that the residence life professionals in my department are increasingly being asked to intervene with students regarding known or suspected personal
problems. In truth, while following up with students regarding their assessment of intervention happens often, it is rare that there is follow up with the residence life professional. My appreciation for the comprehensive work that live-in residence life staff professionals do is a source of insight for this study.

Working in the profession of housing and residential life, and in the student affairs area in general, means that I can positively affect the world through the help that I provide to students. If I can play a role to help a student achieve their goal of attaining a college education, I am making life better for that student, making society better by helping a person acquire an education, and I believe this helps the world. Numerous students have told me throughout my career at different institutions that they would not have graduated without my help. Though I know that these students would have persevered without my help, making their journey to a degree an easier one to travel holds powerful meaning to my life.

The powerful meaning also informs me that I have a bias in this area. I often tell others within my institution that I have the best job because I get to work with students, and that is because it is natural for me to do so after many years in the field. One of the biases that I have is that I feel everyone is as comfortable as I am when working with students and addressing the challenges that students face. Because residence life professionals are usually newer professionals and may be only two or three years from being an undergraduate themselves, they may not have experience with the issues that a student presents with. Another bias is that my practice has been honed from over 25 years of working in the field of housing and residential life and I have practices that both feel comfortable and natural to my operating style. There are expectations that others in the institution and I might have that a first-year residence life professional, after two weeks of professional training, be as comfortable addressing situations as more experienced staff. Within this study, my strategy for mitigating bias is to be open to the
practices that the participants feel comfortable with and to understand that their experiences, which are different than mine, inform their practices.

The interventions that residence life professionals are asked to conduct takes place because of a request by myself or by someone higher in the student affairs organization, and consists of an unstructured conversation that focuses on a perceived problem or observed behavior. This interaction often includes solutions aimed at providing support to the student through a referral to an institutional office. Residence life professionals are often the first to have informal individual interventions, or “responsive interventions” (Gold et al., 2000; p. 22), with first-year students who present challenges related to academic and/or social transitions. Intervening is becoming a larger part of residence life professional responsibilities, which is in line with the trend of “roles and responsibilities of student affairs professionals are increasingly dynamic and demanding” (Reynolds, 2008, p. 258).

Because their responsibilities are increasingly dynamic and because they are in a unique position that allows for more intervention opportunities, it is important to understand how residence life professionals experience and make sense of the effective informal individual interventions that they have conducted. Understanding this experience was the key focus of this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Theoretical Frameworks in a Qualitative Study**

The use of a theoretical framework is a standard feature in all research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007). For studies using qualitative theory, there is a question on whether theoretical frameworks should be used at all (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), as qualitative research generally does not rely on a theoretical hypothesis to be formed prior to data gathering (Charmaz, 2006).
While Corbin and Strauss (2008) prefer not to begin their qualitative research with a theoretical framework, they do see instances where theoretical frameworks are useful in research situations. A theoretical framework may be included in qualitative research when that framework is closely aligned with what the researcher is studying, provides alternate explanations to what the phenomenon studied, or builds upon previous research in the field (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research may also be used to influence the concepts that explain a researcher’s conceptual logic, to position research in relation to the framework, and to understand how theory influences a research project (Flick, 2006; Charmaz, 2006). Smith Flowers and Larkin (2009) do not address the topic of using a theoretical framework, except to say that it may be important for a researcher to be familiar with the claims that participants are likely to make.

The use of a theoretical framework within an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study is not seen as a required element because there is no test of a hypothesis, but an attempt to explore an area of concern in detail (Smith & Osborne, 2003). Brocki and Wearden (2006) specifically address the use of theoretical frameworks in interpretative phenomenological studies by arguing that the research is above all, interpretative, and while it does not lend itself well to being confined by a theoretical perspective, the researcher likely has “awareness of the current literature and issues surrounding the area” (p. 102) being studied.

The theoretical framework is included in this proposal to acknowledge the influences, literature and personal experiences that inform the concepts this study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2006; Brocki & Wearden, 2006), specifically the concept of the experience of conducting an effective intervention with individuals.
Argyris Intervention Theory

The theoretical framework that frames this study is Intervention Theory as described by Argyris (1970) in the field of organizational theory. Argyris (1970) defines intervention as “to enter into an on-going relationship, to come between or among persons, groups or objects for the purpose of helping them” (p. 15). He also posits that to counteract organizational deterioration, targets of interventions should be “human social systems and their parts” (Argyris, 1970; p. 8) including individuals and groups.

Research using the Argyris Intervention Theory has been used primarily in the field of organizational development (Burke, 2011), but has had specific applications within the field of higher education. Most recently, Riney (2017) used this theory as a framework guiding her research into a performance improvement intervention program focused on improving retention in community colleges. Hoover, Giambatista and Tribble (2016) used the framework of Argyris Intervention Theory to address narcissism and complexity as interfering with being able to internally commit to a course of action, which prevents development and learning among millennials. The idea of internal commitment is the last of Argyris (1970) three conditions or tasks for an effective intervention.

Argyris (1970) cited three required primary conditions or tasks in an effective intervention. The first of those tasks is having valid information accessible, meaning that both the intervener and the client are fully aware of the factors present which creates the perceived problem and the interrelationships between these factors. A second primary task is ensuring that there is free informed choice, meaning that clients must know and be aware of the range of possibilities that are open to them, and have the freedom to choose. The final primary task is having internal commitment, meaning the client has strong ownership and responsibility regarding the choices they make and any implications of those choices. Internal commitment, as
noted by Hoover, et al. (2016), is “seated with the individual” (p. 29) rather than brought by the intervener.

**Argyris Intervention Theory and Organizational Development**

Argyris (1970) developed his intervention theory to address the deterioration of organizations and subsequent ineffectiveness resulting from that deterioration. Argyris realized that there were several reasons why organizations deteriorated, including “design of organizational structures … technology, administrative controls and leadership styles used by those in power” (p. 3). Intervention theory was developed to improve the health of organizations by improving the relationships that individuals and/or groups have within those organizational structures through interventions (Argyris, 1970; Argyris & Crossen, 2003).

The Argyris Intervention Theory has been cited as the beginning of modern consultation activities (Burke, 2011) and is used as a lens with which to view intervention activities in the field of organizational development (Baard, 2010; Smulowitz, 2014). Argyris (1970) recognized that the intervention theory that he developed was “a primitive attempt to present the outlines of a theoretical framework” (p. 8). Subsequent publications from Argyris (1976; 1994; 2004) examined intervention as a learning process, known as double loop learning, or learning where the counterproductive behavior of an individual is corrected when both the values and strategies that the individual uses to make decisions is changed (Argyris, 1994, 2004; Argyris & Crossen, 2004). Argyris (1970) recommended that intervention theory be used by others as a starting point for further empirical research regarding what occurs during interventions.

**Argyris Intervention Theory and Individual Application**

Intervention activities, which impact individuals and which advance organizational behavior through individual development, are viewed as enhanced learning techniques (Burke, Weir & Duncan, 1976; Argyris, 1976; Astin, Keup & Lindholm, 2002; Argyris, 2004). The
application of the organizational development notion of intervention helps to guide the understanding of effective interventions on an individual level (Fagans & Pasmore, 1992; Diamond, 1986). Thomas (1984) stated that “intervention is the backbone in the anatomy of the helping process” (p. 53). On the most basic level, interventions which occur within higher education can be thought of as occurring either with groups of students, or with an individual student (Gold et al., 2000) within the social system of the educational organization. Thomas (1984), writing about interventions conducted within the helping professions, defined intervention as “a planned intrusion into the life or environment of an individual, couple or family, or other target unit that is intended to bring about beneficial changes for the individuals or others involved” (p. 29). Thomas further recognized that if interventions did not have a methodology, interventionists would rely on “obvious and comfortable” (p. 15) methods with which to address situations rather than the causes of a situation, a condition that parallels the Argyris (1976; 2004) concept of single loop learning, or taking corrective action without correcting counter-productive behavior.

While the Argyris Intervention Theory was meant to address organizational development, Argyris (1970) primarily discussed interventions in terms of how interventions affect individuals and how effective interventions occur. Ianneo (2014) pointed out that the Argyris Intervention Theory recognized the conflict between the organization and the individual and focuses on the resolution of issues with individuals rather than relying on macro influences for organizational change. It was the incongruences between actions and beliefs that individuals within an organization have which the Argyris Intervention Theory addressed (Bolman, 2017).

The ACPA and NASPA (2010) Advising and Helping competency stated that student affairs professionals must possess “the knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to providing counseling and advising support, direction, feedback, critique, referral, and guidance to
individuals and groups” (p. 6). The skills in the ACPA and NASPA (2015) definition of the Advising and Helping competency replaced the word attitudes with dispositions; however, both definitions parallel the Argyris (1970) intervention skills of generating valid information, fostering free and informed choice, and helping to create internal commitment.

**Argyris Intervention Theory and Residence Life Professionals**

While the Argyris Intervention Theory has traditionally been viewed as an organizational development theory, interventions that occur within an organizational context impact the relationships that individuals or groups of individuals have within their organizational structure (Argyris, 1970). Viewed through the lens of the Argyris Intervention Theory, the residence life professional enters into an on-going relationship as the intervener between the first-year student and a circumstance that the student encounters. This relationship exists within the organizational system of the educational institution in which both the student and the residence life professional inhabit. It is the sense that residence life professionals make of the effective informal individual intervention experiences they have had within the higher education organization that this study examines.

Argyris (1970) noted that there is little distinction between individual learning and organizational learning (Argyris & Crossan, 2003). As the Argyris Intervention Theory consists of activities that an intervener should undertake with individuals who are part of an organization, it is appropriate to study how individuals in educational organizations make sense of their experiences (Diamond, 1986). While Argyris’ (1970) Intervention Theory was developed with organizations in mind, the theory and his basic requirements can be used to inform the concepts contained within this study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2006), specifically the concept of the experience of conducting an effective informal intervention which responds to the problems that individual students may be having (Gold et al., 2000).
While there has not been any residence life specific research which has incorporated Argyris’ (1970) theory of intervention, his theory has had influence within higher education and the student affairs field. Minks (2015) developed a case study in transformational activities which used Argyris (1970) as a typology for intervention strategy in higher educational organizations. Argyris’ work with Schön has influenced the role that theory-to-practice has had in the student affairs area (Bresciani, M., 2010; Reason & Kimball, 2012) in that the member beliefs and values of those working in student affairs has an outcome for students in the higher education organization. Kimball (2016) recognized that student affairs professionals will develop their own theories based on their experiences within the higher educational organization for whom they work.

Since the residence life professional focuses on both educating and helping the student (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; CAS Standards, 2012) within the higher education organization, the theoretical framework of Argyris Intervention Theory applies as it focuses on the perspectives and experiences of the residence life professional regarding the effective informal interventions they have conducted.

**Effective Interventions in Context**

As this research focused on individual interventions that professional residence life staff believes have been effective for first-year students, it is important to be able to describe effectiveness interventions. Argyris (1970) stated that effective intervention activities help “the client… learn not only how to solve a particular set of problems, but how to operate more competently” (p. 21). This means that the effective intervention should not only focus on a specific problem that the student is having, but also on the abilities that student exhibits to solve similar problems as they arise, similar to the cognitive-behavioral approach where “irrational and unproductive thoughts and ideas and attitudes are replaced with rational and productive ideas and
attitudes” (Reynolds, 2008, p. 89). Argyris (2010) noted that people use patterns of behavior to protect their self-esteem and confidence against disruptive forces in their lives. Disruptive forces which affect first-year students arise from the fear and emotional pressure a student may feel at the beginning of their college career which threatens academic and social success, such as a student’s ability to define their own feelings about a situation (Kerr, Johnson, Gans & Krumrine, 2007), their self-belief (Mattern & Shaw, 2010), and their awareness of their own academic self-worth and personality traits (Kelly, Kendrick, Newgent & Lucas, 2007; Lounsbury, Saudargas & Gibson, 2004; Lasky & Hetzel, 2011).

For first-year students, individual interventions should be viewed as an educational process, which addresses an individual student problem that is confronted by that student’s counterproductive behavior (Gold et al., 2000). As students solve their problems, effective interventions conducted by the residence life professional would ideally address the values associated with any counterproductive behaviors (Argyris, 1994; 2004; 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Argyris (1970) stated that four conditions must be present in individuals that validate effective interventions. Those conditions are self-acceptance, confirmation, essentiality, and psychological success. Self-acceptance refers to “the degree to which the individual has confidence” (Argyris, 1970; p. 38). Confirmation refers an understanding that others have regarding an individual which is consistent with that individual’s experience of themselves (Argyris, 1970). Essentiality refers to the feeling of essentialness individuals perceive as they use their abilities and express their needs, as well as an increased commitment “to the system” (Argyris, 1970, p. 39) and its effectiveness experienced.

Argyris (1970) stated, “One of the most effective ways to help individuals increase their degree of self-acceptance, confirmation and essentiality is to generate conditions for psychological success” (p. 39). Psychological success occurs as individuals can define goals
which are realistic for them, related and challenging to their central needs and values, and with definable paths to achieve those goals (Argyris, 1970; 2006). Writing about how individuals trap themselves by their thinking, Argyris (2010) noted that building psychological success will help build and preserve an individual’s confidence and self-esteem when disruptive forces emerge in later situations.

The indicators of self-acceptance, confirmation, essentiality, and psychological success which validate effective interventions for individuals have been found to correlate with indicators of student success within the first year. For example, first year experience programs in some institutions show a weak retention effort; however, the individualized person-to-person interventions within these programs, which aim at improving academic, self-management, and socialization skills, had the greatest effect on first-year student retention (Tinto, 2004; Robbins et al., 2009). Copeland and Levesque-Bristol (2011) likewise found that students who are surrounded by “fulfilling relationships and who feel competent in their role as students” (p. 512) will be more successful supporting their educational endeavors. Residence life professionals who have conducted effective interventions should see that student more engaged within their higher education institution (Wolf-Wendell, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009), especially if an on-going relationship with that student is maintained (Argyris, 1970).

**Section Summary**

This study used an inductive phenomenological research method and was grounded by the Argyris Intervention Theory. It focused on the effectiveness of intervention activities from the perspective of residence life professionals who experienced and then made sense of the interventions they have conducted with students. Performing interventions is an essential job responsibility for residence life professionals, so understanding the experience of effective
individual student interventions is of importance to those in supporting professional development.

**Organization of the Thesis**

This document is organized into five chapters. The first chapter includes an introduction to the research problem and establishes a justification for the study that is proposed. The second chapter presents a review of the professional literature which provides information regarding the issues that surrounded the research. The third chapter provides a description of research methodology used in the study. The fourth chapter presents the in-depth results of the data derived from the research. The concluding chapter presents the conclusions from the research along with recommendations for future research and limitations of the study.

**Definition of Terms**

**Argyris Intervention Theory:** Entering into “an ongoing system of relationship, to come between or among persons, groups or objects for the purpose of helping them.” (Argyris, 1970, p. 15)

**Effective Intervention:** Interventions which engage the student within their higher education community as a way to overcome a problem impeding success.

**Individual Intervention:** An informal intervention that is done with an individual or group of individuals regarding an issue that has arisen which may impede success for the students.

**Informal Intervention:** A responsive intervention (Gold et al., 2000) which addresses a specific condition which may impede and individual or a group of individuals from succeeding. (In this thesis, Individual Intervention and Informal Intervention are used interchangeably.)

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA):** A qualitative research approach which is hermeneutic that explores in detail the experiences that an individual person has and how they
make sense of those experiences in their “personal and social world” (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p. 36).

**Lived Experience:** The everyday impressions and feelings that a person can describe when going through everyday situations.

**Meaning:** What a person designates as being the significant elements of the lived experiences that they have.

**Northeastern United States:** Comprising the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

**Residence Life:** A term used to describe the department within a student affairs area overseeing the undergraduate on-campus living in a higher education college or university. Paired with the term “housing,” residence life can also be used to describe the programmatic and other educational functions which exist outside of assigning a student to a particular room.

**Residence Life Professional:** A master’s level staff member who lives in a college residence hall or within a residential community who oversees student staff and acts to support the student educational endeavors within the higher education institution.

**Live-in:** Living in the same building or residential community as students.

**Student Affairs:** A division in higher education dedicated to providing support for and foster developmental growth for undergraduate students with outside of the classroom educational and social experiences.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand the meaning that live-in residence life professionals made of the effective individual interventions that they experienced with first-year students. The central research question that this study asked was: “How do residence life professionals make sense of the effective informal interventions they have conducted with first-year students?” Moustakas (1994) suggested that phenomenological questions examine both the experiences that the subject has with the phenomenon as well as the contexts, which have influenced those experiences. In this case, knowing about how residence life professionals view the effective informal individual interventions that they have experienced is how this can be done.

This literature review is divided into two major sections that examine the elements of the central research question of this study. The two elements that will be examined in this literature review will center on: 1) Residence life professionals and how the development of their professional responsibilities in residence life has put them in a position to be intervening informally with students; and 2) Interventions and how they are currently utilized within higher education. The review of these two different bodies of literature and their relation to the research question will narrow the focus and establish the basis for further empirical research of effective individual interventions by live-in residence life professionals.

The literature in this review was located by searching the on-line library at Northeastern University, as well as several comprehensive searches on scholar.google.com. Databases containing articles from the Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, The Journal of College and University Student Housing, and the Journal of College Student Development were particularly helpful in discovering information about residential life, student affairs, and intervention practices within colleges and universities. Google Scholar was especially helpful in
discovering the applications of the Argyris (1970) intervention theory and the vast writings of Dr. Chris Argyris. The Argyris Intervention Theory was the beginning of connecting theory and practice and like most organizational development theories, has found fertile ground for application within the field of higher education.

**Residence Life in Higher Education**

The following four sections present the development of residential life within higher education. The first two sections, Development of Student Affairs within Higher Education, and The Development of the Residence Life Professional, highlight how residential life came to occupy a prominent role within the lives of students today. The next two sections, Roles and Expectations of Residence Life Professionals, and The Role of Residence Life and Student Success Indicators, discuss the various responsibilities that have grown as the residence life professional became more prominent on campus and how these responsibilities contribute to student success.

**Development of Student Affairs within Higher Education**

The residence life function at an institution of higher education is seen as providing educational, helping, and developmental services to students in their on-campus residences. Residence life professionals, who are full-time student affairs staff, do this through training in counseling and administration skills, and then focus those skills in the residence hall environment, complementing the academic component of the institution (Schroeder & Mable, 1994; CAS Standards, 2012). As part of Student Affairs divisions, departments of residence life include at least one higher level director, live-in residence life professional staff, and student para-professional staff (CAS Standards, 2012). A number of factors have influenced the responsibilities of residence life professionals and the functions of departments of residence life since the founding of institutions of higher education in the United States.
Early residential communities, called dormitories or houses in colleges and universities in the United States, were modeled on the English system of higher education (Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Fredrikson, 1993) and functioned as the intellectual center of the higher education institution (Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Fredrikson, 1993). Unlike higher education institutions in England, early American institutions of higher education did not have the financial resources to afford enough staff to support a classroom educational staff and dormitory supervisory staff, forcing faculty members to live with students in the dormitories (Schroeder & Mable, 1994).

In the mid-19th century, American scholars who had studied in Germany assumed roles of educational leadership in American higher education, and modeling their German educational experiences, began to divide the classroom and residential responsibilities that faculty had traditionally held (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). These educational leaders saw institutional housing operations as both socially and financially detrimental to the educational pursuits of students, resulting in many colleges closing their student housing and converting bed spaces for academic use (Fredrikson, 1993).

The lack of institutional concern for a student’s life outside the classroom eventually produced the unintended consequence of forcing students into substandard living accommodations, resulting in student dissatisfaction (Fredrikson, 1993). Dissatisfaction over non-academic issues started to affect what was happening inside the institution. Harvard President Charles Eliot, concerned about the out-of-classroom experiences of students, appointed LeBaron Russell Briggs as the Dean of Student Relations in 1890 (Schwartz, 2002; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). This was an important development in higher education as Briggs became the first Dean of Men and the first official in higher education charged with responsibilities unrelated to academic instruction (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). The appointment of Briggs and other Deans
of Men was antecedent to the founding of the Student Affairs profession (Schroeder & Mable, 1994).

Deans of Men viewed themselves as “kindly uncles” who used an informal educational process within their roles to impact student behavior (Galston-Gayles, Wolf-Wendel, Nemeth Tuttle, Twombly & Ward, 2005). As institutions of higher education tended to be smaller entities with a fewer number of students, the Deans of Men model was sustainable and stayed in place until the mid-20th century, when two government initiatives increased access to higher education and precipitated a change in the role of the educational administrator and how students were both viewed and treated.

The first of these initiatives was the passage of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill, which led to 7.8 million World War II veterans accessing benefits and an unprecedented growth of students on campus (Kaplan & Lee, 2007; Schwartz, 2002). As the GI Bill provided returning service members easier access to colleges and universities, higher education became to be viewed as a right for Americans that led to an improved quality of life. This change in higher education being viewed as a right rather than a privilege resulted in subsequent generations accessing higher education at a higher rate than in previous generations (Snyder & Dillow, 2011; Massy, 2001; Mount & Belanger, 2004).

The second government initiative that had implications for residence life and higher education nationwide in the mid-20th century was the inclusion of Title IV of the Fair Housing Act of 1950 (Schroeder & Mable, 1994), also known as “Housing for Educational Institutions.” Title IV provided federal funding at low interest rates for the repair and construction of housing facilities for faculty and students in institutions of higher education, resulting in a building boom of residential facilities on college campuses (Fredrikson, 1993).
These two initiatives resulted in a near simultaneous expansion of students accessing higher education and the construction of residential facilities for them to live in. From 1950 to 1970, the number of enrolled undergraduate students more than tripled from 2.4 million to 8.0 million (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). Through the rapid massification of higher education (Mount & Belanger, 2004) caused by these two initiatives, higher education institutions changed from being a system that served relatively few students in a personal way to one that served many students in a more bureaucratic way. The rise of bureaucracy repositioned student affairs in general and expanded the impact that the residence life professional had with students living in college and university housing (Fredrikson, 1993).

**The Development of the Residence Life Professional**

Early American college housing professionals in the 18th and early 19th centuries were faculty members who “lived with, ate with, supervised, and taught students” (Fredrikson, 1993, p. 174). This style of residential life is known as the English model as the dormitory was the center of the educational endeavor in the English educational system (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). In the mid-19th century, the German educational model of academic specialization influenced American higher education leaders to eliminate the faculty residential responsibilities in order for faculty to devote more time to their educational responsibilities (Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Fredrikson, 1993). As faculty left the residences, other adults affiliated with the higher education institution filled the supervision and management void in college housing. These adults came to be known as house parents and the parental model of residential supervision was introduced (Fredrikson, 1993).

House parents were most often older women, known as “house mothers”, and their role was to serve in a “benevolent capacity while instructing students on social graces and enforcing curfews” (Fredrikson, 1993. p.175). The house parent model evolved simultaneously with Deans
of Men positions. While the house mother role within the residence hall was intended primarily to foster good social graces and enforce rules, the role of Deans of Men was to act in the capacity of the kindly uncle who was there to give advice to students (Fredrikson, 1993; Schwartz, 2002; Galston-Gayles et al., 2005). This model lasted until the mid-20th century when the relationship between institution and student changed from informal to bureaucratic (Fredrikson, 1993; Schwartz, 2002).

This institution and student relationship change was a result the rapid expansion of student access to higher education along with the increased construction of college housing. More students in the academy meant that higher education institutions were forced to change the way that their residences were managed (Fredrikson, 1993; Schwartz, 2002). As higher education became more bureaucratic, the administrative scope within the profession of student affairs grew in importance (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). The oversight of residence communities became more professionalized and greater emphasis on student development and education within the residence emerged (Fredrikson, 1993). The existence of the modern-day residence life professional, their professional expectations, and their role within an institution of higher education recognizes the positive effects that living on campus can offer students.

**Role and Expectations of Residence Life Professionals**

The positive educational effects that living on campus can provide for students has long been recognized (Astin, 1973, 1977, 1985, 1999; Tinto, 1993; Brooks, 2010). Living on the college campus has been shown to be one of the most influential factors in integrating students into the social and intellectual fabric of an institution of higher education (Pascarella, et al., 1994). Siegel (2011) noted that residence communities in higher education connect students more deeply to their academics and provide the challenge and support for students to grow as individuals. Schroeder and Mable (1994) noted that the traditional role of the modern-day
residence life professional was to promote educational growth and development of students, to challenge and support students through the development of critical thinking and interpersonal skills, and to create environments which promote the appreciation of diverse peoples and cultures.

While still concerned with student development, there was a growing emphasis towards student success. The Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and the Council for the Advancement of Standards emphasized that residence life professionals were an influence on students and provided an important component of academic and social success (CAS Standards, 2012; ACPA & NASPA, 2015). The expectations that professional organizations had for residence life professionals have also increased as responsibilities for overseeing the student experience were linked to growing student success (Brooks, 2010). In 2010, and again in 2015, the College Student Educators International (ACPA) and the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) published a list of competency areas at which student affairs practitioners, including residence life professionals, should be adept. These competencies were focused towards the professional development of the student affairs practitioner and included advising and helping; assessment, evaluation, and research; diversity and inclusion; ethical practice; history and values; human and organizational resources; law, policy, and governance; leadership, and personal foundations (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, known as the CAS Standards, stated that a residence life department of a college or university “must provide a variety of educational opportunities that promote academic success and the achievement of learning and student development outcomes” (2012; p. 293). The CAS Standards (2012) went on to identify eleven general areas of emphasis within housing and residence life departments. These areas of emphasis were:
- A mission;
- A program that promotes student learning, development, persistence, and success;
- Leadership which plans, supervises, and manages strategically;
- Hiring and training qualified individuals;
- Adopting and implementing appropriate ethical practices and standards;
- Creating and maintaining educational and work environments that are welcoming, non-discriminatory, and free from harassment;
- Maintaining good relationships with internal and external constituencies;
- Demonstrating effective financial stewardship;
- Using current technology and explore technological enhancements; and,
- Supporting the mission of the department and the institution with adequate facilities and equipment.

The CAS Standards (2012) further defined six dimensions of student learning and development which residence life professionals should provide through their interactions with students. These student learning dimensions include knowledge acquisition, integration, construction, and application; cognitive complexity; intrapersonal and interpersonal development; humanitarianism and civic engagement, and practical competence. The emphasis on delivering these learning dimensions to students living in residence halls placed residence life as a critical component of to the undergraduate experience in higher education (CAS Standards, 2012, p. 290).

Martin and Seifert (2011) conducted a study from 2006 to 2008 to explore the direct relationship between the impact of interactions with student affairs professionals and the cognitive development of first-year students. Their findings showed that interactions with student affairs professionals were positively associated with academic motivation, attitude toward
literacy, and growth of students’ cognition skills at the end of their first year of college. It was further found that these effects occurred “irrespective of whether or not first-year students participate in activities which increase their opportunities to interact with student affairs professionals” (Martin & Seifert, 2011, p. 402). These effects suggested that informal activities play a role in the positive cognitive gains made by first-year students. Martin and Seifert posited that the opportunity for informal interactions between student affairs professionals and students had the potential to affect how well students meet their personal learning objectives.

This finding is bolstered by Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, and Abel (2013) who found that student affairs administrators could help foster academic success by engaging students in autonomous-supportive ways. Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, and Cantwell (2011) also found that the relationships that students had with student affairs staff made a significant difference in their ability to persist. These findings suggest that if an informal relationship exists between residence life professionals and students; student success indicators would be enhanced.

**The Role of Residence Life and Student Success Indicators**

It has been long established that living on campus is linked with the indicators of success used by higher education (Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1973, 1977, 1985; Brooks, 2010). While it is well documented that living in a residential community is associated with student success indicators for first-year students, there is very little research as to what actually makes this so.

Vygotsky (1978), provided clarity when he defined the distance between a student’s developmental level and potential for development under adult guidance as the student’s zone of proximal development. A key factor in the student development role that Vygotsky highlighted was the role that adult guidance played in the developmental process. Riker and DeCoster (2008) found that a professional residence life staff member who knows students on an
individual basis “can have a potent impact upon the quality of the interpersonal environment” (p. 82).

Though not specifically quantified, campus residency has been shown to have a positive effect on first-year student persistence (Schudde, 2011). Pascarella et al. (1994) in their review of research related to the “educational impact of a student’s place of residence during college” (p. 22), found that living on-campus led to significantly higher student involvement and satisfaction, better persistence, and graduation, and, citing Astin’s (1977) conclusion, that living in a residence hall increased a student’s chance of persistence by approximately 12%.

All members of a higher education institution, including faculty and staff, have the ability to positively influence students through the establishment of relationships (Astin, Keup & Lindholm, 2002; Bean & Kuh, 1984). The power of relationships highlighted by Miller (2007), who found that a substantial number of graduating students said that a faculty member helped them to succeed as an undergraduate and that this success was based on caring behavior. Institutional engagement, which establishes a relationship with students, is important as students who are not engaged may find themselves influenced by other students within their own formal and informal cohorts (Terenzini, Spring, Pascarella & Nora, 1995). Cohorts have the potential to foster a “groupthink” mentality (Janis, 1973; 1994) that can bring about behaviors that inhibit the development needed to succeed at an institution of higher education. Turner, Pratkanis, Probasco, and Leve (1992) said that groupthink “can be viewed as a process by which group members attempt to maintain a shared positive view of the functioning of the group in the face of threat” (p. 789).

Maher (2004) found that students in a cohort tended to limit their patterns of thinking to those that were used and accepted by the cohort resulting in the condition described by Janis (1973) as mental efficiency deterioration. Students who were connected solely within a group
that has a friendly, supportive environment may suffer more in the development of critical thinking skills than their peers (Terenzini et al., 1995). Conversely, the conclusions of Martin and Seifert (2011) and Martin (2013) found that unstructured interaction with student affairs staff could be beneficial to the growth of first-year student cognitive skills. As students spend more time in their residence halls than in all other campus locations combined (Riker & DeCoster, 2008), an established relationship between the student and the residence life professional should be an important one.

**Summary of Residence Life in Higher Education**

This section of the literature review emphasized the growing demand for the skills of the residence life professional as having a critical role for student success. The area of Student Affairs rose from the recognition that there was a need for guidance and support for students outside of the classroom. The relationship between the residence life professional and the student changed when the relationship between higher education institutions and their students became more bureaucratic until the present day, where compliance is an emphasis within the position. As living on campus has been shown to be an indicator of student success, the relationship between the residence life professional with the students living in their residence hall is extremely important.

**Intervention in Higher Education**

The following five sections present the topic of interventions focused on their function within higher education and within the student affairs area. In the first section, Introduction and Types of Interventions, the topic of intervening and what it means within higher education will be discussed. The Intervention Theory section will provide an in-depth discussion of the Argyris (1970) Intervention Theory and relate how this theory and the subsequent intervention writings of Argyris applied within higher education. The Individual Interventions in Higher Education...
section will discuss how individual interventions are now viewed within higher education. The final two sections, Effective Individual Interventions and Interventions and Relation to the Research Question integrate the concepts in the first three sections to discuss how individual interventions within higher education organizations relate to the concepts associated with the Argyris (1970) Intervention Theory to the research question being examined.

**Introduction and Types of Interventions**

Intervening with college students for the purpose of helping them is not an unusual concept in higher education. What is education if not an intervention that helps students develop? Thomas (1984) stated that “intervention is the backbone in the anatomy of the helping process” (p. 53).

On the most basic level, interventions which occur within higher education can be thought of as occurring either with groups of students or with an individual student (Gold, Neururer & Miller, 2000). In their study of grieving as a coping strategy for first semester male students in college transition, Gold, et al. (2000) characterized interventions which engage students in groups as psycho-educational in that they are preventative in nature and meant to help with the development of a life task that is common to many students at the same time. Many of the studies in higher education which addressed retention strategies did so by examining interventions common to all first-year students, such as first-year year experience classes or seminars (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009; Wasburn & Miller, 2008; Laskey, 2011; Turner & Thompson, 2014), living/learning communities (Anderson-Rowland & Urban, 2001; Brooks, 2010; Purdie & Rosser, 2011), or orientation programs (Pascarella, et al., 1986; Bai & Pan, 2009; Fowler & Boylan, 2010). In their meta-analyses of intervention strategies aimed at academic performance and retention, Robbins et al., (2009) classified intervention strategies as academic
skill, self-management, socialization, or first year experience which were focused on mediating the emotional, motivational, and social controls of first-year students.

Each of these group intervention strategies has been found to be useful in increasing academic performance and student retention. Students who took part in first year experience programs had a higher rate of retention, completed more academic credits in their first year, and had a higher cumulative grade point average (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009). College or university orientation attendance has a significant direct effect on social integration and institutional commitment which in turn positively affects retention behavior (Pascarella et al., 1986; Fowler & Boylan, 2010). While the advantage of interventions which happen in groups is that the intervention can apply to a large number of students at the same time, the disadvantage is that these interventions are designed to meet the need of most of the students, meaning that some students will not receive the intervention that they need (Thomas, 1984).

Gold et al. (2000) contrasted psycho educational interventions, which are interventions that affect groups of students, with responsive interventions, which are interventions that affect individual students. Interventions which are focused on individuals in higher education tend to be in the areas of substance abuse (Butler & Correia, 2009; Bertholet, Faouzi, Gmel, Gaume, & Daeppen, 2010; Yarnal, Qian, Hustad & Sims, 2013; Seegers & Carey, 2010) or counseling treatment (Demyan & Anderson, 2012; Field, Elliot & Korn, 2006; Whitehill, Brockman & Moreno, 2013). While the advantage to individual interventions is potential for effectiveness, the disadvantage is that they are costlier and may take longer to be effective (Thomas, 1984).

**Intervention Theory**

on-going relationship, to come between or among persons, groups or objects for the purpose of helping them” (Argyris, 1970; p. 15). Argyris’ (1970) theory highlighted three basic requirements that must be present for an intervention to be helpful at any level. Those requirements were:

- Valid information: “which describes the factors, plus their interrelationships that create the problem” (p. 17);
- Free informed choice: “The client has to have a cognitive map of what he wants to do” (p. 18); and,
- Internal commitment: “a high degree of ownership and a feeling of responsibility about the choice and its implications” (p. 19).

Argyris’ (1970) Intervention Theory is the foundation for modern organizational consultation activities (Baard, 2010) and individual intervention activities are viewed as enhanced learning techniques which advance organizational behavior through individual development (Burke, et al., 1976; Argyris, 1976, 2004, 2010; Astin, et al., 2002; Smulowitz, 2014). The application of the organizational development notion of intervention helps to guide the understanding of effective interventions on an individual level (Fagans & Pasmore, 1992; Diamond, 1986).

As a foundation of modern consultancy, the Argyris (1970) Intervention Theory is used as the model to decide if organizational intervention frameworks are truly interventional in nature (Burke, 2011; Daniels & DeWine, 1991; Lindon, 1985). Weatherbee, Dye, Bissonette and Mills (2009) used the three basic requirements of Argyris theory to determine the effectiveness of the Self-Confrontation Method, a psychosocial intervention practice adapted in an organizational change setting. Recognizing that workers within the organization brought personal meaning to the workplace, Weatherbee et al. (2009) discovered that for the
organizational environment to develop in a positive direction, some of these meanings had to be discarded, reinforced, or moved, and required individual interventions.

Argyris (1994, 2004, 2010) defined the learning that occurred during helpful interventions as “double loop” learning in that it changed an individual’s values by eliminating counter-productive behavior. Argyris (1976) recognized that organizational interventions can only be effective through individual experiences, even when those individuals are in groups (Argyris, 2004) noting that there is “a very tight interlock between individual and organizational patterns of actions, and there is little possibility of changing one without changing the other” (Argyris, 1976; p. 347).

Van de Vliert (1977) has provided the only criticisms of Argyris Intervention Theory (Baard, 2010) noting that Argyris did not specifically cite change as one of the primary tasks of an intervention, and that free choice in the theory does not equate with effective choice. Argyris (1970) himself said that change is not a primary task for an interventionist, as classifying changes as either good or bad may bias the interventionist towards change that is unnecessary. Dirks, Rottinghaus, and Lansky (1978) further recognized that the result of applying the Argyris intervention activities inevitably led to change. While not a specific criticism of the theory, Pate (1979) noted that Argyris does not attempt to guide practitioners regarding intervention practice or research; however, Argyris himself noted that his theory was meant to be a starting point for empirical research, rather than a guide (Baard, 2010).

Thomas (1984), recognized that if people in the helping professions did not understand how effective interventions occurred, interventionists would rely on “obvious and comfortable” (p. 15) methods which may not necessarily lead to success, a condition that Argyris (1976) identified as single loop learning, or taking corrective action without correcting counter-productive behavior.
Individual Interventions in Higher Education

The majority of the literature devoted to individual interventions in higher education is focused on interventions that target substance abuse (Abelman & Molina, 2001; Butler & Correia, 2009; Bertholet, Faouzi, Gmel, Gaume, & Daeppen, 2010; Seigers & Carey, 2010; Ray, Stapleton, Turrisi, & Phillon, 2012; Yarnal, Qian, Hustad & Sims, 2013) or counseling treatments (Field, et al., 2006; Demyan & Anderson, 2012; Whitehill et al., 2013) in the college student population. These studies highlighted interventions which were individual in nature and involved brief feedback interventions.

The framework of a brief feedback intervention involves improving performance of an operational or life task by targeting specific areas that need improvement with single instance feedback activities (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Feedback interventions have been studied in a variety of situations within higher education, such as the performance of college students in design studios (Dannels, Housley Gaffney & Norris Martin, 2011) and for students who were mandated to undergo a substance abuse program due to violations of alcohol or drug policies in their residence halls (Mun, White & Morgan, 2009; Lojewski, Rotunda & Arruda, 2010). Mun, White, and Morgan (2009) used both written and motivational interviewing as feedback interventions to determine if gender differences existed for each strategy for students mandated to participate in alcohol assistance programs after violating college alcohol policies. They found that additional motivational interviewing made trivial difference in efficacy over written feedback interventions. It was further found that students who suffered from less-serious alcohol-related problems received a greater benefit from motivational interviewing than students who engaged in heavy episodic drinking (Mun et al., 2009). These findings underscored the importance of individual intervention strategies for students.
Brief feedback interventions for college students that addressed substance abuse and counseling issues tended to be single instance motivational activities which focus on education and skill building (Seigers & Carey, 2010). In their review of brief interventions for alcohol use in campus health centers, Seigers and Carey found the intervention length documented in a majority of studies they examined lasted from five to 75 minutes. This can be classified as a responsive intervention (Gold et al., 2000) targeting a single behavior that impeded development.

**Effective Individual Interventions**

An element that should be examined is what literature defines as an effective intervention. In higher education, effective interventions have traditionally been in the context of helping a student manage the academic and social factors within their higher education institution and how that management correlated to student persistence in that institution (Pan, Guo, Alikonis & Bai, 2008; Wolf Wendell et al., 2009; Reason, 2009a; Tinto, 2016; 2017). Argyris (1970; 2006) identified four conditions which must be present in individual interventions which validate effectiveness. Those conditions were self-acceptance, confirmation, essentiality, and psychological success. Self-acceptance refers to “the degree to which the individual has confidence” (Argyris, 1970; p. 38). Confirmation refers to the understanding of others experiencing the individual as they experience themselves (Argyris, 1970). Essentiality refers to the experience of essentialness that an individual might feel as they are able to use their abilities and express their needs, resulting in their being more committed to the system (Argyris, 1970; p. 38) and its effectiveness.

Argyris (1970) stated, “Effective ways to help individuals increase their degree of self acceptance, confirmation and essentiality is to generate conditions for psychological success” (p. 39), noting that psychological success occurred as the individual was: 1) able to define their own goals; 2) having goals related to the individual’s central needs and abilities; 3) the individual
defined the paths to these goals; and 4) the achievement of the goal represented a realistic level of aspiration for the individual. As such, this definition of effectiveness fits within the traditional higher education view that successful management of academic and social factors influence student success as measured by persistence.

Studies that have examined either persistence or retention in higher education correlate these concepts with personal student characteristics as viewed through the lens of various academic and social success indicators, such as greater personal autonomy, increased academic competence, and better grade point averages (Goenner, Harris, & Pauls, 2013; Kelly, et al., 2008; Nora & Lang, 2001; Giuffrida, et al., 2013; Chapman & Pascarella, 1983). Tinto’s (1972, 1993) retention model stated that students who were both academically and socially successful are able to do the work that was expected of them. They were also able to find and maintain friendships with like-minded others and therefore were more likely to persist from their first year to their second (Tinto, 1972, 1993). The connectedness factor suggested that academic and social abilities were interrelated and were influencing factors during students first years (Bean, 2005).

Few studies exist in higher education which focus on individual interventions as they impact first-year students. Lowis and Castley (2008) developed a question and answer intervention model aimed at decreasing the dropout rate among first-year students and found the most beneficial activity for students who were academically at risk was to talk with an uncritical expert. In a semester long, three hours per week course used as an intervention for first-year students on academic probation, the element that influenced the overall success of the intervention was the personal relationship students had with their advisor (Royal & Tabor, 2008). Cerezo and McWhirter (2012) designed one day peer mentoring interventions around the unique challenges that Latino students face in their first semester of college. Participants were peer mentored and they showed a quicker social adjustment to college than did non-participants,
demonstrating the importance of a one-on-one connection for first-year college students (Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012).

The opportunity for students to interact and build social relationships with faculty and staff emerged in the literature as an important indicator of first-year student success. Students who came to higher education having had inspiring teachers will have their learning climate compromised if they do not find an inspiring teacher in their one of their college classes (Copeland & Levesque-Bristol, 2011). Eckles and Stradley (2012) recognized that not only do faculty and staff influence students, but also the behavior of a student’s friends in that institution has a strong impact on whether that student is retained. Eckles and Stradley calculated that “every friend who leaves makes the student over five times more likely to leave, but every friend who stays make the student over 2.25 times more likely to stay” (p. 177-178).

Individual intervention strategies which were part of a larger group intervention, as in the studies above, show that relationships were especially impactful for student success. In one of the few studies which examined individual interventions in higher education, Gold et al. (2000) studied the social and cultural acclimation of male first-year students and recognized that residential life professionals played an important part in first-year student success acting as role models to students who were having difficulty making meaning of the college experience.

Students who have difficulty in their first year need a way to decrease the emotional pressure and fear that they may feel in order to increase their competence. Socially autonomous and supportive learning environments can increase a student’s awareness of their own learning processes (Copeland & Levesque-Bristol, 2011; Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim & Wilcox, 2013). Living in campus residence halls (Astin, 1985), enrolling in first year seminar classes (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009; Wasburn & Miller, 2007), and being assigned to living and learning communities (Anderson-Rowland & Urban, 2001) are examples of socially linked solutions
which have been found to be helpful in engaging students and enhancing success. However, students were successful only when they also involved themselves in activities which truly enhanced academic and social competencies (Anderson-Rowland & Urban, 2001).

First year experience programs in some institutions that provided individualized person to person interventions aimed at increasing academic, self-management, and socialization skills had the greatest effect on first-year student retention (Tinto, 2004; Robbins et al., 2009). Copeland and Levesque-Bristol (2011) likewise found that students who were surrounded by “fulfilling relationships and who feel competent in their role as students” (p. 512) will be more successful as they will be able to support themselves, buoying the notion that as students find self-acceptance, confirmation, and essentiality through effective interventions, they are better able to support themselves academically and socially.

**Intervention and Relation to the Research Question**

Knowing how residence life professionals make sense of effective individual interventions with first-year students is important because there is a professional obligation and expectation for those working in the residence life field to informally intervene with students on an as needed basis. The CAS Standards (2012) sets forth guidelines which advise that residence life professionals should be able to effectively intervene in cases of academic early warning and have familiarity with crisis and counseling interventions. The CAS Standards also recommend that residence life professionals create relationships with students based on genuine interest and be able to provide individual counseling or advising support within the scope of their training.

As educators, residence life professionals are uniquely placed to perform responsive individual interventions (Bai & Pan, 2009; Riker & DeCoster, 2008; Whitt, 2005; Clark, 2009; Gold et al., 2000; Guiffrida, et al., 2013) focused on developing the academic and social self-management skills that impact retention within higher education (Diamond, 1986; Thomas,
1984; Robbins et al., 2009). Individual informal interventions are also important when viewed through the findings that informal college student interactions with student affairs professionals were important to the cognitive development of first-year students (Martin & Seifert, 2011).

Knowing how residence life professionals make sense of effective individual intervention with first-year students is also important when there may not be a good knowledge basis in professional preparation programs regarding effective interventions. In a survey of 90 students in graduate student affairs preparation programs, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) found that the curriculum prioritized “knowledge attainment over application” (p. 329) and that students felt unprepared to develop interventions focused towards undergraduate students. Because individual interventions are a core technology for helping professions (Thomas, 1984), and helping is the primary educational activity for professional residence life professionals (Reynolds, 2011), it is important to have an understanding about effective individual intervention practices. Residence life professionals often are the first to have “responsive interventions” (Gold et al., 2000; p. 22) with students who may be having difficulty and are most in need of the skills which enhance student persistence, especially since the “roles and responsibilities of student affairs professionals are increasingly dynamic and demanding” (Reynolds, 2008, p. 258).

**Summary of Intervention in Higher Education**

This section of the literature review discussed the role that intervention plays in higher education. Within higher education, interventions can be psychosocial in that they are done in groups, or responsive in that they discussed an individual need. Research which has happened within interventions in higher education tended to focus on interventions affecting groups of students rather than interventions occurring with individuals. However, the research done in groups has provided evidence that individual connections made in those groups are the best indicators of success (Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012). The research that Argyris (1970) has done
regarding his intervention theory can be a guide, especially as his theory was developed within the organizational development realm. As many entry level professionals within a higher education organization may not be prepared to intervene individually (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), it is imperative to understand the meaning that individual interventions hold for live-in residence life professionals.

**Summary of the Literature Review**

The review of literature supports the research surrounding how live-in professional residence life staff make sense of their effective informal interventions with first-year students. Residence life professionals are professionally obligated to help first-year students overcome the academic and social challenges that they may encounter. Higher education professional organizations state that residence life professionals should intervene informally with individual students (CAS Standards, 2012; ACPA & NASPA, 2015). While higher education institutions should not rely on a single intervention technique to help with student success and retention (Robbins et al, 2009; Bai & Pan, 2009; Copeland & Levesque-Bristol, 2011), these institutions do rely on both psychoeducational and individually responsive ways (Gold et al., 2000). Understanding how residence life professionals view effective interventions within their role becomes even more prominent when you consider the increasingly diversified student population (Seidman, 2005; Reason, 2009a).

Relationships with student affairs staff can be an important student success indicator (Martin & Seifert, 2011; Guiffrida et al., 2013) as contact between residence life professionals and first-year students has been found to be significant for both academic (Martin & Seifert, 2011) and social development (Tinto, 1987; 2016; 2017). Residence life professionals are in the position to assist students in understanding the complex academic and social relationships within their institutions (Guiffrida et al., 2013). Inman and Pascarella (1998) examined 16 different
variables regarding the impact of college residence on the growth of critical thinking skills in first-year students. While two of the variables examined by Inman and Pascarella were “experiences with faculty” and “student acquaintances,” there was no option to identify student experiences with college staff as important.

This research addresses how residence life professionals make sense of their effective informal interventions with first-year students; however, the study will also ask about the characteristics of and experiences during effective individual interventions from the perspective of the residence life professional. An interpretative phenomenological analysis is fitting as this study will try to understand the experiences of residence life professionals regarding the effective individual interventions that they have performed and will position the description of an effective individual intervention in the wider cultural contexts of residential life and higher education.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to understand the meaning that live-in residence life professionals made of the effective individual interventions that they experienced with first-year students. The central research question that this study asked was: “How do residence life professionals make sense of the effective informal interventions they have conducted with first-year students?”

The second-tier research questions (Smith, et al., 2009) that could have been answered from participant’s responses were: “What are the characteristics of effective individual interventions from the perspective of the residence life professional?” and “What were the experiences that influenced the behavior and tactics of the residence life professional staff effective individual interventions?” While these questions were originally part of the study, data analysis did not reveal answers for these questions, and because of that, they have been subsequently removed from further discussion.

The main question was examined and answered using the qualitative research approach of interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, et al., 2009; Smith & Eatough, 2007; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Qualitative research is defined as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 232). Phenomenological research was appropriate for this study as this was a search for the meaning of the lived experience of residence life professionals who had conducted an effective individual intervention (Creswell, 2009). In phenomenological research, the basic goal is to reduce and describe the individual experiences around a phenomenon to its universal essence (Creswell, 2009) and in this study, the lived experience of conducting an effective informal individual intervention by a residence life professional was the phenomenon that was studied. It should be further noted that rather than a methodology, interpretative
phenomenological analysis (IPA) is better understood as a perspective from which to “approach
the task of qualitative data analysis, rather than as a distinct method” (Larkin et al., 2005, p.
104).

**Qualitative Research**

The origins of qualitative research were derived from the combination of the fields of
sociology and anthropology when ethnographic researchers in the 17th to the 19th centuries first
sought to describe the native societies “discovered” by Columbus in the Americas, and later, in
the sub-societies of the Unites States through the study of culture and language (Vidich &
Lyman, 2000; Jovanovic, 2011). Ethnography is defined as “the science devoted to describing
ways of life of human kind” (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 40) and the qualitative research
methodologies that are used today originated through ethnographic methods of collecting data
(Vidich & Lyman, 2000).

Qualitative research methodology was first promulgated in the early 1900’s by the
University of Chicago Sociology department. The researchers connected with that school, John
Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and William Thomas, are cited as most influential in the
development of qualitative research methods (Platt, 1985; Jovanovic, 2013) though Platt (1985)
does also cite F. N. Cooley, a University of Michigan contemporary of Mead and Dewey, as
having considerable influence as well.

Qualitative research fell out of favor after the 1920’s as researchers turned to positivist
quantitative methods of data collection (Jovanovic, 2013). Spurred by the rise of social
movements in the 1960’s, a more flexible society called for diverse ways of documenting
differentiation between social groups, leading to a resurgence of qualitative research (Jovanovic,
2013). During this time, the study of new phenomena and “their meaning in a rapidly changing
social context” (Jovanovic, 2013, p. 18) called for a renewal in the interest of understanding characteristics of the individual social and cultural experiences (Jovanovic, 2013).

As social contexts rapidly changed, traditional positivist research did not satisfactorily explain the changing social contexts within society (Jovanovic, 2013). As such, different qualitative research methods emerged. While Creswell (2009) recognizes these different research methods, he espoused the five approaches of narrative research, phenomenology, case study, grounded theory, and ethnography, as the most systematic and rigorous.

### Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research can be described as an inductive emergent process which studies a human or social problem. Inductive means that the meaning of the research is built from the bottom up and into increasingly complex themes (Smith et al., 2009; Creswell, 2009). An emergent process is one in which the meanings that are derived at the beginning of the research process can change as the research continues (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative researchers are situated in the natural world and observe or collect data through which patterns emerge (Creswell, 2009). The researcher involved in qualitative research is described in different ways. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) refer to the qualitative researcher as a “bricoleur,” or jack-of-all-trades, who produces a pieced together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. Corbin and Strauss (2008) thought of the qualitative researcher as a detective who followed leads to “concepts, never quite certain where they will lead, but always opened to what might be uncovered” (p. 144). In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument who, relying on the meaning of the experiences of participants of the phenomena studied, interprets historical documents, makes observations within settings, or interviews participants about experiences to develop and interpret a complex account of what is actually happening (Creswell, 2009).
Creswell (2009) cited a good qualitative study as having rigorous data collection procedures, meaning that the researcher spends an adequate amount of time in the field and uses multiple forms of data, maintains a single focus, uses ethical procedures, collects extensive data, uses multiple levels of abstraction, and reflects the history, culture, and the experiences of the researcher. The most important characteristic of good qualitative research, according to Creswell (2000), is that the reader experiences “being there” (p. 46) in that the story and findings are “believable and realistic” (p. 46) to the readers. Denzin and Lincoln (2009) also pointed out that a good qualitative research study has always been judged on whether it communicates meaning to the reader or not.

**Phenomenological Research Design**

For this study, the qualitative method of phenomenological research (Creswell, 2009; Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty & Hendry, 2011; Smith et al., 2009) was chosen as this method best fits the research question that is being asked. Phenomenology is defined as “to make explicit the implicit structure and meaning of human experiences. It is the search for ‘essences’ that cannot be revealed by ordinary observations” (Sanders, 1982, p. 354) or the “philosophical approach of the study of experiences” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). Moustakas (as cited by Creswell, 2009), framed phenomenological research questions as broad and suggests only two: “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?” and “What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of the phenomenon?” (p. 61).

Phenomenological research questions attempt to identify the understanding and meaning that individuals have made as they experienced the process that is being investigated and as such, what and how questions are appropriate (Creswell, 2007). Because the understanding and the meaning made would be from the perspective of the participants, and would be interpreted and
presented by the researcher, the research being done in this study would be considered interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

In phenomenological research, it is not so much a theoretical assumption that is being tested, but a description of “what an experience essentially is” (Sanders, 1982). The effective individual intervention that occurs between a residence life professional and a first-year student represents a significant job expectation and the opportunity to help the student; thus, it is important to understand from the experiences and perspectives of the residence life professional regarding the effective interventions they have conducted.

Phenomenological research and interpretative phenomenological analysis are an inductive approach to qualitative research as it does not test a theory or rely on assumptions prior to the research being conducted (Reid, et al., 2005), but builds the experiences of the participants from the ground up (Smith et al., 2009; Larkin et al., 2006).

The roots of phenomenological research are derived from the philosophical writings of Edmund Husserl (Gill, 2014; Creswell, 2009; Larkin et al., 2006; Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith et al., 2009) and attempt to examine the lived experience of the participant by connecting the object being studied with the “appearance of the object to consciousness” of the participant (Sanders, 1982, p. 356). Early phenomenological studies, however, were more descriptive than interpretative (Sanders, 1982; Creswell, 2009).

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is derived originally from Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger, who noted that interpretation, rather than description, was the emphasis of phenomenological endeavors (Gill, 2014). Heidegger inspired the growth of “hermeneutic” – or interpretative – phenomenological research methodologies (Smith et al., 2009; Creswell, 2009; Gill, 2014). In the early 1990s Jonathan A. Smith devised IPA as a
philosophical interpretation of an experience (Smith et al., 2009). As a methodology, IPA is a growing method of research and the popularity of this type of research has grown especially in the field of psychology (Pringle, Hendry & McLafferty, 2011). Interpretative phenomenological research seeks “to explore in detail individual person and lived experiences and to examine how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p. 35-36) and is suggested by Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006) as an approach rather than a prescribed method of data collection and analysis. Gill (2014) noted that the aim of IPA is to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (p. 122). As this research looks at how residence life professionals make sense of effective individual interventions with first-year students, the perspectives that the participants’ have of their experiences and influences will be presented in detail.

In IPA, it is important to understand that the research is idiographic in that it is the study of an individual situation or event (Smith et al., 2009; Larkin et al., 2006); and that the data collected is “double hermeneutic” (Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith et al., 2009) in that it is not only the situation or event that the participant is interpreting for the researcher, but also the researcher is likewise interpreting the participants sense making activities (Gill, 2014). IPA would be considered inductive research as patterns are built from the bottom up and the researcher is in “constant interaction with the data from that study” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 42) a condition that is consistent with qualitative research (Creswell, 2009).

This study used IPA as it was the lived experiences and influences of the live-in residence life professional participants around their effective individual interventions, which were interpreted. As such, this study relied on the IPA data analysis procedures as advanced in Smith, et al. (2009) who advocated for a thorough reading of the interview in order to develop emerging, connecting themes from the transcripts leading to believable and realistic actions and
conditions (Creswell, 2009). This study also provides a montage of images (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) through participants’ actual words (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Eatough, 2007) giving the reader a complete sense of the experiences and influences which are at play when residence life professionals conduct effective individual interventions.

**Participants**

This study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach (Smith et al., 2009; Larkin et al., 2006; Smith & Eatough, 2007) to answer the research questions and took place in the Northeast United States in the Spring and Summer of 2016. After IRB approval (See Appendix A) the researcher contacted residence life professionals who worked with first-year students throughout the Northeast United States to determine interest in participating (See Appendix B). Those who indicated an interest in participating were sent a consent form (see Appendix C) to inform them of the research purpose and a copy of the questions to be asked during the interview (see Appendix D).

As the subjects of the interview were all live-in residence life professionals who worked with first-year students, they were a homogenous population sample in terms of where they are placed within their professional structure (CAS Standards, 2012) and the intervention actions and processes used with first-year students (Creswell, 2007).

Different phenomenological approaches suggest different numbers of participants. Some interpretative phenomenological research continues to sample participants until no new themes emerge (Gill, 2014), much like grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2006), while Sanders (1982) methodology proposed in organizational research suggests 3 to 6 participants. While there are no pre-determined numerical specifications in phenomenological research that provides a complete picture, Creswell (2009) stated that he has seen phenomenological studies from 1 to 325 individuals. Gill (2014), in a comparison of phenomenological research methodologies,
showed that different phenomenological methodologies advocate different numbers of participants, with IPA having at least one participant. Both Creswell (2009) and Smith et al. (2009) suggested that 3 to 10 subjects was sufficient for phenomenological research. Conversely, Seidman (2006) was reluctant to specify a correct number of participants to interview. In this research, six live-in professional residence life staff persons were interviewed in accordance with guidelines of phenomenological research (Smith et al., 2009; Sanders, 1982; Creswell, 2009).

One of the limitations of IPA is that not every residence life professional can be interviewed and this analysis encourages a smaller number of participants (Gill, 2014; Pringle Hendry & McLafferty, 2011). While Seidman (2006) cautioned that there are practical limitations to interviewing, such as time and money, Smith et al. (2009) argued that a limited number of research participants could enhance and provide a richer and deeper analysis of the phenomenon being studied.

**Access and Recruitment of Participants**

The participants of this study were live-in residence life professionals who were working in colleges and universities in the Northeast United States and who have conducted effective individual interventions with first-year students. Because of the researcher’s professional affiliations, the research participants were anticipated to be residence life professionals working in private educational institutions in eastern Massachusetts who have lived in residence communities with first-year students for at least one academic semester.

This study used a homogenous sample in that the subjects were all live-in residence life professionals who had conducted effective individual interventions from their perspective. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2009). With over 150 colleges and universities in the Northeast United States that offer housing for first-year students, finding enough resident directors to participate in the study was not an anticipated problem. In this research, there were
six subjects who were included in the final sample. Table 1 presents a visual presentation of aggregate participant information.

Table 1

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<th>Aggregate Participant Information</th>
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<td>Resident Director</td>
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This research took place in the Northeast United States in the Spring and Summer of 2016 and while it was anticipated that the participants would be recruited through a variety of different avenues, one email (see Appendix B) to the Northeast Association of College and University Housing Officers (NEACUHO) list serve yielded much interest and every participant that was interviewed was the result of this one email.

The participants were recruited through the NEACUHO organization for residence life professionals, of which the researcher is a member. The Northeast Association of College and University Housing Officers (NEACUHO) includes the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The researcher also planned to recruit subjects via the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) Region 1 Facebook page, which covers the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New
Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont; however, the first email to the NEACUHO list serve provided enough participants. Compensation in accordance with IRB directives was offered for each interview with a participant. Participant interviews (See Appendix C) lasted between one and one and a half hours (Smith et al., 2009) and as compensation, each participant received a $15.00 Visa gift card for participation.

**Ethical Considerations**

In any research conducted with people, a major concern is anticipating any ethical issues that may arise during the research (Creswell, 2009). Several guiding principles for the qualitative researcher in terms of the ethical considerations must be present prior to and during the research. Piper and Simons (2005) suggested several questions that researchers need to ask themselves prior to conducting research. These include: 1) Does the study respect participants’ rights? 2) Does the researcher balance rights with the responsibility for generating public knowledge? 3) Does the research provide scope for participants’ ethical development? 4) Does the research honor those who are less enfranchised? and, 5) Does the research respect cultural, gender, and age differences? In this study, the researcher was also concerned about another question, which was do the results reflect the meaning of the participants?

The overriding element that should be present in an ethical study is respect (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Charmaz, 2006) and any ethical considerations during the research should be derived from this concern. Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Creswell (2007) highlighted the fact that participants should have their anonymity protected by keeping all individual participant information confidential, not using names or identifying features, and not stereotyping. In this research, the participants needed to be protected by keeping their names confidential and it was essential to keep the higher education institution for which they work and the names of any students with whom they intervened confidential. Treating participants
ethically also meant that the participants’ privacy must be respected so that no identifying information can be linked to them through the research and that the participants had the right to withdraw from the research (Creswell, 2007). Participants also had the right to let their voices be heard through the research if they choose to participate (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This was especially important in the interpretative phenomenological analysis process as participants needed to know that their verbatim comments would be used in the research and they would have the opportunity to review any of their comments being used (Smith et al., 2009). Along with confidentiality, it was important to be sensitive to vulnerable populations and imbalanced power relationships (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006).

Good qualitative research has always been judged on whether the story the researcher put together says something to the reader (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). To collect an authentic account of what happened during effective individual interventions with first-year students, the participants must be treated ethically in that they must know what sort of research in which they are participating, sign an informed consent form, and be treated fairly and with respect (Charmaz, 2006) throughout the research process. Finally, this research sought and received the approval of the Northeastern University Institutional Research Board before any participants were recruited or contacted, or any research initiated. Respecting the participants also means that they should be treated in a manner that the researcher would like their family treated (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Operationally, this means that the researchers needed to seek consent from the participants, avoid deceiving them regarding any aspect of the research, and not place the participants at risk (Creswell, 2007).

**Data Collection and Storage**

The main data collection strategy was interviewing, using specifically semi-structured interviews (Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith et al., 2009; Gill, 2014) and phenomenological based
interviews (Seidman, 2006) where the goal was to have the participant in the interview recollect both what happened and how they made sense of their experiences with the phenomenon being investigated. Seidman (2006) suggested three separate parts to the interview process: examining the history of the participant, eliciting the details of the subject, and participant reflection on the meaning of their participation in the process. Creswell (2009) suggested that the phenomenological interview be a two-part interview which dwells on the actual experience of the participant and then has the participant reflect on the meaning of the experience. Smith et al. (2009) suggested a single interview of sufficient depth so as to have the participant express their experiences during the phenomenon being studied.

As interview questions are meant to elicit participant meanings, they should be broad, open ended, and non-judgmental to allow stories to emerge from the participants (Charmaz, 2006). Asking “how” and “what” questions are recommended for qualitative research data collection since they are open ended and can include researcher prompts to invite the participant to contribute more than a one-word answer (Smith et al., 2009; Creswell, 2007; Fontana & Frey, 2000). It is important to recognize that the participant is the expert on the effective intervention that they conducted and would be talking about, and as such, Smith et al., (2009) suggested that they should be given leeway during the conversation. Interviewing allows a researcher to “ask about the participants’ thoughts, feeling and actions”, “validate the participants’ humanity, perspective or action”, and “respect the participant and express appreciation” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 26). Respecting the participant and expressing appreciation are also elements which help enhance the trustworthiness of the research process which will in turn help to gather more authentic information.

Ideally, the interview should facilitate the participant’s ability to recollect what happened during the experience and how they made sense of it (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Eatough,
Seidman (2006) conceded that researchers who are new to qualitative research should use a shorter time frame for their interviews and that the participants should have enough time to recount both what happened from their perspective and the meaning that they made of it. Fontana and Frey (2000) provided no direction regarding the correct length of an interview as they see ethnographic interviewing as an event which can take anywhere from five minutes to several hours. Based on the suggestions of Creswell (2009) and Smith et al. (2009), the researcher planned on an interview length of at least one hour altogether with an emphasis on the description of the event and the meaning that the participant made of it. These conditions were communicated to the participants of this research during the recruitment process.

The time and place of these interviews were at the discretion of the participant, since the comfort of the participant leads to a better outcome (Smith et al., 2009; Seidman, 2006). It is also important to select a site that is free of distractions and lends itself to the digital recording process (Creswell, 2009) to maximize the data collection opportunity. Both participant comfort and a distraction free site are reasons why building rapport with the participant prior to the interview is crucial to success (Charmaz, 2006). By building rapport, the participants feel respected as they engage with the data collection process, which is consistent with the ethical practices and inevitably brings the best data possible (Smith et al., 2009; Seidman, 2006; Creswell, 2009). Respect was also afforded to the participants of this research by providing them with an opportunity to review their remarks after the interview was transcribed, though in this research study only one participant requested that opportunity.

According to Creswell (2007), important steps in the data collection and storage process included collecting the data, recording information, resolving field issues, and having proper data storage. The majority of the data in this research study was collected through interviews by the researcher only with live-in residence live professionals. Interviews were recorded using an
Olympus VN-8100 PC digital voice recorder, which allowed for the interviews to be downloaded to a computer. The researcher solely completed transcription as requested by the Northeastern Institutional Research Board. After the transcription of the interview was completed, it was compared with audio of the original interview to make sure that no errors occurred during the transcription process.

The interviews and transcriptions were securely stored on the researcher’s laptop computer and have been kept confidential. In keeping with good qualitative research methodology, all subjects were given pseudonyms throughout the transcription process to ensure the anonymity of the research participants and the confidentiality of their answers to the interview questions. These recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed after the end of the dissertation process.

**Data Analysis**

Since the majority of the data in this research study was collected through face to face interviews with residence life professionals, interview transcriptions made up most of the data that was used to develop the concepts that describe the meaning that they make of conducting effective individual interventions with first-year students. While the interviews were taking place, the researcher also took field notes which were used to note follow up questions regarding the meaning that the participants were making (Smith et al., 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Corbin and Strauss (2008) compared initial data collection and analysis in terms of fishing, in that the researcher hopes that something will come out of the initial data but never knows what. While field notes should have a role in data analysis, the researcher found that documenting impressions during the interview distracting to the participants, and used notes only as way to determine follow up questions or record strong emphasis on particular answers.
Interpretative phenomenological analysis relies on four stages of inductive analysis activities for the researcher to make sense of the participant’s experience (Gill, 2014). The first stage occurs when the researcher reads and re-reads the transcripts individually and looks for themes that emerge in each interview (Gill, 2014; Smith, et al., 2009). It is important that the researcher tries to develop the perspective of the participant since the participant is the expert on the topic being researched (Reid, et al., 2005). During the initial reading, the transcripts were extensively annotated for meaning. The initial reading was done while simultaneously listening to the interviews to better note the meaning of the participant’s words. An example of this was when a participant explained how she celebrated after an effective intervention, it was noted that she looked away and seemingly re-enjoyed the moment. Listening to the interview during the initial reading helped the researcher to remember facial expressions and gestures, which helped to better interpret meanings.

As each individual interview was read and re-read, and the researcher interacted with the data, conceptualization of the data was made through a line by line reading while writing comments about the descriptive words and phrases that the participant used, how language was used, and the conceptual comments that the researcher made in understanding of the participants meaning. When Creswell (2009) said that the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research, it is the relationship between the data and the researcher that is being defined.

Memoing can help the researcher annotate significant points that isolate and describe the essential qualities and the significant themes and meanings contained in the text of the participant’s comments (Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Gill, 2014; Pringle Drummond and McLafferty, 2011). In this research, the memos written about each participant consisted of bullet points of significant information which contextualized what the participant was saying during certain passages in the interview. During the research phase, memos were written to gather initial
thoughts about each of the interviews, the possible themes of each of the participants, and need to bracket information. As an example, a memo was written regarding the list of the factors which influenced the researcher to combine certain participant themes into superordinate themes.

Bracketing in phenomenological research is an activity where the researcher sets aside their own preconceived ideas regarding the phenomenon. Smith et al. (2009) and Gill (2014), while recognizing the importance of bracketing, underscore how difficult it is for the researcher to completely disengage from their own perspectives about a phenomenon. As interviews were transcribed and read by the researcher, the concepts that were repeated and identified from previous interviews seemed to take on importance. Writing the memos in bullet point format helped to keep the perspectives and impressions that were taken from previous interviews out of the conceptualization of the data that was being interacted with.

Smith et al. (2009) suggested that the noise of the researcher’s experiences when reading the transcript may be so high, that getting these thoughts on paper is an effective way to bracket researcher bias. Since the researcher has interest in the subject being studied, the subject is never far from the researcher’s mind. Smith and Eatough (2007) cautions researchers that the “over-identification of a participant based on shared experiences and attitudes” or the “negative identification” with the participant due to researcher bias is a problem that must be recognized and addressed during data analysis.

When the researcher over-identified with a concept in an interview, bracketing this concept was practiced by creating a word document with the concept written on it, printing it out and putting it away in a folder to symbolically keep these pre-conceived notions away from the research. Because the researcher has extensive experience in the residence life field, bracketing became an important exercise during data analysis in that it was the meaning that the participants were making which was important, rather than the researchers experience.
As an example, a concept which needed to be bracketed emerged in the researcher’s mind during the first reading of the second interview was that new residence life professionals felt like outsiders as they initially entered the field of student affairs. The researcher understood that focusing on this concept would influence subsequent interviews and focus the research on a concept outside of the phenomenon of individual interventions. The researcher immediately typed the phrase “residence life staff consider themselves outsiders” in a Microsoft Word document and printed it out on a sheet of paper and placed it symbolically away in a folder.

The second stage of IPA is the initial noting stage, where the goal is to make a contextual analysis of the data while dividing the texts in meaning units and commenting on each of the units (Smith et al., 2009). These notes and comments were extremely important to the researcher as they reflected as much as possible the explicit meaning that the participants made of the event they were describing. Smith et al., (2009) suggested focusing on three different types of comments while engaging with the transcribed text.

- Descriptive comments. The researcher focuses on comments which consist of key words, phrases and explanations used by the participant which are seen as being important to them (Smith et al., 2009).

- Linguistic comments. The researcher focuses on how the participant uses language. This includes not only parts of language, but also the use of metaphors (Smith et al., 2009).

- Conceptual comments. The researcher focuses on newly emerging understandings of the participant meanings, while drawing on their own perceptions in order to draw out the meanings of key events and processes (Smith et al., 2009).

In this phase of the study, the researcher created initial noting in a word document of each interview with three columns. In the column to the left, the researcher inserted the verbatim interview. In the column in the middle, the researcher pulled descriptive phrases and wrote
comments about the comment. In the column to the right, the researcher pulled the conceptual meaning from the phrase or comment. Table 2 shows an excerpt of the conceptual comment process from Brady’s interview:

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Comment Noting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Excerpt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mean I think for my role here, others may not be able to count this in their live in Res Life experience but the idea of having a BFA degree, as my like undergraduate background, has helped me immensely at a specialized institution. I can talk the same language as the students. I understand the similar struggles that they’re going through, what this means to be in the midst of 24-hour access and not be writing papers or doing research projects, but to be cranking out paintings and where that is your work, um or to be creating or building or something to that effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conceptual comments made by the researcher are important as they are using their own knowledge to comment or question the meaning that the participant is making. Smith et al., (2009) cautioned that in this phase of data analysis, it is important for the researcher to keep in mind that the interpretation should be inspired by the participant’s words, rather than the experiences of the researcher. This was a very important step in the data analysis process as the researcher needed to focus on interpreting the participant’s words while keeping true to the meaning that the participant has made.

The third stage of IPA is to take the data derived from noting the interview and to look for or develop themes. Themes emerge from the data by taking the participant’s answers and creating more concise statements highlighting what is important in the statement (Smith et al., 2009). This is an important time for the researcher to engage in bracketing, since it is the
researcher’s interpretation of the data from which themes emerge. Themes which emerge from data collection should both be grounded in the data, and reflect not only the actual words of the participant, but the conceptual interpretation of the researcher (Smith, et al., 2009). This is done though relating and linking the themes through quotes in the text (Pringle Hendry & McLafferty, 2011). Bracketing will also occur as the researcher moves from one interview to the next and repeats the analysis of participant’s text into themes. Smith et al. (2009) suggested that themes which emerge from each individual interview should be phrased in such a way that they are grounded from the interview but “with enough abstraction to be conceptual” (p. 92).

In this study, the researcher developed participant themes by pulling out the conceptual comments from each interview and grouping them together. There was a constant check between the conceptual comment and the quote to ensure that the conceptual comment accurately represented the lived experience and the spirit of the participant’s words. Occasionally, the researcher listened to various parts of participant interviews to hear how the participant sounded when making the quote to interpret the intent of the quote more accurately. Once the individual participant conceptual comments were grouped together, participant themes were developed by reframing the research question as a statement and developing themes through completing that statement. In this phase, the research question was reworded as the following statement so that there needed to be an answer at the end: “Professional live-in residence life staff make sense of/are influenced in effective informal interventions with first-year students …”

The fourth stage of IPA is to connect emergent participant themes derived from across the interviews which will end up with the construction of “a final table of superordinate themes” (Gill, 2014, p. 126) from each of the interviews (Smith et al., 2009; Pringle, Drummond & McLafferty, 2011). Superordinate themes are themes that connect the participant’s experiences through the underlying participant themes and through extracts from participant interviews.
(Chapman & Smith, 2002). Creswell (2009) delineates these units of meaning as both textural descriptions of what happened during the experience and structural descriptions of the context in which the experience happened. Smith, et al. (2009) created superordinate themes by identifying patterns between like participant themes, noting that not all emergent themes need to be categorized.

These four stages must be completed for each of the interviews separately. The concept of bracketing is important while doing data analysis so that prior analysis of earlier interviews does not influence data analysis of a later interview. After all of the interviews have been through the stages of data analysis, Smith et al. (2009) recommended that the researcher look for patterns and connections collectively among the data that emerged from each of the interviews.

There were a few attempts to complete this final phase before the eventual superordinate themes emerged. Once the participant themes were set, they were written on separate pieces of paper and grouped together in numerous ways. This process did not seem natural to the researcher and it was decided that it was because they were on paper, the themes were not all visible at the same time. Eventually the researcher color coded the themes in an excel spreadsheet, grouped them together to identify the patterns between participant themes, and this strategy ended up producing the end results. As the participant theme meaning emerged, the superordinate themes began to likewise emerge as the themes were grouped together. Once the participant themes were grouped together into superordinate themes, the researcher referred back to data in each participant theme and formed names for the superordinate theme so that the superordinate theme name would accurately reflect the connection to the data in each of the participant themes which made up the superordinate theme. As the researcher continued to work with the data, new meanings emerged and participant theme names invariably changed to the names presented in Chapter 4.
Superordinate themes which encapsulate the subordinate participant themes are presented with a quote or quotes from the participant(s) illustrating the themes (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Eatough, 2007). Each of the themes presented in this research connect to a narrative account of what happened during the phenomenon that is being studied where “the researcher’s analytic interpretation is presented in detail with verbatim extracts from the participants (Smith et al., 2009).

**Establishing Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research can be difficult subjects to define. The quality of qualitative research depends both upon who is doing the research and who is judging the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2006). Creswell (2007) said that good qualitative research happens when the reader experiences “being there” (p. 46) and the story is “believable and realistic” (p. 46). Likewise, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) pointed out that qualitative research has always been judged on whether it says something to the reader.

Validity in qualitative research does not refer to a statistical measure but a description of several activities (Creswell, 2009) that are used to enhance the believability of a study. Merriam (2002) defines validity as congruence between one’s findings and reality. Flowers and Larkin (2009) used Yardley’s (2000) principles of validity in qualitative research to measure validity in IPA. In IPA, Smith et al. (2009) relied on Yardley’s four principles of validity in qualitative research, sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. The principle of impact and importance (Smith et al., 2009) would agree with Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as impact and importance of the research is met when it conveys meaning to the reader.

Creswell (2009) said validity can be reached through checking the member participants who are interviewed so that they are able to view and confirm the final conclusions and theories
that have developed by the end of the study. Validity and ethical considerations will be reached for in this research by offering each participant a transcript of their interview (Seidman, 2006) to ensure that the researcher has captured the experience from the participant’s point of view.

While neither Charmaz (2006) nor Corbin and Strauss (2008) used the term validity due to the quantitative connotations it has, they used the concept of credibility which intertwined with Creswell’s (2009) suggestions regarding validity. Corbin and Strauss (2008) said that a research project contains credibility when it indicated findings which reflect the “participants’, researchers’, and readers’ experiences with a phenomenon, but at the same time the explanation is only one of many possible ‘plausible’ interpretations possible from the data” (p. 302) and that credibility derives from both the researcher and the reader being able to make judgments about the research process.

To establish that the data being produced was accurate and trustworthy, the findings that emerged were sent to the participants of this study by the researcher to ensure that the meaning that the participants were trying to make was brought forward accurately. In a set of emails to each of the participants, the researcher sent each of the participants a document that included the pseudonym of the participant, a description of the intervention they conducted, and the final themes taken verbatim from Chapter 4 including both an explanation of the theme, and the quotes correlated with that explanation. The participants were told that it was important that their views be represented in an authentic way. Each of the participants were asked to react to the information that was sent to them by the researcher.

Each of the participants replied positively, and the participant comments are presented in Table 3.
### Participant Comments Regarding Theme Authenticity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Member Checking Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Aaron       | “I actually got a chance today to look through this and it rings very true. The four theme areas made sense as differentiated but all true, and I recognized either my exact words or the types of things I definitely say all the time.”
|             | “These themes are also nice outlines of how I would write down on the piece of paper my process for working with students, so that is a nice self-check backwards.” |
| Brady       | “What you’ve written feels accurate and is representative of the work I did with (the student) long ago. It's interesting to see it presented this way. It seems I say "like" a bit too much. I'll have to keep that in check.”
|             | “I should let you know, after our interview I reached out to the student I was talking about. We met up briefly over a beer. He's doing quite well now - married, employed in the film industry and seemingly quite happy.” |
| Rob         | “I am fine with the way that you have incorporated my language throughout your dissertation.” |
| Julian      | “Reading this prompt revalidated my passion to pursue this next phase in my career. I think you did a great in conveying my words an I do not have anything to add or edit.” |
| Lola        | “Thank you for sending me this along. It was great to read the themes that you discovered when analyzing what I shared. It all sounds authentic to me! It also made me think more critically about the impact I make on students’ lives by the day to day interactions and small interventions I have with them.” |
| Giselle     | “This is really great.” |

Following an established methodological research structure also helps to establish the credibility of a study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The criteria that shows that a research methodology is followed by the researcher includes documenting the research process, the major categories that emerge, the data analysis process, and the indicators that point to the core categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher should also document how statements of relationships are formulated during data analysis, how the core categories are selected, how the concepts are related systematically, and how the concepts may vary from subject to subject (Merriam, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The selection of an established research
methodology, the seriousness of the data collection and analysis process, and clearly showing how the data aligns are illustrated in the concepts of sensitivity to context, transparency, and coherence that Smith et al. (2009) used to establish credibility within IPA.

Another way to bring credibility to the qualitative research project is to provide a rich, thick description and interpretation of the results (Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 2009). Results which are comprehensive and add a variety of detailed perspectives that lend themselves to being seen as realistic by a reader can be considered credible (Creswell, 2007). Providing a thick, rich description goes hand in hand with spending a prolonged time in the field and being dedicated to commitment and rigor within the research process (Creswell, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). A prolonged presence in the field means that the researcher can confirm emerging findings through the use of theoretical sampling and check the conclusions with the participants (Merriam, 2002). A prolonged presence in the field should also give the researcher enough data to achieve “intimate familiarity with the setting or topic” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182) so that when conveying the ideas, thoughts and concepts, the reader will be able to form an independent opinion of the claims made (Charmaz, 2006). Corbin and Strauss (2008) saw credibility as being established when the findings are significant to the professional and social groups of the participants and become part of the discussions in those groups.

Providing negative or discrepant information that emerges from the data also adds to the validity of the study because it adds authenticity (Creswell, 2009). Not all the themes are going to emerge in neat packages and if discrepant information is presented, the research findings are seen as more transparent and believable. In this research, credibility and trustworthiness was attained not only through member checking, but also through transparency throughout the research, data collection, and data analysis processes (Smith et al., 2009). Fullan (2011) said that transparency involves “being open about results and practices and is essentially an exercise in
pursuing and nailing down problems that occur and identifying evidence-informed responses to them” (p. 99).

**Limitations of the Study**

Any study has limitations and this study is no different. It is, for obvious reasons, impossible to study every residence life professional in the Northeast United States who has conducted an effective individual intervention with a first-year student. As such, the study of only six of them could be considered a limitation of this study. While three other potential participants indicated interest in the study, there were only six who completed the interview process. A different six participants may have provided different data regarding meaning that they held around the phenomenon of conducting effective individual interventions. Likewise, it should be noted that in a field which is represented equally by men and women, four of the six participants were men. Only one respondent identified as a person of color. It is possible that the inclusion of more women or more persons of color would result in different findings.

Another limitation of the study is the small sample size, which consisted of six participants. The inclusion of more participants may have the potential to better refine the results of this study. It should be further noted that the small number of participants in this study would not be statistically significant enough of a sample to represent the experiences of every residence life professional, which is a noted limitation of IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009).

As noted earlier, because the researcher has extensive intervention experience and has worked in the residence life field for many years, the results are open to interpretative bias. For the results of this study to be trustworthy and overcome potential bias, a rich and thick description of the experiences of the participants and the interpreted results from their interviews should be present to mitigate this bias.
Another limitation is that four of the participants came from public universities while two came from private universities. Public universities and private universities often work with students in different ways based on the differences in governmental oversight. If this research was conducted using a single site, using residence life professionals from public universities, or using residence life professionals from private universities, there is the possibility that difference would emerge in the meanings made from the individual intervention experience. This limitation is partially mitigated by the fact that there are professional organizations existing outside of the public/private which provide professional standards regardless of whether the practitioner is working for a public or private higher education institution.

A final limitation is that the researcher’s experience in the residence life field and familiarity with the phenomenon studied may have limited his ability to conduct the interviews and perform the data analysis in an adequate enough manner. Because the researcher has extensive experience in the residence life field and speaks the same ‘professional language’ as the participants, there is the chance that the researcher’s instinctive understanding of the concepts may have resulted missed opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the meanings that the participants made. Also, though every effort was made to bracket the researcher’s perceptions of the meaning that the participants were making during data analysis, there is no guarantee that this did not happen. Despite the awareness of the researcher to not have bias impact the study, there is no guarantee that personal bias is not present.

**Summary of Research Methodology and Design**

Using the interpretative phenomenological analysis research method, this study attempted to understand the meaning that six residence life professionals made of the effective individual interventions that they conducted. The qualitative nature of this study was an appropriate research approach as it matches the approach of examining the lived experiences of the
participants. This study used a homogenous sample in that the subjects were all live-in residence life professionals who could answer the research question. Data collection was completed through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and data was analyzed through the four-stage inductive process recommended in IPA studies, which consisted of the researcher reading and re-reading the data, taking notes of the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments, developing participant themes, and connecting those participant themes in superordinate themes. Trustworthiness of the data was established by checking results with the participants and being transparent regarding the data collection and analysis process. The study has implications for both live-in residence life and other student affairs professionals who may find themselves intervening with students around a variety of issues and it may inform supervisors of residence life professionals in the areas of both staff training and appropriate professional development opportunities for the staff they supervise.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the meaning that live-in residence life professionals made of the effective individual interventions that they experienced with first-year students. The central research question that this study asked was: “How do residence life professionals make sense of the effective informal interventions they have conducted with first-year students?”

This chapter begins with an introduction of the six participants in this study, followed by a presentation and discussion of the findings for each participant. This chapter ends with an overall summary of the findings and explanation of the five superordinate themes that emerged from this research.

Study Participants

Data for this study was collected through interviews with six participants who were all working as live-in residence life professionals in four higher education institutions within the Northeast United States. Each of the professionals was asked to recall an effective intervention with a first-year student, and then interviewed about that experience. After the data was collected and refined into emergent themes, the themes were sent to each participant for review and comment to ensure data authenticity. Participant review of the emergent themes allowed for member checking of the findings.

In this research, there were six subjects who were included in the final sample. Table 4 presents a visual presentation of key participant information. The following section contains participant information and intervention descriptions and is arranged in the order in which the interviews were conducted and data analyzed throughout the spring and summer of 2016.
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Type of Institution</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Type of Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4-year mid-sized public university</td>
<td>Area Coordinator</td>
<td>Academic and personal issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brady</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4-year small public college</td>
<td>Assistant Director</td>
<td>Personal Need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4-year private religiously affiliated college</td>
<td>Resident Director</td>
<td>Roommate Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4-year mid-sized public university</td>
<td>Area Coordinator</td>
<td>Personal Need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giselle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4-year small private religiously affiliated university</td>
<td>Resident Director</td>
<td>Damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lola</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4-year mid-sized public university</td>
<td>Area Coordinator</td>
<td>Personal Need</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant 1: Aaron

Aaron is a live-in area coordinator with six years of professional residential life experience working for a mid-sized state university. The intervention that Aaron conducted was with a student who was experiencing intersecting issues which included a declining classroom performance coinciding with significant personal issues.

All within a few weeks, the student with whom Aaron intervened had ended a relationship with a person who had been offering significant personal support; a professor contacted Aaron about the student’s academic performance; and, the student was found in a state of intoxication that required a medical transport. Further complicating this situation was that the student lived with a resident assistant (RA) who had worked for Aaron for three years. This student’s problems created tension between her and the RA, and because of Aaron's prior working relationship with the RA, the intervention became a priority for him. Aaron’s strategy during the intervention was to link the problematic factors together, working with and helping the student focus on what her overall goals at the institution were. Aaron found that the student needed to have a certain level "baseline" support to find success within the institution. The
intervention was seen by Aaron as an effective because the student found belonging through the support offered her and became more active within the residence hall community.

**Participant 2: Brady**

Brady is a live-in assistant director of residence life with six years of professional residential life experience working for a small urban public college of the arts. The student with whom Brady intervened was a first-year student having difficulty finding his place in the campus environment.

Originally from a rural New England community and attending an urban institution, the student spent a considerable amount of time trying to fit in. Brady mentioned several times that this student was trying to find "a group" that he could truly belong to and Brady also noted that the student was "doing the tag along thing" while not having a strong connection to any particular group. Unable to find belonging within the institution, the student presented to Brady as lethargic. The student began independently to reach out to Brady looking for engagement. At about the same time, Brady became aware that the student began to engage in risky personal behaviors such as experimenting with substances. As he started to engage with the student, Brady got the sense that the risky behaviors were not what the student wanted from the college experience. While intervening, the student became more present in Brady's thoughts and he realized that he needed to focus on introducing the student to leadership opportunities available at the institution. Brady saw the intervention as effective because the student later became a leader in his academic department, and Brady established a friendship with the student, which persists to this day.
Participant 3: Rob

Rob is a first-year residence hall director working for a private religious institution. Rob’s intervention involved a student who discovered her roommate using the student’s personal items without permission or regard for the items.

After spending a weekend away from her residence hall, the student noticed items from her desk had been removed and replaced with Solo cups. The student showed Rob a picture of the room and Rob noticed a funnel for drinking alcohol present in the room. Rob was aware that the roommates had had some minor problems throughout the year, and the student told Rob in a meeting that the incident that weekend was the latest of many troubling episodes that the student had experienced with her roommate. The student told Rob that she felt unsafe. A complicating factor in this meeting was that the student’s mother accompanied her to the meeting with Rob.

Rob’s strategy was to determine what the student meant by feeling unsafe and discovered this meant that the student was exhausted from the various petty disagreements that she and her roommate engaged in for the entire academic year. While intervening with the student, Rob discovered the other issues that occurred throughout the year and the student said these issues had caused her to lose sleep, study time, and control of her personal items. The student and her mother connected their dissatisfaction with the fact that they were paying the university for an on-campus living experience that did not meet their expectations. Rob resolved the issue by moving the student with whom he was intervening to a different room where she could feel like her items were safe and she could concentrate on her studies. The intervention was seen by Rob as an effective one because he felt as though he made a connection with the student and saw his service to the student mirroring the values of his institution.
**Participant 4: Julian**

Julian is a live-in area coordinator who now works for a mid-sized state university and has been working as a residence life professional for five years. The intervention that Julian discussed concerned a student who was undergoing a transition from one gender identity to another while Julian was working as a graduate residence hall director at a different institution, a small private college in an urban area.

Julian's intervention happened six years prior to his interview, when he was in his first paraprofessional role as a graduate student. Working towards his master’s degree at the time, Julian considered himself a student rather than a working professional and expressed that he felt he did not have the knowledge needed for the intervention. He went ahead with the intervention because he was asked to by his supervisors, despite what he felt were a lack of institutional resources available for the student’s concerns. The student presented to Julian as not having a close relationship with family and not feeling connected within the institutional community. Because Julian felt he had limited skills, the intervention consisted of supporting the student, checking in on the student, and researching local resource opportunities for the student to access. The intervention was seen by Julian as an effective one not because of the overall impact it had on the student, but because of the impact it had on his own growth and development as a professional working with college students.

**Participant 5: Lola**

Lola is a second-year area coordinator working for a mid-sized state institution. Lola’s intervention was conducted in her first year as a professional with a student who had been found responsible for trespassing in a residence hall from which she had been banned.

The student had been banned from that residence hall because of prior incidents involving both behavioral problems and alcohol use. During this intervention, the student told
Lola that she was present in the other residence hall because she felt uncomfortable and disconnected in the residence hall where she lived. Additionally, the student felt she had more support in the residence hall from which she was banned.

During the intervention, Lola realized that the disconnection that the student felt was due to the student being uninvolved in the institutional community. During the intervention, Lola uncovered the student’s passion for service learning and Lola provided resources so the student could connect with the service learning office in their institution. Because of this intervention, Lola found that the student became more involved within the campus community and more involved in the residential community where she lived. The intervention was seen by Lola as an effective one because she was able to provide the student with the strategy of becoming involved to find her community.

**Participant 6: Giselle**

Giselle is a second-year residence hall director who works for a small university. Giselle's intervention occurred not with just one student, but one group of nine students who were all male, all in their first-year of college, all on the lacrosse team, and all living in the residence hall that she supervised.

After being made aware of damages which occurred in her building one evening, Giselle was asked by her supervisor to investigate and find out who may have caused the damage. She found out from the residents in her building that the nine lacrosse students living in her residence hall were somehow associated with the damages. Giselle met with the group to determine what level of involvement with the damages they may have had.

Giselle entered the intervention determined to have an honest conversation with the students. Stating that this intervention was different because she intentionally changed her approach, Giselle decided that she would appeal to their honesty, rather than expressing anger.
After Giselle mentioned that the damages would be recovered through fining all the students living in that residence hall, the student who was considered the leader of the nine students stated that he was not going to get fined for something he did not do and proceeded to tell Giselle that upperclass students who did not live in the residence hall were responsible for the damages. After this intervention was over, one of the lacrosse students thanked Giselle for not assuming they were the students who caused the damages. The intervention was seen by Giselle as effective because the students were honest, and because of the professional transformation that she felt from using a different strategy during the intervention.

Case Findings

The following sections present each of the individual themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants. Each of the participant themes that emerged is discussed in detail and includes representative quotes that illustrate each of them. Table 5 presents a visual representation of the participant themes identified.

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The following sections explain the case findings from each of the participants interviewed. A discussion of the superordinate themes will follow these sections.

Aaron

There were four themes that emerged from Aaron’s interview: nurturing autonomy, assuming the quasi-parent role, activating path to success, and, personalizing student success. In the next four sections, each of Aaron’s themes will be discussed in detail. These themes highlight the way in which Aaron views himself and the activities he undertook within the intervention that he conducted.

Nurturing autonomy. The first theme for Aaron was nurturing autonomy, which means that Aaron saw his role in the intervention as working to enable the student to become more independent and self-governing in discovering solutions to the troubles she was having. A representative quote of this is that when Aaron talked about being a residence life professional, he said it meant his job was to find a way for students to “ask for help or accept it into their own ability to advocate or um, work for themselves.” He stated that he did this by relinquishing power during the intervention and by prodding the student to lead the decision-making process which would affect her. Aaron recognized that the student came into the intervention with her own set of expectations about what was going to happen to her, and those expectations may have made her feel powerless. This thought spurred Aaron to nurture the student’s autonomy.

Based on his experience Aaron recognized that the student he intervened with did not have any good expectations about the intervention saying, “When students have no idea what they’re about to walk into, they’d rather you just tell them … they also want you to just get directly there…” Calling his meeting with the student a “principal’s meeting,” Aaron acknowledged that he held an institutional position of power in the meeting based on the lack of expectations. Nurturing autonomy within the student meant for Aaron that:
…you have to take some time to let go of that [power] because someone else’s experience may not operate on your timeline, and their needs may be beyond what you had originally thought when you sat down.

Nurturing autonomy for Aaron also meant that he had to recognize the experiences with which the student came into the meeting. Aware that the student should have the need to control her own destiny, Aaron consciously gave control to the student by “pretty much promising to not even speak half as much as she is in that situation to try to give her some power and feel of control…”

By paying attention to the power dynamic and actions that affected it, Aaron encouraged the student to be “operating on her own timeline.” Effectively nurturing autonomy within the intervention had meaning for Aaron. Aaron explained this by saying:

I always find that people, when they feel like they’re either in control of the situation or have their own autonomy, especially in situations like, something like this like, a principal’s meeting where people aren’t in power and they don’t feel like they have control over what’s going on, giving it back to them can be a lot of help.”

Having the student be the owner of the change that they want is what Aaron endeavored to do during the intervention, explaining that his goal was to see the student “…coming into their own ability to make change in their lives.” Aaron believed that he provided the conditions, but it was the students who will find success once they are able to own the changes they make in their lives. “If it’s their idea, it’s basically inception, that they’ve given themselves their own path” was Aaron’s way of looking his effectiveness at the nurturing he does to have students take control of their own self-sufficiency.
Assuming the quasi-parent role. The second theme that emerged for Aaron was assuming the quasi-parent role, and this theme emphasized Aaron’s view of himself as being positioned in a pseudo-familial relationship with his students that is more impactful and caring than one would think that a college administrator would have. Aaron referred to himself through the interview as being in a parental role, or an uncle role, and as someone who provided authority and companionship to his students. When asked about how he saw his professional role, Aaron said that “…my first answer is always a brother because of the way my family is structured.” Aaron added that one of his influences within his role as a residence life professional was to use “…a lot of my experience with my siblings. They’re nine to eleven years younger than me, which is now actually the age gap between me and some of my RAs.” Being a quasi-parent emerged as an emotional motivator for Aaron. When asked further about using his role as a brother in relation to his students, Aaron said:

So, I don’t think about it [brother role] as much anymore, but at the heart of why I started to do the job, that core is still very much there; that’s a core motivation or it’s a very intrinsic part of emotionally why I’m doing the job.

Throughout the interview, Aaron discussed his relationship with his students as being analogous to, but not equal to a parental role. He stated in the interview that he sees that “there’s a similarity in the job because we’re in this role where parents are removed from the equation on a daily basis for whatever reason.”

Though Aaron recognized that he was not acting ‘in loco parentis’ for his students; he saw himself as filling a need for the students by filling a role that was both authoritative and advisory. Aaron described himself as an “educator” within his professional position and indicated that educators are “a major force in our students’ lives and while we may not, in many cases, teach classes, we’re providing a different sort of life education.” By adopting this view,
Aaron places himself in the role of quasi-parent. Though he knew that he was “not properly a parent to my staff or my students” Aaron does saw himself as “a brother, or perhaps an uncle in terms of familiar relationship.”

By placing himself in the quasi-parent role, the effective intervention had meaning to Aaron in terms of the guidance that he gave to his student. Seeing himself in this role, Aaron viewed himself as “someone who can provide some authority but also some companionship and some equality in some ways; have a real-life conversation that’s not pedantic.”

Aaron understood that having real life conversations, providing companionship, and fostering equality were keys to the effective intervention that he conducted. This viewpoint of himself as a quasi-parent guided his interactions during the intervention.

**Activating path to success.** The third theme expressed Aaron’s belief that his job during an intervention was that of providing the conditions so that the student can see the direction that he or she needs to take to be able to move from having difficulties to managing their own successes. Aaron discussed that his goal with students was to “… address individual issues or, um, find a way to help students find their path and their own ability to stand on their own toes…”

Aaron’s philosophy when approaching interventions with students was “the Einstein quote is my favorite, ‘I don’t teach my pupils. I provide the conditions in which they learn,’ I’ve always used that as my ideology.” This ideology for Aaron does not just mean providing physical conditions, which is a basic expectation for residential life professionals, but also it means providing guidance directed towards student growth. Recognizing that the students he works with may need developmental help to overcome difficult experiences, Aaron also recognized the need for guidance which points the student to a particular direction:

And they’re at a point where they might know me and know what they need to do at a particular stage in life but they may need a different sort of guidance to fully
get there or the value of the experiences that I can help them reflect on or through to be able to get there.

This guidance that Aaron works to provide creates a different relationship with the student that is aimed at reducing the distance between them. If Aaron is distant from the student, he will not be able to provide the support, or have the companionship or equality that he feels he needs to be effective. Aaron describes the ideal relationship as “…essentially becoming a partnership where we’re working toward their success mutually.” In the intervention described, by affiliating with the student, Aaron guided the student into seeing the connections between the issues that may have impeded her success. Connecting the obstacles that a student may be experiencing is a strategy that Aaron used to facilitate intervention effectiveness, explaining:

I’ve had many smaller versions of this or alternate versions of this kind of conversation with students, where a huge first hurdle is getting them to admit that there is an overarching problem or that there’s a link between smaller issues.

Having students recognize how smaller issues link together is a crucial first step towards activating the student path towards success. Aaron found that this intervention was effective when the student asked, “for help or accept it into their own ability to advocate or um, work for themselves” in pursuing their own success within the institution.

**Personalizing student success.** The fourth theme expressed Aaron’s internalization of the intervention effectiveness in seeing student in moving the student towards success within the institution. Facilitating student efficacy is a critical part of Aaron’s job and he acknowledged the student’s success by expressing feelings of relief and responsibility, of feeling good, and general positivity at the encouraging outcomes of the intervention he conducted.

Throughout the interview, Aaron expressed how meaningful personal student achievement is for him, noting that while his goal as a residence life professional is to “...provide
a safe and productive learning and living area and community for the residents, a place for them
to learn and grow in and out of a classroom”, he sees this goal as unobtainable saying that “it’s
the unending, unmeasurable and always incomplete goal but the one you’re always trying to aim
for.” This juxtaposition of having a goal, but seeing it as “unending” or “incomplete”, shows
just how personally Aaron views his role within his institution.

Aaron viewed the effectiveness of the intervention that he discussed in a sensitive way. When
Aaron realized that the student was receptive to the intervention, it became obvious that it
meant more to him than just fulfilling a job function. When asked how he felt, Aaron said:

Prob…you know, relief… not only from in terms of in an emotional way but just,
‘All right. We got more time to work on the rest of it,’ or we can move along
through the next step and they’ve already processed this out to some point in time
which helps the overall goal.

Seeing himself as a quasi-parent, it should not be surprising that Aaron viewed the
effectiveness of the intervention in a personal way. Aaron recognized that this intervention was
more personal because the student who needed the intervention resided with a trusted student
employee that had worked with Aaron for a few years. Aaron took this situation personally
because he said when the resident assistant was “talking about [the situation] with me
interpersonally, it’s not just work.”

Aaron also discussed the effectiveness and outcome of the intervention in personal terms
as well. He talked about seeing the student increase her engagement with the residential
community and said that “there is also something positive and good about seeing that student
here every day, still as a part of the community.” Recognizing that his tactics in helping the
student worked, Aaron reflected that the intervention meant he could “feel good about your
approach, you can know that that particular line of procedure works um, and you can utilize also
the good feelings.” Aaron said that he thought “it was nice” that the student took part both “in and out of the classroom” as he both noticed her participation within the residence hall community and after talking with the student’s professor found that the student had improved academically.

Brady

There were five themes that emerged from Brady’s interview: helping the student find identity, building on common experiences, narrowing focus of purpose, feeling pride, and, giving grace. In the next five sections, each of Brady’s themes will be discussed in detail. These themes highlight Brady’s focus on the student throughout the activities that he undertook within the intervention.

**Helping the student find identity.** Brady’s first theme is defined as Brady recognizing that the intervention was effectual after seeing the ways in which the student found his place within the institution. Brady said that after the intervention, the student “became really engaged, I mean he formed really great connections within the community, became something of a leader within his department.” The student found his identity, Brady continued, by becoming “this person who was really passionate about his craft, about film making, and who really, like truly fell in love with it and embraced it and has made it his life.”

Throughout his relationship with the student, Brady said that he “saw such a change, from like this lost little boy to somebody who was really firm in whom he was.” Through the intervention and his growing relationship with Brady, the student found his sense of belonging on campus. Reflecting on the intervention outcome for the student, Brady said that the relationship he established with the student made the student “feel as though he belonged here and that this was a place for him.” For Brady, the meaning of intervention effectiveness was that the student had found his identity and his purpose within the institution.
Building on common experiences. The second theme for Brady addressed the strategy that Brady used of highlighting the mutual activities and understandings that he had with his student to both break down barriers and create a rapport during the intervention. This theme was defined as the created bond with the student through the similar understandings of having a similar view of shared academic events. Brady stated that when talking with the student with whom he intervened, he understood that “we do have a lot of shared experiences; right, I think that that’s key, is this shared experience that we have.” Brady called it a “sense of empathy” with the student, and said his goal was to portray himself during the intervention as, “Yeah, I get where you’re at, because it wasn’t so long ago that I was right there with you.” Brady viewed the successful use of this strategy as “really huge” to the effectiveness of the intervention.

Brady’s undergraduate major was in art and his intervention occurred while he was working at an institution that was focused on the arts. He said that because of this, he could “talk the same language as the students. I understand the similar struggles that they’re going through.” Brady focused meaning on finding commonalities as a key strategy to break down the perceived barriers that may impede intervention effectiveness. He noted about students, “I think for some people they are very intent on maintaining a barrier, right. I think that that barrier is … will mess up your ability to successfully intervene.”

Brady felt that finding meaning within the shared experiences that the student could relate with was effective because of the vulnerability that Brady showed. Talking specifically about showing vulnerability, Brady said, “I think that’s been especially important for my professional practice with students. I think it brings me to a level and allows me to establish a really in-depth relationship with someone.”

Expanding on this theme, Brady explained that his goal was to have the student see him as an individual, rather than an administrator who was part of the larger organization that the
student may be struggling with. Brady said, “… it’s really important that a student can see you as a human being and not some just like person who’s out to get them or ‘is doing this to me’.”

Conversely, Brady also understood that it was his responsibility to reciprocate this view and see the student as an individual as well, and not a product that the university works on developing and producing. Brady explained that it was important in his position to see the student as:

…not some black box that we’re going through and ‘A’ goes in and out comes three pellets on the other side and it’s like how did that happen? I think in that conversation, in that vulnerability there’s a lot of learning that can occur for the student.

In reflecting on using vulnerability to open himself up to the student, Brady role-modeling to better assist the student. Brady said that the found effectiveness when he could articulate, “Let’s talk about who I am and what I’m about and let’s talk about you and who you are and what you’re about.” For Brady, the effectiveness of the intervention hinged on building a relationship with the student through the shared experiences they had, through finding commonality.

**Narrowing focus of purpose.** The third theme for Brady is defined as how Brady’s thoughts became clearer on how to better help as the student’s struggles became more apparent. The intervention began with Brady being concerned about how the student was doing in the institution to Brady centralizing his thoughts on how best to foster support for the student within the institution. Brady noticed that he “started thinking about him a lot more and he became more present in my mind and I just started paying more attention to him.” As he thought about his attention toward the student increasing, Brady explained it as:
I feel like when you … This is an aside … When I bought the car that I drive now, I suddenly noticed that there are 8,000 of them out on the road, right, and what are all these … What’s going on here? When you know something or when you’re in it, close, you see, I think you see a lot more of it.

As the student became more present in Brady’s thoughts, he focused on how he could help the student thrive and was able to narrow the purpose of his focus. During this intervention, Brady had the opportunity to “pass it [the student situation] off to someone else,” but eventually asked himself, “Okay, what can I do to help?” He decided that he needed “to invest in the student.”

As the student became more present in Brady’s thoughts, Brady assessed the student’s needs and targeted the student for more follow up regarding his place within the institution. The intervention strategy that emerged for Brady was through “… targeting my questions into what he was looking to get out of the place.” Once Brady established his relationship with the student, he said, “I was asking these probing questions and saying, ‘What are you doing?’” This strategy, which focused on what the student wanted to get out of the institution, emerged as a clear goal of the intervention, and Brady said he began:

…asking really intentional questions…trying to figure out from my background of broad understanding of developmental theory, um, seeing where a student was at and assessing what is their ultimate goal; what do they want out of this place.

The narrowing of focus on the student’s purpose within the institution had meaning for Brady as an element of intervention effectiveness because it demonstrated to the student that his success was important to Brady.

**Feeling pride.** Brady’s fourth theme addressed the emotion that occurred when he realized that his intervention had made a difference. Brady took a mix of self-worth and
gratification away from the intervention. Brady felt satisfied that he was meeting the requirements of his professional position, but he felt – and continues to feel – a fulfillment as he realized what the student accomplished after the intervention concluded. After the intervention had concluded Brady stated, “I think I was happy to see how the student had done and who he became after his first year and who he grew into. I felt a sense of pride.”

Brady also felt that other students who saw the assistance he provided may regard him as an ally and approachable. He commented, “I think others observed the positive interactions that we would have with one another and could appreciate that and maybe that removed a barrier for them.” Brady posited that the student may have had something to do with showing other students that Brady was a resource that other students could use. Brady noted, “I think for the student, he carried like, he gave me a good name or some good street ‘cred’[ibility] amongst other students, which was helpful to share with the broader community.”

Brady said that during the intervention he had “… that sense of pride” that he was providing a positive impact with the student, but realized that he had “the knowledge that there’s a lot more to do…”

This feeling of pride extended into Brady’s view of his professional capability. While reflecting on what this intervention meant to him professionally, Brady realized that the issues the student was dealing with were serious and he said, “I was very proud that I was able to help the student through that.”

Brady further talked about that “good feeling I got from the student, that like, ‘Oh I felt proud of this’.” in a way that goes beyond feeling proud of the influence that he was able to have. In wrapping up the interview, when Brady was given the chance to comment about anything that came up during the interview, he said, “Yeah, it’s good. It makes me want to give the student a call and be like, ‘Hey, how you doing? How’s life?’.” This shows that there is not
only pride in what he accomplished, but how deeply this intervention affected Brady through his continued concern for the well-being of the student.

**Giving grace.** Brady’s fifth theme highlighted the view that he has of the student when he approached an intervention. This theme was defined as providing appropriate leniency and goodwill toward students so that they can recover from the mistakes that they make. This giving grace is the heart of Brady’s approach when intervening with students and the central strategy that he employed in his effective intervention. He stated during the interview that “I still think that … I often will say, ‘Ah, you’ve got to give people a little grace. Let them mess up a little bit.’” Brady spoke these words with both seriousness and sincerity when talking about grace, showing that these words mattered to him.

Giving grace meant that Brady allowed the student to be authentic without pre-judging him and also; giving the student the room to make his own mistakes and discoveries. Noting he may sometimes present as reserved, Brady said:

I don’t present as such perhaps but so I think that value of like, people actually matter, everyone matters is sort of like, it’s a theme throughout my life and especially, too, coming from a background with disabled parents, deaf parents who have faced a lot of challenges…

The phrase ‘everyone matters’ is one that Brady repeated when talking about the skills and tactics he brought to the intervention, “…this value placed on humanity and suggesting like everyone is important, everyone matters.” Thinking that everyone is important is more of a personal value, but it has influenced Brady’s professional practice. Because giving grace is important to his practice as a residence life professional, it is Brady’s central stance when approaching a student. Brady understood that the student he worked with may not have been
what they showed to the outside world when he observed “… so, it’s like you can’t assume what you see on the front of it, how somebody presents, there’s much more at play with them.”

The concept of giving grace for Brady means that you should allow students to be human and make mistakes without pre-judging them. It is through these mistakes that students find their identity, develop as people, and discover what it is they want out of their college experience. Giving grace is Brady’s way to recognize that students need to develop and find their way in the institution.

**Rob**

Five themes emerged from Rob’s interview: connecting to student concerns, empowering the student, aligning personal and institutional values, taking timely action, and, affirming professional capability. In the next five sections, Rob’s themes will be discussed in detail. These themes highlight the roles that Rob felt he brought to the intervention that he conducted.

**Connecting to student concerns.** Rob’s first theme highlighted his use of the strategy of aligning with the interests of the student and centering support on the issues that the student brings forward. This intervention started out with Rob meeting with the student and her mother and the initial connection that Rob made was around financial concerns. Rob said that for the family, “There was this connection being made in their heads of, ‘we're paying so much money, so we shouldn't be getting what we're getting’.” Rob recounted that he used these financial concerns that were brought up in the meeting as the basis for which he related to the situation, “I connected that to the strongest feeling that came up in the meeting, which was, in part, surrounding economics, which kind of made me feel like I'm relating to the situation …”

Rob relayed that he told the student and her mother, “I certainly wouldn't want to be dishing out a lot of money and feel as though I'm not getting a quality experience.” This comment showed that while the economic concerns were the connection to the student, it was the
experience of the student living in the residence hall that Rob was most concerned about during the intervention.

Rob was concerned that the student was not getting the full college experience by not having control of her items and living space. He reflected that while talking with the student about loss of control, he “kind of associated that with how I was feeling, in that moment. Like, ‘I can appreciate why that would be difficult to swallow.’” In saying this, Rob showed how he moved from connecting to the financial point of view to connecting over the student’s overall experience. Rob explained that, “It's hard when you hear one of [your] students come to [you] and say that they're uncomfortable in their living situation, and I really related a lot to what they're saying.”

Rob’s connection with student concerns was influenced by the institutional value of having students develop their whole selves. Rob saw his job as not only connecting with the students, but also helping students connect to the holistic factors of their lives. Rob talked about how overall, he sees this connection to helping students as helping them find their identity:

We did a lot of service and a lot of work with faculty connecting all these different spheres in a student's life, so their academic self, who they are on the weekend, who they are when they're serving, and integrating those selves in more of a cohesive identity.

While working to connect with the student’s immediate concern, Rob worked to connect to the higher order developmental concerns that his institution values for its students.

**Empowering the student.** The second theme defined Rob’s intentional work to show that the student has the capacity to successfully engage with and solve her situation. Giving power to the student by focusing on the language she used, Rob demonstrated a deep understanding of the student’s need to have control of her experience. He said that he “work(s)
with a lot of students who sometimes feels disenfranchised and have power taken away from them.” Rob focused on showing student centeredness as he conducted the intervention to make sure she was helped, noting that for him, being a resident director “… means journeying alongside students, and being present with them in moments, in terms of meeting them where they're at, specifically with first-year students.” Rob framed his role in the intervention as that of a helping companion.

Rob fostered empowerment in this intervention by listening to the student, specifically to the words and language that the student used. He explained that when he addressed the problem with the student, he understood that “at the end of the day, it's not my room, it's not my language.” Rob explained how he aimed for “really understanding” the student and needing to define concepts the way “the student does” calling this “unpacking something with a student.” Rob further clarified that “unpacking” meant taking the words the student uses and “defining those in the way that the student defines them, so that I'm clear on what seems to be going on.”

Wanting to understand the student was Rob’s way of fostering companionship and empowering the student, saying that “Wherever I can reflect back their language, it creates this impression that I'm meeting them where they're at.”

Not only did Rob use the same language as the student, he also made sure to check the language that others used with the student so the student was not being unduly influenced. Rob recollected a time when a different staff person used language to a student and Rob felt he had to “check in with the student to say, ‘So, I heard that word just used to describe your situation. Do you describe your situation that way, because you know that you don't have to, right?’” Rob stated that checking on the language of others for students was an important way for him to empower students, because he saw it as his role to help students, “… understand that sometimes people will give them language that isn't theirs, and it's okay not to accept that language.”
way, Rob felt that he could “give that agency back” to the student so that they knew they had the capacity of exerting power on their own behalf.

By giving the student their own way of defining a situation that they were in, Rob recognized that “I'm understanding them a lot more than if I were just to define it [the problem] in my own way. In that way, to feel as though I'm exactly where the student is, that's a great feeling, to me.” Empowerment in this intervention was about having the student determine their own path to success, rather than forcing the student to do something they may not have wanted to do. The result of empowering the student was a positive outcome for Rob, saying that he felt “great” when he recognized that the intervention had been effective. Reflecting that “to be able to do something that a person wants, rather than me doing what I want on behalf of that student, that feels great”, Rob recognized that when students take control of their situation with his help, the outcome is positive for him as well.

**Aligning personal and institutional values.** Rob’s third theme defined the prominent role that parallel institutional and personal values played in the effectiveness of the intervention. The institutional value of service had personal implications for Rob as he conducted the intervention. Rob correlated service to the student as connecting his personal values with institutional values. Rob explained that at his institution:

> A value of my current institution is … humble and generous service. The culture of service is very important to the students at my current institution. For me, that guided this interaction of service. This was a form of serving my student.

Deeper personal values further guided Rob’s sense of service. He stated that one of the personal values that “I hold dear is the dignity and worth of every person. And so, for me, it's very important to validate people.”
When queried about where these values originated for him, Rob talked about his spirituality playing a key role in how he views the personal values that he has and his orientation towards working with the students. He stated, “I’ve gone to Catholic school all my life and I think that’s translated throughout my entire education.” As Rob was working at a religiously affiliated institution, it seemed to be natural for the values of the institution to be aligned with his.

When asked about the nature of his religiosity and whether his faith was a major influence during the intervention, Rob thought for a moment and said, “For me, service doesn't necessarily imply faith. For me, you can be of service, and not necessarily align yourself with any particular faith tradition.” He went on to explain that “they're almost like two rivers alongside one another, service and this piece about faith and spirituality.” Rob did, however, note the parallels between his values of service compared with the institution he worked for:

There's a huge parallel, which I really like there. For me, a lot of what I'm doing, professionally, is guided by a more personal value and a deeper connection with the values of the institution I work for, to serve.

Having aligned personal and institutional values was a strong influence that bolstered Rob’s sense of service as he conducted the intervention. By aligning his values with those of the institution, Rob had a conduit through which to provide the service that corresponded with his institution’s values.

**Taking timely action.** Rob’s fourth theme defined the frustration that occurred when a problem was not addressed as soon as it could have been. Rob expressed that the problems the students experienced could have been prevented if he had been made aware of them earlier in the semester. Rob recounted that after he met with the student and her mother and heard the complaints that the student had about her roommate, his thought was “I'm looking at them like, ‘I
Students may have their success impeded if Rob is unaware and unable to address the problems they are having. As a professional, this situation upset Rob, because it can be a hindrance to his overall job effectiveness.

During the interview, Rob was asked how he felt when he realized that the intervention was effective. Curiously, he reflected that he was frustrated because the student could have informed him earlier. He said:

But it's frustrating for me, sometimes, the feeling that I feel. I would have helped sooner, had I known that an intervention was needed sooner. It's frustrating for me that they feel so frustrated, because they've gone all this time without having said anything to anybody.

When it was pointed out to Rob that his answer was interesting due to the use of the word 'frustrating,' he elaborated, “I think, again, it's one of those moments where I meet their frustration almost with an internal frustration.” It disappointed Rob that the student did not take prompt action with the problem she was having. He also stated, “I get why that [the problems] would be upsetting, if you've gone this length of time without having done anything about it. So, that, to me, is sometimes confusing.”

Rob said that one of the things he says most to students is "the point at which you come to me with an issue is the exact same moment that I can begin to help you." It is the sense of taking action that Rob is concerned with. He expressed the sentiment that “somebody's got to do something”, because when someone does something, “…it's in that moment that I can begin to do something, rather than say ... ‘I wish you had come to me a month ago, or a week ago, or something’.”
His sense of service made Rob want to help the student address the issues she was having as soon as he could, and he understood that intervention effectiveness is enhanced only when students are open about those issues earlier rather than later.

**Affirming professional capability.** Rob’s fifth theme defined the validation of competency and skill within the position through experiencing the effectiveness of the intervention. As the intervention was happening, Rob said he felt that “… I was being a champion for my student, in the sense of a need is being brought to my attention.” In this intervention, Rob felt acknowledged by the student not only because the intervention was effective, but also because he felt that he had built a relationship with the student, and felt he could demonstrate to colleagues how to intervene successfully.

That a student entrusted Rob with the information felt good to Rob. He said, “It's a good feeling to know that I've built that relationship with my student.” By saying that he built a relationship with the student, Rob meant that he had a nearness to the student’s concerns, which he saw as professionally important. Knowing that he created nearness affirmed his worked to affirm his capability to himself.

From a professional stance, Rob said that the meaning that he took away was that he not only felt empowered by the success, but also that he could share his experiences with others. When asked about sharing his experiences, he replied, “What it means to me now? It's a reminder that I can do it again.” He added “It's, you know, that helpful reminder of I can do this again, if need be.” He also understood that the positive outcome was an affirmation “…in terms of the training that I have received.” Rob used the words “satisfied” and “empowered” because he realized that he conducted an effective intervention. He also understood that he “can do it [intervene] in the future, or to teach somebody how to do it.”
After the intervention was over, the student thanked Rob for all the help that he gave her, saying “Thank you so much for listening to me. You really heard me out. Thank you for doing this for me. This is something that I wanted” and he reflected that this statement had the meaning for him that “for me, it's satisfying in the way that I feel that I've done right by my student.”

Conducting an effective intervention affirmed for Rob that not only was he capable in a professional capacity, but also, he was being a champion for his student by enhancing her educational experience.

**Julian**

Five themes emerged from Julian’s interview: adjusting to professional limitations, developing self through experience, knowing the student, guiding towards development, and connecting to student circumstances. In the next five sections, each of Julian’s themes will be discussed in detail. These themes highlighted the importance that development played in Julian’s perspective about his effective intervention.

**Adjusting to professional limitations.** Julian’s first theme addressed the realization of his lack of educational or specialized skills and the recognition of that while conducting the intervention. Julian felt limited because he was a first-semester graduate student when he conducted the intervention, and noted that he “felt a little incompetent just because I didn't have every single answer in the back of my pocket.”

Julian felt that as a graduate student he did not have the identity as a student affairs professional, noting that, “I didn't get to see the full scope of the intervention past my involvement with the student.” Julian felt limited by several factors that he had to adjust to both during and after the intervention ended. Not only were there institutional restrictions, but also educational gaps that he discovered when intervening with the student.
His supervisors did not stake out a formal role for Julian within the intervention other than telling him to “just check in with the student once in a while to make sure they're okay or let the student check in with me if they were okay.” Julian said that he “didn’t want to feel powerless” and “didn’t want to not have something to give to this student” because he felt responsibility for the student who was living in his community.

Because the student was more independent, Julian said that “they just wanted to know the resources” that were available. Julian felt his skills were limited and said, “I was just throwing off resources, because that's all I knew I could do at that time.” Still attending graduate classes, Julian expressed the feeling that the intervention he was conducting was outpacing what he was learning. Saying that he had not yet learned “to really be an effective helper” as he was intervening, Julian also recognized “I couldn't wait for that chapter to happen in class.”

Julian lacked fulfillment because the semester ended before the intervention was over, and he moved to another professional position. Julian also said that he “didn't see improvement or changes within our organization or what we were doing to help students moving forward.” Julian addressed this lack of closure saying, “We don't always get that validation, so I think it's always hard to know if we've really impacted the student.” In thinking about this, Julian paused and said, “We hope. I hope, I hope.” Despite not knowing what happened with the student, Julian still had hope that he provided a positive experience that helped the student.

**Developing self through experience.** Julian’s second defined his understanding of the intervention as being an opportunity that led to the growth and the realization of professional identity and goals. Thinking about the intervention, Julian said, “With that specific intervention, it has taught me personally of the type of person I am. There's not enough of me, in my opinion, in this field.” This intervention influenced his path and provided Julian with self-discovery of
what his professional passions were in terms of how he can be better positioned to positively impact the students he works with.

Julian chose to talk about an intervention that he conducted six years prior to the interview at a different institution. When asked why that was the intervention he chose to discuss, Julian explained that experience was the starting point to a change that he was making in his professional career, from working in residential life to working as a college counselor. “This is the work I want to be doing,” Julian stated, and this intervention experience sparked the thought for him that “…that there's a need for me to be in this field [counseling].” Julian had the advantage of looking back at an intervention that had happened six years prior and, in reflecting on that intervention, affirmed that “it has taught me that that caring side, that commitment, that dedication I have hasn't changed.”

Recognizing that he took this intervention as an opportunity to develop himself, Julian said, “I think selfishly it helped shape me a little bit better of being a better professional.” Julian said that overall, the intervention that he conducted six years ago taught him “a lot about my personal, professional, mission, goals, life, and just in general.” When asked about what he learned about himself through the intervention, Julian paused a few moments to think before he answered:

That is the number one thing I learned, that direct correlation, connection to everything from when I was 14 and up is self-care, especially now... I'm practicing it, and that's what I think makes me a better professional and why I am ready to go into that next professional part of my life because I've learned it and I know how important it is.

Because Julian was a graduate student when he conducted the intervention, he did not see himself as having a lot of influence. He recognized that “… it may not have been an ideal
situation, but right now, I have no regrets because that's how you have to learn.” Because of where he saw himself in the organization, Julian recognized that the intervention “taught me some great skill sets about myself in regards to being a better supervisor, how to navigate through difficult conversations with supervisees.”

As Julian had to adjust to his self-perceived limitations, he recognized the value of working through the intervention as an important developmental experience. He discussed experience being his primary training when he said, “You get trained, but much of your training comes from the experiences in dealing with these situations first-hand, and that kind of has been the mentality I've had.”

The meaning that Julian took from the intervention was, “It's taught me that right now I know what I want to do. It's because of these experiences. Being a residence hall director helped me ... jet streamed me to that direction.” This experience started Julian on the developmental path towards his goal, which is to work at a college counseling center.

Knowing the student. Julian’s third theme defined the importance placed on developing an in-depth and complete understanding of the student as a person. When asked about his tactics for intervening, Julian said that it was imperative to get “to know the person first and really understanding” them before “you jump into the maybe, the personal, deeper questions.” As a strategy to support the student, Julian tried to learn as much about her and understand who she was to help address any issues that she might be having. The intervention was about Julian “getting to know the person” and getting to know the student’s “background information.” Julian wanted to know “the basics of how their classes are going,” how the student is finding their life within the institution, and how the student was “connecting” to the institution. Julian recognized that there is more to a person that you can see, and that was where he found meaning in helping students:
There's a lot more in-depth than there is on the surface, and for me, it's not the surface, it's about what's going on internally first, and once I reach that, then we have those conversations.

Effectiveness in the intervention centered on Julian “getting to that personal level” with the student. Getting to that personal level meant that Julian not only had to get to know the student, but also had to let the student get to know him as well. When he first tried to define an intervention, Julian talked about an intervention as being in a situation where you look for the best from a student, then quickly added, “No, an intervention is first getting to know that person, allowing them to get to know me, starting off an individual because it's about rapport setting.” Thinking more about that statement, Julian added, “It’s about trust setting.”

Julian recognized that trust was a crucial element to the intervention he conducted, “You've got to build that first before you can jump into any type of conversation about healing or anything like that.” Knowing who the student is and trying to get more in-depth with the student was a tactic that Julian used in this intervention to build trust with the student.

**Guiding towards development.** Julian’s fourth theme is defined as being able to influence the student to be in control of his or her own growth and progress. This theme discusses the responsibility that Julian saw himself having within the intervention. Viewing himself as a helper, Julian felt his mission was to use his “natural ability to want to help others and help guide people along their path and wherever that may be.” This distinction is crucial as Julian does not see himself as being responsible for creating solutions for the problems that the student experienced. Julian recognized that he was the conduit the student could use to access institutional and community support at a pace the student felt comfortable using.

Julian saw his role in the intervention as interpreting what the student wanted and then moving him towards resources that addressed those wants. He stated that:
I've always tried never to be the person who ... this is what I can do for you but first I'm just saying, ‘What do you need from me?’ It's putting them in a seat. It's asking them what are the resources they need.

Julian framed his role within the intervention as “… finding those little outlets that gives me that chance to get in there to ensure this is about them, and they have the power to tell what they want to tell and not want to tell.” The effectiveness of this intervention approach showed Julian that when meeting with students, his attitude towards the student should be, “This is your opportunity to become the person that you want to be or the better person that you want to be; so now that we're here, let's discuss that.”

Julian recognized that the intervention was a way for the student to “move forward,” but also understood that the student “can't move forward unless you identify it [the issue] and you're willing to do the work.” As a helper, Julian saw his role as providing support for identity development. He was passionate about this theme and said about college students:

This is their identity, so they have to do the bulk of the work when it comes to forming their identity, but at least they have my support. ... It's just they need to be able to do that for themselves.

By providing guidance for the choices the student needed to make, Julian recognized the power and the responsibility that the student has for self-development within their own intervention. “That's the whole point of college, in my opinion” was Julian’s attitude towards students being able to be in command of their choices.

**Connecting to student circumstances.** Julian’s fifth theme addressed the creation of a bond through the common experiences and events that the student had been through, or through the similar issues that may be shared. When asked about why he felt his intervention was so effective, Julian brought up empathy, saying, “It's my relate-ability…a trait that I think I've
always had is my empathy… being able to put myself in that other person's shoes.” Not only did Julian attempt to relate with the student through similar experiences around the issues that the student was struggling with, he also worked to understand the student’s experiences within the institution. Talking about his approach to interventions in general Julian said that to be effective one needs to:

… take your own experiences and not apply to someone else's experiences, but to help set some sort of outline or some sort of relationship, some sort of connection with others who may be struggling or who may not be struggling, but who needs, but who just want that guidance.

The way to connect for Julian was simple: “We need people to talk to. We need people to relate to. We need people to just, to find a common connection.”

Julian was influenced by his experiences in the youth foster system, which eventually led to his becoming an advocate for foster youth. He connected the advocacy that foster youth needed in a stressful environment with the advocacy that the student needed within the higher education environment. His experience in the foster youth program taught Julian the importance of connecting with others’ experiences through stories. He found the common connection in his intervention through stories of “my personal experiences of being a first-year student.” His tactic was to “… jump into how I can understand how challenging [it is for] a first-year student adapting to a different environment, meeting new people, and through my stories I try to find connections.”

Connecting with student experiences, from Julian’s perspective, is a primary task of the residence life professional. Julian felt that there is a “certain baseline” that residence life professionals need and that “I felt as an RD [residence director] that you should be able to have that type of connection with a student to really focus on them.” This focus was where Julian not
only found meaning with the student he connected with, but also as an avenue to “create, hopefully, an outlet for having more of that deeper conversation” that would lead to him being able to guide the student towards development.

**Lola**

Five themes emerged from Lola’s interview: valuing institutional engagement, benefitting professionally, extracting essential details, enabling student control, and receiving gratitude. In the next five sections, each of Lola’s themes will be discussed in detail. These themes centered on how Lola viewed her work with the student during the intervention.

**Valuing institutional engagement.** Lola’s first theme is defined as the importance placed on the benefits of involvement within the university community. The theme discussed how Lola emphasized the student’s participation in the college experience as being important during the intervention. Lola said, “In my undergrad I was really, really involved on campus and even in grad[uate] school, I was pretty involved on campus and that’s something that I think that all students should experience.” Lola explained that as an undergraduate, she found her identity, acceptance, leadership opportunities, and outlets for her advocacy skills through her immersion in campus organizations. Because of her experiences, Lola associated her development with involvement in the institutional community and believed that all students should experience involvement.

Discussing her involvement, Lola said that she “was really involved with our queer community on campus, and for me, even my friends mostly identify as LGBT and being able to be in that community was really important for me.” This involvement was not only about being important for her professionally, but also how it influenced the development of Lola’s interests within higher education:
And like, being able to find that support there was really helpful for me just being able to have advocates and allies on campus and so, for me, it was also where I kind of developed my leadership skills … so that led me to be interested into going into higher ed[ucation] and really being able to be an advocate for students with marginalized identities.

Because of her positive experiences with campus involvement, Lola viewed student success through that lens, and when she intervened with the student who she saw as not being involved, Lola made campus involvement the focus of the intervention. She stated emphatically during the interview, “I know the importance of getting involved on campus.”

Lola was careful not to say that she pushed the student to be involved in a part of the institutional community, but that she provided the resources so that the student “was able to reach out to those people if she wanted to get more involved.” Lola recognized that “it was important for me [emphasis added] to encourage that student to try and get involved on campus and connect her with the resources that would help her do that.” During this intervention, Lola recognized that it was the student who needed to value involvement as a strategy to develop.

**Benefitting professionally.** Lola’s second theme is defined as the positive advancement and skill development that she felt within the job through the effectiveness of the intervention. Lola did not describe the result of the intervention as overly positive, but in looking back at the intervention, she recognized that “it's just really rewarding to see that a positive impact was made.” This theme also reflected the happiness that Lola felt from seeing the difference that she made in the student’s life and how that happiness impacted her job performance.

Lola effused throughout the interview that the intervention was a professionally rewarding experience for her because she saw effectiveness through the student becoming more involved. Though she does not know how the student felt about the intervention, Lola said, “I
think she felt more positive. She didn't know me beforehand I don't think. I think she felt positively about me.”

Understanding that part of the residence life professional’s job to make an impact on a student’s life, Lola reflected on the impact that she made with the student, “It's really positive. It's a positive experience. I get happy when I do that.” During her interview, Lola said that the work she did with the student was natural and beneficial for her. When she looked back on the intervention, she relayed, “Part of me is like is this even an intervention? But it's nice to remember the impact that I made on someone's life.” Though the student was the focus of the intervention, Lola recognized that she received benefits when conducting an effective intervention. She reflected on that by saying:

So being able to help a student during that time is usually really beneficial for me.

I had one of those the other day too and it was really nice being able to really connect with a student and feel like I made a difference.

The idea of making a difference in the student’s life and being able to see the student succeed was a professionally rewarding experience for Lola. She reflected that it’s “always really rewarding. Where you're able to see the benefit that you've ... how you've benefited someone.” Lola received a benefit from seeing the student become connected within the university. She explained that for her, it is very rewarding when a student realizes the “benefits in general and feeling like ‘I'm not alone’ and there are people here that care.” As she addressed the sense that she made of being a caring person institution, Lola recognized the value that providing care brought to her in her professional position. Lola made meaning of the professional benefits of being able to demonstrate that she is a caring person in her professional position.

**Extracting Essential Details.** Lola’s third theme is defined as bringing to light the deeper reasons, or hidden issues, that relate to the reasons why the student is having problems.
Lola stated that when she conducts an intervention, her tactic is “… not just focusing on the behavior of the student but really figuring out why the behavior was happening. Because a lot of times there is something underlying that's going on.” Lola recognized in this intervention that the issue she needed to discuss with the student was different than the issue that the student was called in for. Lola perceived that the behavior that the student displayed did not tell the entire story about the student and Lola took the intervention as an opportunity to uncover reasons behind the student’s initial behavior. She stated that it was her practice when meeting with students that:

… one of the things that I like to do when meeting with students is kind of figuring out what's going on because usually even with alcohol or with anything, sometimes there's something else going on.

Lola’s view that students have deeper needs than they present with influenced her approach to the intervention that she conducted. The reason for uncovering the behavioral motives of the student was to help Lola provide support for the student and help the student move toward success. Lola said that in the intervention, she sought to figure out “…yes this behavior is happening, but why is it happening” and by doing so she was able to provide the student with “the support and resources that you need.” Lola’s view of intervention in her professional position is:

We are able to effectively reach out and contact or touch base with a student about something whether it's their behavior or something else that's going on and really have a conversation or a dialogue about that to hopefully be able to change that behavior.

Lola understood that she must be able to see underlying reasons to be effective in the intervention to be able to provide support and resources to mitigate the threats to student success.
Enabling student control. Lola’s fourth theme the management of the intervention by ensuring that the student understood that they had influence over their own situation and solutions. Lola was very intentional about making sure the student felt like they had some control in the intervention, by allowing “them to start the conversation.” This theme referred to the mindfulness that Lola displayed by recognizing that the student needed to be in control of their solutions, and began by ensuring that the student was an equal their meeting. Lola’s strategy to enable student influence during the intervention consisted of making sure that the student was comfortable, giving the student control of the conversation, and ensuring that the student had all the information possible to be able to reach out to available resources.

Recognizing that the student may see the intervention as a negative experience, Lola began by “trying to build up that rapport at the beginning and letting them share what happened first…” Lola explained that it is important for her not only that the student have control, but also that she felt like she was being heard. She explained her strategy as:

I let them share with me what happened prior to letting them know what we have on the incident report just so that they feel like they're being heard and that knowing that there actually are two different sides to the story.

Lola also stressed that the student “being heard” was not her only tactic in giving them control, but that she tried to ensure comfortableness by building rapport and showing interest. Lola built rapport and comfortableness by asking “…a simple question to a student [that] may make them feel comfortable enough to open up and let you know what's going on with their lives.” The reason that Lola did this, rather than discussing the disciplinary incident, was because she felt that showing interest allowed the student “… to be able to share any backside information that I may not know about or that maybe there are personal things going on” which
helps to uncover behavioral motives and determine the proper institutional support the student may need.

By providing the student with resources and having her choose if they want to follow through or not, Lola gave the student control. Lola intervened by providing the student “with resources on campus that she could reach out to so that she felt more connected.” Enabling control meant that Lola needed to be open, allow the student to start and control the conversation, and provide resources that the student could choose to use or not.

**Receiving gratitude.** Lola’s fifth theme is defined as the personal meaning that is made from the appreciation that is shown throughout the intervention process. Reflecting on how good it felt to receive the student’s thanks, Lola believed that the care and concern that she showed during the intervention fostered gratitude for her efforts. As she reflected on the nature of the intervention she conducted, Lola talked about how the student’s attitude affected her:

I feel like conduct meetings so many times students get so much attitude or get angry. But in instances where they're not [angry], they're just very grateful and thankful that you're there to help them or you're able to provide them with some type of assistance.

Lola felt that the student appreciated the time she took to uncover the issues that were stopping the student from being successful. Lola observed that “a lot of times the students will have a smile on their face even though maybe the meeting went negatively, maybe they're still being held responsible for the conduct process” at the end of an interventional or conduct meeting. Though the situation may have started off discussing a negative behavior, Lola recognized “that's not really what the focus of the meeting ends up becoming” and that is what the student appreciated.
Lola realized it was not just the student being grateful for the interaction, but for the investment that Lola put towards success. “You can tell by the look on their face and afterwards when they shake your hand and they're just very grateful and say thank you so much for helping.” When Lola received this gratitude, she understood that the gratitude came out of the care and concern that she showed.

Giselle

Five themes emerged from Giselle’s interview: transforming self, supporting students, feeling pride of accomplishment, valuing honesty, and, developing confidence. In the next five sections, each of Giselle’s themes will be discussed in detail. These themes center on how Giselle viewed herself in the context of conducting the intervention.

Transforming self. Giselle’s first theme is defined as the internal change that was felt within the working environment after conducting an effecting intervention. This theme referred to the transition Giselle experienced due to both the preparation she made for the intervention and how she changed her approach, which showed her a distinct way to engage her authentic self within her professional position. Giselle recognized the result as self-transformative by noting that not only did she change the students she worked with, but “I transformed myself too, like that was awesome.”

This transformation occurred because Giselle consciously conducted the intervention in a different manner than she normally would. Prior to going into the intervention, Giselle was speaking to another colleague at her institution about the meeting she was going to have with the lacrosse players in her residence hall who were suspected of causing the damage. She recounted her colleague’s reaction: “He’s like, good luck, because I have met with mine and they’re just awful. He’s like, but I know they probably won’t talk back to you, because you’re pretty like, badass.” This was not the first time that Giselle had received feedback about her overly assertive
approach. Reflecting on a when she started as the residential life professional at a previous institution she worked at, Giselle remembered:

I thought back when I was at my first institution one of my coworkers ... He said I just want you to know something real quick. I’m like, okay. He’s like you’re going to have a tough time in the field, because you’re Latina. I’m like, how so? He said … your personality, you’re a little too aggressive and it doesn’t really work in the field that well so you’re going to have to tone it down a little bit.

Giselle also received the feedback from her co-worker that she was “a little too ‘hood.”’ Yet, the co-worker reassured her, “He’s like you’ll figure it out, but just figure it out quickly.”

Giselle thought about her colleague saying that she was a badass and said to herself, “I don’t think I want be badass this time.” The need for transformation was obvious in Giselle’s mind right at the time that she was about to conduct the intervention.

Understanding afterwards that the transformation centered on students being honest with her, Giselle recognized that the effectiveness was grounded in her approach to honesty within the intervention. Just as she was being honest with herself about her demeanor, Giselle wanted the students to be honest with themselves as well. Giselle realized that the assumption that a student would be dishonest with her would signal how she would emote and recognized that “it’s like my demeanor is way different, but what I don’t like sometimes is how that can affect someone wanting to be open and honest with me.”

Her decision to take a different approach during the intervention was the main factor in the effectiveness that Giselle saw. The intervention effectiveness provided her with more comfort in her role as a resident director as she felt that she had proven herself professionally.
transformation rather than effectiveness. Giselle said, “I told my supervisor. She asked me, how did it go? I told her every detail. She’s like, wow, that’s not like you. I’m like, I know.”

As she thought back to the original feedback that she received from her first co-worker, Giselle recounted that he told her that “it’s going to take you some time, but you’ll figure it out and you’re going to hit that moment where like, oh, this is how I’m supposed to do it.” Upon realizing the difference she made with the new approach Giselle said that she thought “it’s like, yes, this is what I live for.” Giselle connected her transformation and transition as a professional directly to the effectiveness of this intervention.

**Supporting students.** Giselle’s second theme is defined as the active advocacy and encouragement given to students during the effective intervention. Giselle viewed herself as a “soccer mom” for the students living in her residence hall. When asked about using the term ‘soccer mom’ Giselle immediately talked about the advocacy and encouragement that she fostered, stating:

100%, yes. I compare myself to … I don’t know if you watched the Blind Side, that mom? One of them compared me to her so I was like, yes, you know it. Yeah, it’s just like Giselle’s just like tough love, but she loves us and she’s protecting us…

Because of this strategy, she learned that she could have more successful interventions with her students. In this intervention, Giselle found reciprocal success with the students, because as she showed support for the students, the students were more inclined to display honesty during the intervention. Giselle talked about actively supporting the students within her institution. She said, “I have a whole section of a hallway just especially for the athletes like the posters of, if someone gets, one of them gets rookie of the year, sorry, of the month. They know that I’m supporting them.” The athletes know that Giselle supports them and she stated that the
lacrosse team wanted her to be a part of what they do in college. She said that the students on
the lacrosse team asked her:

Giselle, you coming to our game? I’m like, it’s away guys. They’re like, yeah, I
know. I’m like, maybe. I’m like, aww, you want me to come to your game, that’s
cool. It’s been … It’s positive. They know I’m on their side, but I have to do my
job.

Displaying this type of support meant that Giselle was making an impression on the lives
of her students and had an opportunity to have a more positive impact. When asked about the
impact she hopes to make with the students, Giselle summed up the reason behind all the things
she does to show support for her students in saying, “Honestly, it [having a lasting impression]
means that I’ve made a difference in someone’s life. Even if it’s one person, I think that’s a
privilege to say that.” Giselle showed support not only because it was her job, but also because
there was a privilege that she felt by helping students succeed.

**Feeling pride of accomplishment.** Giselle’s third theme is defined as being aware of
how self-satisfaction felt in the achievement of completing an effective individual intervention.
This feeling was bolstered due to the understanding that the intervention was transformative for
both the students and herself. Giselle said, “I can’t say I know how the students saw me,”
immediately after the intervention, “but my coworker was amazing. He was, yeah, I’m so proud
of you.” The co-worker told Giselle, “I admire what you did. You got someone to really ‘fess
up or like tell you what happened especially with those boys. I’m [Giselle referring to herself]
like, yeah, it was pretty cool.”

Reflecting on the intervention, Giselle felt proud of herself for getting all nine of the
students in a meeting with her, a distinct point of pride, by noting, “They all came. This is going
to sound cocky, but not many RDs could do that to the point where they know that they’re [the students] not going to blow it off.”

Yet, it was difficult for Giselle to fully express the enjoyment she felt by this breakthrough. Looking back, Giselle said, “I kind of feel like I don’t like talking a lot about my success so when I do have a go, I’m a little of like, yay, I did that.” Giselle smiled and said that as a celebration, “I went to Chipotle afterwards I was so happy. It was awesome.” when pointed out that this intervention emerged as a very significant event in her professional career.

**Valuing honesty.** Giselle’s fourth theme is defined as the importance that Giselle placed on the expectation of openness and candor within the intervention. Giselle viewed this value through the lens of her Hispanic culture when she stated, “When students lie or resident assistants do something kind of shady, it actually gets to me on a personal level. I have to chill out for a second, because I just think about my culture.”

Giselle placed truthfulness as having primary significance within her interventions and interactions with students, such that she judges the effectiveness of interventions by how honest they are. This is a cultural value for Giselle, which she acknowledged by saying, “I’m approachable, but I’m respected and respect is huge in Hispanic culture. Honesty, loyalty, huge like you have no idea.”

Honesty is such a huge value of Giselle’s that she addressed it in a variety of ways. When she was preparing for the intervention with the students, Giselle had to tell herself that she had to be honest, telling herself, “We’ll find out [what happened], just be honest. I’m like, ‘have some faith Giselle,’ so I literally gave myself a pep talk before I saw them so I’m glad I did.”

She even made it a point to say that she did not want to mislead the lacrosse students about what the meeting was about:
It was hard to think about it though, because I didn’t want to lie to them or make it sound like we’re going to meet for something good ... but they know, okay, this could be something good or bad.

Giselle reflected, “I really, really, really hoped that they would just be honest with me, because I don’t like liars, but they’re students.” Anticipating that the students would not be truthful during the intervention, Giselle felt that she needed to foster honesty by being honest herself, and being “...calmer and more open to listening to what they have to say.” She did so by being honest with the students, telling them, “I get it. You’re in college. You’re hoping no one finds out.”

When the students were honest with her, Giselle was surprised and admitted, “I didn’t even know how to handle that with the honesty, you know.” She was not expecting the students she was meeting with to tell the truth, and understood how stressing honesty with the students impacted the intervention:

Yeah, this one just felt really good, because who would have thought I can get nine male lacrosse athletes to have a moment of, you kind of grew up a little bit and you should be proud of yourselves for being honest with me.

Giselle mentioned, as she looked ahead to the following academic year, “It’s just nice because that hopefully sets a tone for next year if the freshmen that are lacrosse players are going to be like, just be honest with Giselle.” This moment of fostering honesty among her students was meaningful for Giselle, which she saw as beneficial for her future.

**Developing confidence.** Giselle’s fifth theme is defined by the acquisition of self-esteem as an individual within the professional position. Giselle reflected on this mixture of personal and professional development, “I can just have a conversation and not be so … like I don’t know, just kind of like aggressive. It felt good.” This comment showed that the effective
intervention experience impacted her own confidence and her professional skills, providing her with forward-looking self-esteem as a professional.

Having received feedback from a co-worker that her approach may not fit the profession of student affairs, Giselle said in the interview that she does not “… mind being someone that is tough love…” but noted that her coworker told her that being tough love is not always a good fit for the profession because she would find “… that I’m not approachable, because that defeats the whole purpose of what I do.”

Because she was meeting with nine students at once, Giselle thought about approachability when she thought to herself that she could not be “tough love” with her students in this situation. Giselle realized that “I’m going to have to do this differently. I don’t know how; it just came out.” Being a person who values honesty and respect, Giselle was not happy that damages had been done in her community, but understood that her normal response would not work in this circumstance. She stated:

   So, ‘cause I was pretty mad that day when I found out. I was like I can’t believe someone would literally destroy seven exit signs. And I just took a step back and I don’t want to be my usual self, not that it’s bad, because I wouldn’t have this job, but I wanted a different approach to see if it does work or not. I was actually thinking, it was not going to work, but I’m so happy it did.

   Even though she felt that she was going to go with a different approach, Giselle didn’t feel confident that it would work. She said, “I felt like I wasn’t going to get through to them, because I wasn’t going to approach them how I probably would have approached them like, I told you just a little bit more tough.” Even though she doubted that her approach would work, that did not deter her from changing. Giselle said, “I decided chill out and tell them. Talk to them like you don’t assume they did it, even though someone on their team did it.”
Though Giselle doubted that this unfamiliar approach would work, she said that to her “…way of thinking of like, if this goes well I’m definitely continuing this.” When reflecting on her approach, Giselle recognized, “It was hard. It was very hard, because I was talking to them like I have never talked to a student before.” The effectiveness of the approach provided a developmental experience for Giselle in that she realized that the change to her personal approach facilitated greater self-esteem as a residence life professional.

Making Sense of Effective Informal Interventions with First-Year Students

After careful and deliberate reading of the data collected from the participant interviews, five superordinate themes were identified. To be classified as a superordinate theme, there had to be at least four participants whose themes could be clustered together. The five themes were: 1) developing personally and professionally; 2) making student success personal; 3) connecting with students experiences and concerns; 4) empowering the student towards autonomy; and, 5) focusing support towards students.

Each superordinate theme answered the research question: How do professional live-in residence life staff make sense of their effective informal interventions with first-year students? Shown in Table 6 are the themes associated with each of the participants. Based on the information in the table, the following section will discuss the ways that residence life professionals make sense of information interventions with students.

Developing Personally and Professionally

The first superordinate theme is Developing Personally and Professionally, which is defined as seeing intervention effectiveness as an experience that provided residence life professionals the opportunity for individual and career growth. This growth can be a progression that occurs on either on an individual level or within the context of their job performance. Though each of the participants touched on the developmental aspect in some way, the
participants who were newer in the position recognized how intervention effectiveness provided them with development.

Table 6

Superordinate Themes and Associated Participant Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Theme</th>
<th>Participant Theme</th>
<th>Aaron</th>
<th>Brady</th>
<th>Rob</th>
<th>Julian</th>
<th>Lola</th>
<th>Giselle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing personally and professionally</td>
<td>Benefitting professionally</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirming professional capability</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing self through experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transforming self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making student success personal</td>
<td>Personalizing student success</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling pride</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling pride of accomplishment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receiving gratitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecting with students experiences and concerns</td>
<td>Connecting to student circumstances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connecting to student concerns</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assuming the quasi-parent role</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building on common experiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extracting essential details</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empowering the student towards autonomy</td>
<td>Nurturing autonomy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enabling student control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empowering the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guiding towards development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focusing support toward students</td>
<td>Activating path to success</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrowing focus of purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
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</table>

The participant who reflected on both personal and professional development was Giselle. She not only saw the intervention as professionally transformative, but also talked in personal terms about how this transformation felt. Recall that Giselle described how the intervention was transformative not only for the students but for her as well when she recognized that “I transformed myself too…”
The transformation of self was a concept that some of the participants touched on, but in diverse ways. Lola recognized she had developed when she helped a student through an effective intervention. She talked about how “rewarding” it was to make a difference in the student’s life and recognized that she understood “the benefit” that she received from “benefitting someone else.” The reason Lola found it rewarding was because she recognized that she was viewed as a resource within her institution and viewed as a person who cared. Lola explained that for the students:

... realizing the benefits and the educational benefits and just the benefits in general of just having connected to someone in the university and feeling like I'm not alone and there are people here that care.

Lola was impacted in that she grew as a residence life professional when she realized the way that the student viewed her.

As Lola found development by being viewed as someone who cared, Giselle was likewise viewed with appreciation after the intervention that she conducted. She explained that after the intervention, one of the students:

... came back and said I just want to let you know that I appreciate that you didn’t immediately think it was us. I’m like, I can’t assume, because I didn’t know, but thank you. That was all.

Like Lola and Giselle, the view of the professional residence life staff being on the student’s side was also meaning that Rob took away from the intervention he conducted. The intervention effectiveness meant for Rob that he had grown as a professional by building a relationship with his student through helping her. Building a relationship with students is one of Rob’s job requirements, so knowing that he had done so affirmed his professional capabilities.
As the intervention was happening, Rob said felt like “…a champion” for his student because he was demonstrating his advocacy skills for the student.

As in the cases with Lola and Giselle, the student thanked Rob for “listening” to her and for helping her. Rob reflected that this had both personal and professional meaning for him. Recall that Rob found it “satisfying” that he had met a job requirement, but felt personally uplifted that he had “done right by my student.”

The participants made meaning of the effective intervention as a sign of professional capability. His intervention experience left Rob feeling “empowered” in his job and that this effectiveness was a reminder that he could “do this again” if he had to. This type of empowerment is important for a live-in professional residence life staff person at the start of their career. Giselle reflected that the effective intervention meant, “I feel like I kind of grew professionally. I had a moment where I’m like, I can do this.”

Rob also expressed that he felt he had attained the skills he needed when he said, “I'm capable of doing this, and can do it in the future, or to teach somebody how to do it.” Rob added “It's, you know, that helpful reminder of [that] I can do this again, if need be.”

Julian is a more seasoned professional than Lola, Giselle, or Rob. However, the intervention that he discussed happened in the first year of his first professional position while in his graduate program. Looking back, Julian saw the intervention as a first step towards his overall development and the evolution of his “personal, professional” mission, goals, and life. Julian said that this intervention influenced him “in general” to become the person that he felt he needed to be.

Julian’s focus of personal and professional development was not so much tied to the student’s positive experience, but as the beginning of a professional development opportunity that he was exploring at the time of the interview. Looking back, Julian had the feeling this
experience “helped shape” him to become a “better professional,” and put him on his present path. When asked about being a better professional his path to become a counselor, Julian recognized that the intervention taught him how to navigate “difficult conversations.” The meaning that Julian brought out of the intervention was that of an experience which started him on his developmental path, crediting the experience as revealing to him the “type of person” he was.

The participants in this study took meaning from both the personal and professional development that occurred because of intervention effectiveness. None of the participants viewed the effective intervention as an event that had static results for their development. While Julian may have said it best, saying that this experience “jet streamed” him into the direction that he was heading; each of the participants found themselves reaping the benefit of maturity and growth within their personal and professional lives that their intervention experiences provided.

**Making Student Success Personal**

The second superordinate theme is Making Student Success Personal, which is defined as the residence life professional being individually affected after seeing how their effective interventions impacted their student’s achievement within the institution. Though the intervention happened in a professional context, the participants attached their own distinct connotations from the effectiveness of it. Some of the participants talked about the pride that they had in conducting an effective intervention, while others talked about the relief that conducting an effective intervention brought.

Intervention effectiveness was important to the participants because they developed emotionally ties to their students’ successes. A representative quote about how residence life professionals see their position as personal comes from Aaron, an experienced live-in area coordinator, who said that he saw the goal of his professional position as providing “a safe and
productive learning and living area.” Recall that Aaron talked about this goal as being “unending, unmeasurable and always incomplete.” The sense that the goal Aaron has in his position is always incomplete shows just how personally Aaron takes his job. Aaron commented on how he was personally reassured that the intervention would be effective after realizing that the student was being receptive. Aaron used the word “relief” and went further than that, expressing that he was relieved “in an emotional way” and further recognized that being relieved meant that he could move forward by providing the student the resources that she needed to “work on the rest” of the issues that she presented.

Another personal way in which some participants made sense of effective interventions was through the pride that they felt, or felt from others, after the intervention had concluded. Both Brady and Giselle talked about the self-regard they felt after their intervention was over. Brady said that during the intervention he had “that sense of pride” that he was providing a positive impact with the student. Brady’s pride did not center on solely providing the student with a good intervention experience. He also said that he was “happy” to see how the student had grown and who the student “became after his first year.” The pride that Brady felt continued after the student had graduated, and Brady felt contented by what he and the student had accomplished together.

Giselle’s pride was centered on the accomplishment of conducting an intervention that was transformative for both herself and her students. Giselle felt both self-pride in the effectiveness of the intervention and by being recognized by her co-worker. Giselle’s co-worker said to that he “admired” her job performance and said, “I’m so proud of you.” This statement affirmed Giselle’s feeling that she should make personal meaning of her success.

Both Giselle and Brady recognized that this pride also may have stemmed from the fact that they felt respected by their students. Giselle said that she felt pride that she was able to get
the students to show up for the meeting, saying that “not many RDs could do that.” This sense that she was able to get the students to attend the intervention was a sign to Giselle that the students respected her. Brady also felt he earned respect from the students in his building, but in a separate way. Recall that Brady said that his ability to intervene successful may have given him respect among other students as a resource when he said, “I think for the student, he carried like, he gave me a good name or some good street ‘cred’[ibility] amongst other students…”

Though both Brady and Aaron felt pride in the way in which they made the success of their students personal, effective interventions also affected how the participants felt. Aaron said that he felt “good” about his approach and thought that he could utilize the “good feelings” from the intervention in future interventions to duplicate that success. Brady likewise remarked on the “good feeling” that got from the effectiveness, recalling that the “felt proud” of his work with his student.

For Lola, the good feeling came from the gratitude that the student showed after the intervention had concluded. Lola remarked that when the student she intervened with had “a smile on their face” at the end of an intervention, she recognized that the student was showing gratitude because Lola took the time to know the student as a person. Lola realized that it was not just the student being grateful for the interaction, but for Lola investing in the student’s success. When the student shook Lola’s hand and said, “thank you so much for helping” to her, Lola found it personally “really rewarding” and understood that the student was grateful for the care and concern that was shown during the intervention.

From feeling self-esteem and pride, finding happiness and finding gratitude, to earning credibility with other students, the participants found that effectiveness in interventions was enhanced when the success of the student became personal to them. The participants felt that
they had helped the students they worked with succeed, and that success provided personal meaning.

**Connecting with Students Experiences and Concerns**

The third superordinate theme is Connecting with Students Experiences and Concerns, which is defined as residence life professionals finding effectiveness within the intervention through the tactic of relating with the occurrences the student has gone through or the uneasiness that they may be having. The five participants cited in this section saw themselves closely aligned with their students and to facilitate effectiveness, searched for ways to link themselves with what their students were feeling. Connecting with experiences and concerns, like Julian said, means that the live-in professional can put themselves “in that other person's shoes.”

The participants of this theme recognized the power dynamics within the relationship between themselves and the students as an issue which may prevent them from being able to connect with students. Barriers were cited as an issue that may prevent effectiveness. Barriers were of concern to Brady as he recognized that they would “mess up your ability to successfully intervene.” The reason that barriers are detrimental to effective interventions is because the participants recognized that barriers were caused by a power differential that existed between a student and a professional staff member. The residence life professional is a representative of the institution in which the student is struggling, and the student may not see the residence life professional as a resource, but may view them as an expert. The student view of the residence life professional would create a power imbalance during the intervention.

Recognizing that a power imbalance might exist, Brady focused on the commonalities that he had with the student to bring the student and himself to the same level. Noting the need for interconnection, Brady said that “it’s really important that a student can see you as a human being” rather than a part of the institution that the student is having trouble in. Brady meant that
he is looking to foster equality with the student. In saying that intervening with his student felt “almost like older brotherly,” Brady found success in setting up equality in the intervention.

Brady and Aaron are both experienced hall directors with several years of experience and like Brady, Aaron saw himself as more than just a professional staff member monitoring student behavior. Aaron saw his relationship with the student as being much closer, calling himself a brother, an uncle, and regarding himself as both as an advisor and a companion to the student. Aaron assumed a close relationship with his students, regarding himself as providing both “companionship” and “equality” with the student. Aaron’s view of his professional position was one that resonated as being more intimate than that of administrator, viewing his role as that of “a brother, or perhaps an uncle in terms of familiar relationship.”

The participants found that connecting or involving themselves in the lives of the students required authenticity. Brady said that he successfully found effectiveness through showing vulnerability to the student. Calling it “especially important” to his professional practice, Brady believed that vulnerability allowed him to initiate “a really in-depth relationship” with his student.

Julian displayed the same vulnerability that Brady did. Though not specifically naming what he did as being vulnerable, Julian showed vulnerability and established connection through telling his story. “We need people to talk to” is how Julian framed how he saw the impetus for students “to find a common connection” within the intervention experience. When asked about finding a common connection, Julian believed that he could relate to students because he understood what the experience of a first-year student might be. Alluding to breaking down barriers through hearing the experiences that a student might have, Julian talked about showing vulnerability by telling his stories. He stated that his tactic, like Brady’s, was to use “his stories”
to find the connections to the challenges that first-year students have while acclimating to a new residence hall environment.

Brady seemed to echo Julian’s ideas about connections, and noted during the intervention, he felt that his job was “to be able to articulate” about who he was as person and to find out more about who the student was and what they were “about.” This showed that Brady was not only willing to establish authenticity with the student, but also a willingness to be vulnerable about who he was. Brady felt not having authenticity only established “a barrier” which would eventually limit the success that an intervention will have.

Both Rob and Lola, though not as experienced as Brady, Julian, or Aaron, also discussed the idea that establishing a connection and relationship with their students was important to their intervention experience. Rob talked about connecting to the student’s concerns to understand what she was experiencing in her room. Connecting with the main concern that the student brought in, which was “surrounding economics,” and the fact that the student was paying for a residential experience that was not optimal, Rob told the student that he could “appreciate” her concerns. By saying that, Rob began the process of linking the economic issue to address the overarching issue, which was a breakdown in the roommate relationship. Rob did this because his institution values the holistic development of their students and Rob’s values align with the institution’s values. By connecting to the economic factor in the roommate situation, Rob was understanding that the student was concerned about being “uncomfortable in their living situation” based on the cost of living in the residential community.

While Lola did not use the word “connect” regarding establishing a link with the student’s concerns, she did talk about how she tried to uncover the deeper meanings when she intervened with the student. Lola stated that in her intervention, the first thing she did was to establish “rapport” with the student so that the student would feel comfortable with her. Lola
understood, like Julian, that a person’s story is important and demonstrated this when she told the student that there are “two sides to every story and I want to hear yours.”

For Lola, like Julian and Brady, it was the activity of storytelling that made the connection and furthered the effectiveness of the intervention. Lola said that in the intervention, her strategy was to establish “a dialogue” to determine why the behavior was happening. If Lola could figure out “why is it [the student’s behavior] happening” she felt she would be able to appropriately provide the student with “the support and resources” that they needed.

For these participants, connecting with student’s experiences and concerns was done through the stories that they heard, shared, and facilitated. By engaging the student, being authentic, and showing vulnerability, the participants were able to facilitate and enhance intervention effectiveness.

**Empowering the Student towards Autonomy**

The fourth superordinate theme is Empowering the Student towards Autonomy, which is defined as the effort and encouragement towards guiding the student to be independent in developing the solutions for the challenges they faced. The four participants in this section discussed providing support to students and investing time and effort towards their success as activities which enhanced the effectiveness of their interventions.

Julian recognized empowering the student as a crucial part of effectiveness when he recognized that while the goal of the intervention was to get the student to “move forward.” He understood that the student “can't move forward” unless they were able to properly identify the issue and be able to be “willing to do the work.”

To get to a solution to a student situation or concern, the participants of this study believed that students needed to feel that they were capable of both defining a solution for themselves and enacting it. This started with the student feeling like they are capable and
responsible. Recall that Julian provided a representative quote regarding a student self-determining their own solution:

   This is their identity, so they have to do the bulk of the work when it comes to forming their identity, but at least they have my support. ... It's just they need to be able to do that for themselves.

For the student to be able to form an identity or tackle an issue, they needed to feel capable of doing so. Nurturing their students’ capacity and empowering them to create their own solutions emerged as important in these effective interventions.

The participants discussed how they started nurturing empowerment for the students within the interventions. Aaron recognized that students sometimes “have no idea” what is going to happen prior to the intervention, but he also recognized that as the authority figure in the room, he should relinquish control because that student “may not operate on your timeline” meaning that he feels the student must be able to control experiences within the intervention to attain success in the intervention. In his intervention, Aaron promised to “not even speak half as much” as the student did and explained that this was done to “try to give her some power and feel of control” within the intervention.

   It is this concept of students being heard that the participants hold as a key to empowerment. Lola’s strategy was also to give the student control of the situation by making sure that the student is comfortable within the intervention and by letting “them to start the conversation.” Lola let the student “share with me what happened” to empower the student so that “they feel like they’re being heard.”

   Rob emphasized the importance of hearing the student and talked about the many ways in which he used that to advance empowerment. Working with students who “sometimes feel disenfranchised, and have power taken away from them” Rob gives capacity to his students by
“meeting them where they’re at.” Meeting the student means that Rob endeavored to use the language that the student did, saying “it’s not my language” that is being used in the meeting. Rob does not try to redefine the words that the students use, but strives for “really understanding” the concepts and the problems that the student has by using the words and phrases in the same way that “the student does.”

Lola also is cognizant of how effectiveness may be enhanced by allowing the student to speak. Her strategy is to ask, “a simple question” to make the student “feel comfortable enough to open up” so that she knows what is happening in the lives of the student. This gives the student control and the opportunity to participate in generating their own solutions. Not only does this show that Lola is interested in the student, but also it allows the student to share with Lola “any backside information” which is a way for Lola to uncover issues that may be impeding the student.

Language is important as it is the way that students can be empowered. Recall that Rob had to check in with the student to say, “So, I heard that word just used to describe your situation” and reminded the student that she did not have to use another’s words to describe her situation. Rob stated he did this to empower the student, because he had seen other people try to explain the student’s situation in a way that the student would not and for the student, “it’s okay not to accept that language.”

Having students be empowered and have the agency to affect their own change is a goal that Julian had as well. Julian said the “whole point of college” in his opinion, was to move the student towards being autonomous, rather than doing everything for the student. Julian, like the other participants, recognized that students should have control of their own situations.
Focusing Support toward Students

The fifth superordinate theme is Focusing Support toward Students, which is defined as directing care towards the student by understanding their needs and drawing attention to opportunities to address those needs. The four participants in this theme discussed in this section saw concentrating help towards student success as a strategy that emerged in several different ways, but what is important to recognize is how focusing happens during an intervention when the participant realizes that the student needs more support.

Brady provided a representative quote that illustrates this theme. As he thought about how he first started noticing the student presenting to him, Brady realized that his focus of attention started shifting to the student. Recall that Brady said:

I feel like when you … This is an aside … When I bought the car that I drive now, I suddenly noticed that there are 8,000 of them out on the road, right, and what are all these … What’s going on here? When you know something or when you’re in it, close, you see, I think you see a lot more of it.

Brady went on to explain that this meant he started “noticing trends” in the student’s behavior and Brady began to ask himself “what his [the student’s] level of engagement is.” As the student became more present in Brady’s thoughts, Brady began “targeting my questions” towards helping the student determine what “he was looking to get out” of his higher education experience.

Aaron talked about the difference in support that emerged during an intervention with a student by recognizing that the student needed a “different sort of guidance” to be able to succeed. Aaron also stated that providing the guidance meant that he would help the student “reflect on or through” their situation and the “value of experiences” that they could have.
The participants who noticed that they were focusing support towards their students each expressed how this support manifested in diverse ways. Aaron talked about his philosophy as to how he does his job when he said that his ideology is to “provide the conditions” in which his students could be successful. Providing guidance for students is one of the conditions where Aaron sees his support for the students being manifested. For Aaron, that meant that he tried to build “a partnership” in working towards mutual success with the student.

As a new residence life professional, Giselle used a different method to focus guidance and support in a more tangible way. Calling herself a “soccer mom” Giselle evoked the image of what focused support looked like. When asked about using the term ‘soccer mom,’ Giselle sees herself in a similar role to Leigh Anne Tuohy, the mom from the movie, The Blind Side, because she said one of her students “compared me to her” in terms of the support she provided. Giselle took tangible steps to show the students she intervened with that she supported them. She kept a “whole section of a hallway” to celebrate the athletes that she worked with, and confidently said, “They know that I’m supporting them.”

Another aspect of this theme emerged in interviews with both Julian and Rob, as they expressed frustration at not being able to provide focused support to students in the way that they would have preferred. As a graduate student, Julian felt that he had not yet acquired the professional knowledge that he should have had to conduct the intervention. He said that he felt incompetent because he “didn't have every single answer” that he thought he should have to help his student.

Similarly, Rob reflected that his lack of knowledge about the on-going roommate situation was the frustrating factor in that it delayed the support that he could provide. When asked about his feelings when he knew he had an effective intervention, Rob stated plainly that it was “frustrating.” Rob said he was frustrated because he was not able to provide focused
support sooner, and clarified that it was frustrating for him because his student had gone a long time enduring the problem in her room “without having said anything to anybody.”

When it was pointed out to Rob that his answer was interesting due to the use of the word ‘frustrating,’ he elaborated he was frustrated because the student did not take timely action with the problems that she was experiencing. He explained that it was “confusing” to him why the student would have gone so long “without having done anything about it.” He expressed the sentiment that when a student is having problems, “Somebody's got to do something!”

Julian expressed a similar sentiment as Rob, expressing a similar sentiment when he was conducting the intervention he was interviewed about. Though he felt unprepared as a graduate student to intervene, and he “couldn't wait for that chapter” to come up in class time, Julian did feel that he had a positive effect.

The reason that the participants of this study worked hard to provide support to students was because they were focused on the success of their students. For them, it was not just a job requirement that they were fulfilling by conducting interventions, but something more. Recall that Giselle said, “Honestly, it means that I’ve made a difference in someone’s life. Even if it’s one person, I think that’s a privilege to say that.” Giselle could have been speaking for all the participants. While being focused on the support for the students they intervened with was a job requirement for the participants, it was also a way for the participants to watch another person they cared about find success in their institution.

Additionally, the interventions that each of the participants experienced seemed to impact them as much as the students with whom they intervened. By focusing support towards the students, each of the participants found meaning from the interventions which enhanced their professional aspirations and provided personal and professional development.
Summary of Findings

An analysis of the data from participant interviews brought forward five superordinate themes that discussed the main research question addressing how residence life professionals made sense of the effective interventions that they conducted with first-year students.

Residence life professionals made sense of effective interventions by connecting with students through common experiential activities and through those connections, encountered important personal and professional development. By connecting to the student’s experiences and concerns, residence life professionals could not help but see the success of their students through a personal lens. The residence life professional participants also made sense of effective interventions that they conducted using focused support towards students while empowering the student towards self-sufficiency. These activities were performed through a framework of authenticity within the intervention, which created a personal connection between the student and the residence life professional.

In the following chapter, the findings will be discussed in relation to the main research question, the current literature in the field, and the theoretical framework. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research will also be addressed.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to understand the meaning that live-in residence life professionals made of the effective individual interventions that they experienced with first-year students. The central research question that this study asked was: “How do residence life professionals make sense of the effective informal interventions they have conducted with first-year students?”

This qualitative study explored the experiences, perspectives, and influences of live-in residence life professionals in the Northeast United States. This location was chosen by the researcher for this study based on sample convenience. By studying a variety of participants in various stages of their careers, the researcher was able to understand more about the overall experiences that live-in residence life professionals have had in addition to their perceptions of how their informal interventions have affected them both personally and professionally.

The following chapter will discuss the significance of the data that emerged in this study. This chapter is organized into four sections. In the first section, conclusions that have been derived from this data will be presented accompanied by a discussion of how these conclusions relate to current research and the conceptual framework. The second section will present the implications that these conclusions have within the researcher’s professional practice and within the current practices of the residential life field. The third section addresses the researcher’s recommendations for future research that could build on or expand knowledge about the practice of interventions by residential life professionals. The final section consists of concluding thoughts by the researcher.
Conclusions and Discussion

This section offers conclusions and discussions for this interpretative phenomenological analysis study. Each of these conclusions answers the main research question in some way. Four conclusions were drawn from the findings: 1) genuine feelings of caring are critical for live-in residence life professionals in providing individual interventions; 2) connecting students through institutional engagement is a strategy of live-in residence life professionals during interventions; 3) live-in residence life professionals are guided by foundational values during individual interventions; and 4) seeing the outcomes of individual interventions impacts the personal and professional development of live-in residence life professionals. The following four sections describe the conclusions and relates them to the literature that was reviewed which provided the setting for this study.

Conclusion One: Genuine Feelings of Caring are Critical for Live-in Residence Life Professionals in Providing Individual Interventions

The first conclusion drawn from this study is that genuine concern and caring by residence life professionals are critical components of the individual intervention experience. The informal interventions experiences discussed by the participants were based in the approach of caring and concern that the live-in residence live professional brought to the intervention. This conclusion relates to the superordinate theme of Connecting with Students Experiences and Concerns. This caring was shown through the personal support and access to resources that the residence life professionals provided to their students throughout their interventions.

Much of the literature regarding professional residence life staff fostering success in their roles addresses professional competencies (Munsch & Cortez, 2014; Kuk, Cobb & Forrest, 2007) focused towards success. Though Saidla (1990) mentioned caring as a competency that student affairs professionals should have when working with students in a variety of areas, caring has
since lost prominence in later discussions of competencies (Kuk et al., 2007). The residence life professionals who took part in this study were not so much worried about the professional competencies (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; CAS Standards, 2012) as they were about being competent professionals.

In this study, each of the residence life professionals interviewed addressed interventions that they conducted with students who were living in the residential community that the professional oversaw. It is well known in higher education that student success and living on campus is correlated (Tinto, 1993, 2016; Astin, 1973, 1977, 1985; Brooks, 2010) and this study supports the notion that students living in on-campus housing have easier access to institutional resources and support. Even if the residence life professional was not personally close to the student with whom they were intervening, the fact that they lived in the same community afforded the opportunity for the professional to be a close resource for the student. In their research regarding the educational impact of a student’s residential situation during their college years, Pascarella et al. (1994) discovered that living on-campus led to significantly higher student involvement and satisfaction, citing nearness to institutional resources as one reason.

The findings in this study support the research findings of Riker and DeCoster (2008), who found that the quality of the interpersonal environment of the student can be positively impacted just by knowing the residence life professional in their residential community. This point was emphasized in Brady’s intervention as eventually he was able to intervene with the student that he discussed because the student knew of him. The student connected to Brady by being visible to Brady within the community. Along with their observation that students spend more time in their residence halls than other campus locations combined, Riker and DeCoster found that the potential contact that first-year students can have with residential life professionals sets up the importance of the residence life professional as an institutional resource. However, it
is not just the proximity to the professional residence life staff that brought caring to the interventions discussed in this study. The level of caring given to each of the students during the intervention helped to spur effectiveness. This is exemplified by Rob, who displayed concern for the student he intervened with by aligning his values with the value of generous service within his institutional culture.

Munsch and Cortez (2014) singled out the ACPA and NASPA competencies as a vehicle for assessing and guiding professional development to student affairs staff. Kuk, Cobb, and Forrest (2007) looked more specifically at the competencies that student affairs administrators and faculty in student affairs academic preparation programs considered important for entry level student affairs staff to have in order to be successful in their positions. Kuk et al.’s (2007) review of literature cited the goal of the competencies having changed from being focused on professional development rather than on capability in the position.

As found in this study, the competency of caring still plays a role when intervening with students. The live-in residence life professionals interviewed each genuinely cared about the outcome for the student or students with whom they intervened. This was demonstrated by their efforts to establish a relationship with the student that focused on the mutual interest of the student being successful within the institution. It has long been recognized that faculty and staff have the ability to influence students by establishing meaningful relationships with them (Miller, 2007; Astin, et al., 2002; Bean & Kuh, 1984). Meaningful relationships were emphasized by Miller (2007), who found that there was a link between the caring behavior that a faculty member displayed towards an undergraduate student that influenced the success of that student. While Miller (2007) discussed the caring relationship between faculty and undergraduate students, she did not study caring behavior between students and institutional staff.
Moreover, the findings of this study support the findings of Vianden and Barlow (2014) who found that student affairs professionals who exhibited behaviors that were caring and focused on social bonding, such as appreciation and recognition of the student, helped to link the student to the institution in significant ways. Recognition and social bonding was represented in this study by Giselle’s actions, as she discussed the ways in which she recognized the students that she worked with and referred to herself as a “soccer mom” when explaining how she related to the athletes with whom she intervened. Kerr et al. (2004) recognized that “intervention strategies aimed at encouraging thoughtful awareness and discussion of emotions” (p. 609) could have a positive effect on student well-being in the first semester. Recall that both Aaron and Lola focused on encouraging thoughtful awareness in their interventions as a strategy of caring within the interventions they conducted.

Each of the residence life professionals in this study brought caring to the individual intervention they conducted, not because caring was a part of their position description, but because they genuinely cared about the experiences of the student within the institution. This conclusion aligns with the findings of Martin and Seifert (2011) and Martin and McGhee (2014) which showed that caring interactions that student affairs professionals have with students are associated with positive outcomes for the students. Martin and McGhee (2014) have advocated for more research on the specific impacts that occur when there are interactions between student affairs professionals and students, which this study successfully addressed. The findings of this research demonstrate that the personal investment of genuine caring for students is critical to residence life professionals during the individual interventions that they experience.
Conclusion Two: Connecting Students Through Institutional Engagement is a Strategy of Live-In Residence Life Professionals During Interventions

The second conclusion of this study is that live-in residence life professionals used the strategy of connecting students to institutional resources during their interventions. The resources that the participants connected to students were either the professionals themselves or other resources within, or associated with, the institution. This conclusion aligns with the superordinate themes of Focusing Support towards Students, and Empowering the Student Towards Autonomy. Connecting to institutional resources emerged as a strategy that the participants of this study undertook as part of the intervention directed towards helping the students overcome the challenges they were having.

Resources that support college students can be viewed as any person or event designed to support student success within the institution (Kuh, 2007). Eckles and Stradley (2012) recognized that faculty, staff, and friends within the institution influenced the success of first-year students. This strategy of connection can be viewed as attempting to foster essentiality, a concept of Argyris (1970; 2006) who posited that the more a person feels they can use their abilities within a system, the more they feel essential both within and to the system of which they are a part. As live-in residence life professionals have the ability to positively influence students through the establishment of relationships (Bean & Kuh, 1984; Astin, et al., 2002; Martin & McGhee, 2014), the role of the live-in residence life professional as a resource can help build essentiality for first-year students with whom they intervene. In this study, the concept of essentiality through connection was exemplified by the student that Brady intervened with who was able to develop connections within the institutional community and became a leader within his academic department.
There are a variety of ways in which to view the connections within the student/institution relationship and even more ways to indirectly measure engagement with the institution (Wolf-Wendell et al., 2009; Kuh, 2009). The attainment of grades, social connections, academic engagement with the institution, and graduation rates have all been cited as indicators of student connection within higher education (Krumrei-Manusco, Newton, Kim & Wilcox, 2013; Mattern & Shaw, 2010; Caison, 2005). For first-year students, the focus of their success in higher education has traditionally been measured in terms of retention and the obstacles students have had to overcome to be retained successfully (Giuffrida, et al., 2013; Kerr, et al., 2004; Gold, et al., 2000).

There are several different terms used in the research to describe the ways in which students can be connected to their higher education institution. From a higher education organizational perspective, first-year student success is often viewed only through the lens of whether a student maintains enrollment through the second year (Reason, 2009b; Wolf Wendell et al., 2009). Wolf-Wendell et al. examined the three concepts of involvement, engagement, and integration through interviews with leading higher education retention theorists and found that these terms, while having overlapping conceptual constructs, defined different foci within the relationship between the student and the institution. Involvement is thought of as a student focused activity in which the student chooses to be actively involved, while engagement is considered an institutionally centered activity where the impetus is on the institution to create opportunities that invite student involvement (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

For the participants of this study, the residence life professional’s strategy of looking for opportunities for the student to become engaged with the institution emerged as a significant factor in the effectiveness of the intervention. The participants all worked to engage the students they intervened with using available institutional resources, and found effectiveness within the
intervention by doing so. Recall that both Julian and Lola worked to provide opportunities for the students with whom they intervened to engage them with resources both within and outside of the institution. It was important to the participants of this study to engage students within the institution as way to connect them to the institution. When a student connects successfully with their institution by being academically or socially engaged (Tinto, 1993), the student can be considered to be successfully integrated within their institution (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). This connection was the central theme of the participants of the study, who all viewed connecting the student to available resources as the primary focus of the intervention. The conclusion that the residence life professionals used the strategy of engaging students with the institution underscores the importance of the institution to create activities and environments that invites the student to engage.

Of the thousands of research studies examining various aspects of retention of college students (e.g. Wolf Wendell et al., 2009; Reason, 2009a), many have relied on Tinto’s (1972) retention theory, which focuses on the first-year student’s ability to manage the internal and external changes that relate to their academic or personal ability to succeed. The connectedness factor of retention suggests that academic and social ability are interrelated and may influence one another in a student’s first year (Bean, 2005).

The opportunity for students to interact with and build social relationships with faculty and staff emerges in the literature as an important indicator of success, especially considering the many adjustment issues that are faced (Miller, 2007; Martin and Seifert, 2011; Martin and McGhee, 2014). This study showed that the strategy of the residence life professionals acting as institutional resources and building a relationship with the student they intervened with as an influential factor within the intervention experience. Study participants Brady, Rob, Giselle, and Julian, all discussed the relationships that they built with their students during their interventions.
Furthermore, this study also showed that the participants viewed students who became involved with their institution, which Argyris (1970, 2006) would regard as displaying essentiality, as a sign of student autonomy. While the strategy that emerged within the intervention was to connect students to resources, the reason that the participants connected students to resources was to nurture autonomy for the student. Aaron exemplified this through his discussion regarding how he saw his role as facilitating “inception” by helping the student acquire the skills to be successful within the institution. In doing this, Aaron and the other participants supported the Argyris (1970, 2006) notion of psychological success, an indication for effectiveness of interventions which occurs when the individual being intervened with is able to define the path to their own goals which are related to their needs, abilities, and values. The strategy of connecting students to resources through institutionally created engagement is not only for the sake of engagement, but to foster overall student autonomy within the institution, and this autonomy building emerged as important in the intervention experience.

**Conclusion Three: Live-in Residence Life Professionals are Guided by Foundational Values during Individual Interventions**

The third conclusion of this study is that personal foundational values guide the live-in residence life professional during the interventions they conduct. More than the training that they received, this study found that strong personal ideals and beliefs of the participants were the stronger influences during their individual interventions. This conclusion aligns with the superordinate theme of Making Student Success Personal.

In having foundational values which guide them during their informal intervention experiences, the participants of this study displayed alignment with Argyris’ (1970, 2006) ideas regarding how an interventionist would behave during an effective intervention. Writing specifically about intervention behavior, Argyris (2006) stressed the need for authenticity and
openness when conducting interventions in order to build trust. In bringing their personal values forward during their interventions, the participants were being authentic and building trust within the intervention experiences.

These findings additionally support the ACPA and NASPA (2015) competency area of Personal and Ethical Foundations. In this competency, ACPA and NASPA recognized that, “Foundational outcomes emphasize awareness and understanding of one’s values and beliefs, especially as related to professional codes of ethics and principles for personal wellness.” (p. 12). By understanding their own values and beliefs, the participants of this research are excelling within this professional competency.

This conclusion is congruent with the findings of Reason and Kimball (2012), who recognized that student affairs practitioners shape their approach to intervening through their personal beliefs. In examining how the participants of this study brought their values forward, there were a variety of values discussed in each of the interviews, and the participants built trust by being genuine during their intervention experiences. Julian discussed how telling his stories about growing up in a foster home helped during the intervention he conducted. Rob talked about the importance of aligning his personal values with the values of his institution. The value of involvement in the institution as a vehicle for identity development was vital for Lola’s personal development. Giselle considered the cultural value of honesty as the overriding value for both her and the students with whom she intervened. Brady talked about his value of giving grace to students, which was influenced by his experience of being the child of hearing-impaired parents. Not only were these study participants being authentic, they were displaying confidence in their approaches by bringing these values forward during their intervention experiences. Argyris (1970, 2006) cited confidence in approach and the ability to trust their own experiences as being influential indicators of effective interventions. When someone is engaged in
intervening trusts their own experiences, it helps the person being intervened with to remain open to different ideas and feelings (Argyris, 1970, 2006).

The participants in this study specifically engaged in interventions that encouraged students to consider alternative perspectives and new ideas. Martin and Seifert (2011) suggested that informal interventions help students to consider new perspectives and have a positive influence on the cognitive growth of students. Martin and Seifert found that student affairs professionals have an influential role on the growth of students and urged a re-orienting of student affairs work from structured interactions to unstructured interactions, noting that “more unstructured opportunities could have profound effects on how student affairs professionals help students achieve desired learning outcomes” (p. 404). The importance of unstructured opportunities can be seen through the influence that Giselle had on her students through her approach during the intervention and the subsequent connection that she made to student growth through the intervention experience. Dalton and Crosby (2014) called for personal coaching programs that are congruent with student affairs educational practices and suggested that there was a burgeoning need for informal interactions or interventions with students that complement academic experiences.

The results of this research and the conclusion that foundational values are essential to the effectiveness of interventions confirm the findings of Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, and Cantwell (2011), who studied high risk students who had persisted in their institutions and found that the key characteristics of institutional agents who made a difference with these students were that they had a passion for working with their students, a desire to impact students, and a willingness to invest time and energy in order to make genuine and authentic connections (p. 333).
Though not specifically studying the importance that values play in interventions conducted by residential life professionals, Reynolds (2011) found that complimentary “micro-skills” such as listening, building relationships with students, and honesty, were among the most important helping skills when working with students. Schreiner et al. (2011) pointed out that as student success is influenced by faculty and staff being genuine and authentic, there should be a premium on the quality rather than the quantity of the individual interactions that staff have with students within the institution.

**Conclusion Four: Seeing the Outcomes of Individual Interventions Impacts the Personal and Professional Development of Live-In Residence Life Professionals**

The fourth conclusion drawn from this study is that the outcome of the interventions not only affects the students, but also has significant impact for the personal and professional development of the residence life professionals. This conclusion aligns with the superordinate theme of Developing Personally and Professionally. This study delved into the meaning that residence life professionals made of effective informal interventions, and is one of the very few studies addressing the impact felt by the live-in residence life professional as they carry out a work responsibility.

Most of the studies of live-in residence life professionals examine the impact they make on college students, and not how their work has impacted themselves (Wang, Arboleda, Shelley and Whalen, 2003; Riker & DeCoster, 2008; Schudde, 2011). Davidson (2012) examined job satisfaction among entry-level residence life staff through the lens of employee attrition and found that understanding the nature of the work was a key indicator of satisfaction among entry-level staff. This study advanced the understanding of the impacts that interventions with students has on live-in residence life staff. One of the reasons that individual interventions bring meaning to the live-in residence life professional in terms of belonging in the profession could be the
increasing amount of responsibilities that they have (CAS Standards, 2012; ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

Past research of entry level residence life staff has focused on challenges that entry level residence life professionals face within the institution (Sawyer, 2012), or competencies which entry level residence life (Haggerty, 2011) or student affairs professionals (Okuma, 2016; Schneider, 2014; Miller 2011) should possess. There is literature (Munsch & Cortez, 2014; Kuk, et al., 2007) which also focuses on the competencies that student affairs professionals should acquire through developmental activities rather than how they are affected by their interactions with students. A limitation of the study of competencies written for student affairs professionals is that there is no distinguishing between those professionals working in residential life positions and professionals working in any other areas within the student affairs field, such as career services or student activities (Martin & McGhee, 2014). The responsibility of intervening was acknowledged by the participants of this research, who saw their intervention experience as an affirmation of their professional capabilities and an indication of competency within the student affairs profession.

Argyris (2006) discussed a benefit that an effective intervention has on the interventionist, stating that conducting an effective intervention will “increase the probability that the interventionist will experience himself, and be seen by others, as an effective interventionist” (p. 183). Supporting the Argyris (2006) notion of development, the personal and professional development of the participants of this research were impacted in a positive manner by the outcomes of their intervention experiences. The participants not only felt this positive impact internally through their own realization, but also through the response they received from supervisors and co-workers. This realization is exemplified by Giselle, who experienced more
positive feelings about herself when she tried a new way to approach students and experienced success.

In this study, the participants cited the approval of their supervisors and more experienced peers as being influential. This is because supervisors and peers act as role models and have expectations for the participants in their professional role. This backs up the findings of Pittman and Foubert (2016) who found that supervisory styles and opportunities for mentoring to be the two most important variables which influence professional identity, with the supervisor playing the most significant role of professional identity development for new professionals. This study supported this finding as all of the participants addressed the professional expectations about interventions that their supervisors or more experienced colleagues had of them in some manner.

The informal individual intervention experience was very important to the participants in terms of their professional identity development regarding their work as a residence life professional. This finding supports Reason and Kimball (2012), who found that it was the beliefs and experiences that student affairs professionals had which informed actions they took within their professional position. Riker and DeCoster (2008) pointed out that a professional residence life staff member who knows students on an individual basis “can have a potent impact upon the quality of the interpersonal environment” (p. 82), and it should be noted that the interpersonal environment that the student lives within the residence halls also includes the residence life professional. As the quality of the interpersonal environment for the student improves, it also improves for the staff member living in that environment (Davidson, 2012). This study supported the notion that the outcomes of the intervention experience has meaningful impact on the way in which the live-in residence life professional sees themselves and the ways in which they view their own development within the student affairs profession.
Section Summary

Four conclusions were drawn using an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data. First, genuine feelings of caring are critical for live-in residence life professionals in providing individual interventions. Second, connecting students through institutional engagement is a strategy of live-in residence life professionals during interventions. Third, live-in residence life professionals are guided by foundational values during individual interventions. Fourth, seeing the outcomes of individual interventions impacts the personal and professional development of live-in residence life professionals.

Each of these conclusions answered the research question in that residence life professionals made sense of effective informal interventions through the care they showed to students; through engaging students with the institution; through the values brought to the interventions; and, by the personal impacts that they felt. This sense-making of the participants afforded them the opportunity to reflect on their own ideas or personal theories (Reason and Kimball, 2012) in determining how to conduct effective interventions with the students in their institution.

These conclusions demonstrate that it is important to understand the individual and personal meanings that resident directors make of their informal intervention experiences because it is critical to the residential life and student affairs practice of developing and supporting residence life professionals within the higher education institution. It is also critical because these intervention experiences occur with students, whose success are linked with institutional success.

Personal and professional experiences are interwoven and play a vital role in interventions that residence life professionals conduct. It is incumbent on the higher educational institution to ensure support for live-in residence life professionals before, during, and after the
interventions that they conduct. In doing so, higher educational institutions are supporting the student. The next section, Implications for Practice, provides some specific suggestions for practices to support these conclusions.

**Implications for Practice**

This section is divided into two different sub-sections. The first sub-section will explain how this study has transformed my own professional practice. The second sub-section will discuss implications for the field of residence life based on the conclusions of this study.

**Implications for My Practice**

There are several ways in which this study has already influenced my own professional practice. The findings of this study have helped me understand that live-in residential life professionals bring a tremendous amount of caring to their position.

This understanding has helped me to be even more appreciative of the live-in residence life professionals with whom I work. Since genuine caring is a value that live-in residence life staff bring to their work, understanding the findings has helped me to transform my practice to display the appreciation and caring more intentionally to my staff. Because of this, I have found myself more present in expressing thanks and concern to my staff when discussing the informal interventions that they have conducted, or any other critical part of their professional performance.

Another implication for my personal practice is the concept of giving grace and how I have found myself using this practice with students. Because of the reverential way that Brady talked about giving grace, it has resonated with me since the day of Brady’s interview. For Brady, giving grace was about letting the student “mess up a little bit” which meant that he gave them room to be themselves. Brady was not saying that he was enabling the student to engage in behavior which may be harmful, but allowing the student to be who they are. This is a shift in the
way in that I have always thought about approaching students, which had been focused since my graduate school days on trying to engage students in intentionally developmental experiences. I had seen developmental experiences as parochial and neutral, and I now see that giving grace is a more positive way to show acceptance of who the student is which more naturally fosters development. It has enhanced my professional practice to adopt the giving grace approach, because it fits with the positivity with which I approach my professional responsibilities.

Another implication is that the caring and positive approach to student development that I have incorporated has already changed how the department I lead hires and develops live-in residence life professionals. Of the many qualifications that a candidate can have, it has become important within the hiring process that we search for candidates with prior experiences that provide evidence of a caring attitude. We proactively search for candidates who display positivity throughout the application and interview process. Caring and positivity have become important criteria in the selection of candidates to bring to campus for day-long final interviews. For example, interviewers who meet with and interact with candidates brought to campus to interview for a live-in residence life position are asked to answer is the statement “Rate the positivity of this candidate” on a scale from one to five, with one being ‘low’ and ‘five’ being high. Interviewers are also asked to back their rating with a specific comment regarding why they rated as they did.

Another implication is the change that we have made when on-boarding new professionals after they have been hired. The professional development we have adopted in my department focuses on activities which immerse the live-in professional within the life of the institution, including becoming knowledgeable about campus resources and on developmental opportunities which enhance their own perceived professional needs. This model intentionally mimics the developing connections within the institution strategy that the live-in residence life
professionals use when intervening with students. By connecting the professional with the institution, they can find their place and feel more comfortable within the institution, thereby being more successful employees.

A final implication is regarding the planned rewriting of all of the professional staff position descriptions in my department, including both live-in and live-out staff. This rewriting will include how the characteristics of caring and positivity play within the description. At the present time, my department focuses on these two capacities in an informal way during the hiring process, but these qualities should be known to the candidates prior to the application process and should be written into the job description and job advertisement in some way. Adding these two capacities to the job description will add transparency to the hiring process for potential candidates, and better advertise the values of the department. To do this, I may add a line to the overall position description which outlines the ideal candidate as having “demonstrated ability to bring positivity to engaging opportunities with students and staff.” Adding positivity as a competency to the job descriptions may be easier than adding caring, as positivity is an element of the Personal and Ethical Foundation of the ACPA and NASPA (2015) competencies, while caring is not specifically stated, but implied within the competencies.

Finally, I want to note that doing this study has helped clarify the experience I want to pass along to the live-in residence life professionals in my institution to have when intervening with students. There is always a live-in residence life professional on-call for the entire campus. This individual is expected to be the on-site manager for any demanding situations which arise within the residence halls outside of normal working hours. These professionals are owed strong and intentional leadership from their supervisors which role models the values of the institution, support for their own professional aspirations, and recognizes of the vital work that they do.
Implications for the Residence Life Field

The findings and conclusions of this study also lead to implications for practice within the field of residential life. Since this study is based in the practice of informal interventions, it should be recognized that these interventions have the potential to be conducted throughout all the student affairs areas within higher education. While the implications in this section are centered around the work the residence life professionals do, they should be generalized to the field of student affairs.

The first implication for the residence life field centers on the fact that the informal nature of interventions with students places the process of hiring and training of residence life professionals as extremely essential functions for the institution. The need for hiring and training practices which highlight authenticity and resource knowledge emerges as important to the duty of intervening with students. This study revealed that live-in residence life professionals use intervention experiences to foster student autonomy by connecting the student with resources within the institution, and that the foundational values that the professionals brought to the intervention played a role in relating to students concerns and experiences. The foundational values that the residence life professionals in this research brought into the intervention was the lens through which the professionals interpreted and conducted the intervention.

Another implication of this research is that there is a need to understand how informal intervention experiences affects the residence life professional. Though the literature about how living on campus affects students is widely known, not much is known about how residential life professionals influence students living on campus on a day-to-day basis, or how residence life professionals make sense of their unique experience. It seems strange to think that the professionals who have the potential to have the most contact with students on a college campus (outside of the faculty) are the campus professionals that research knows least about. If you
consider the intervention as consisting of an interaction between a student and a live-in residence life professional, it makes sense that what happens in that intervention affects both the student and the professional. Interaction is not a one-way street and the intervention, as this research shows, holds meaning to the residence life professional. This understanding has implications for the professional development of the residence life professional. Both live-in residential life professionals and their supervisors should have specific training about informal interventions and create opportunities within the work day for residence life professionals to reflect on and therefore make sense of the interventions that they conduct. The participants of this research not only saw the successful intervention as giving them a sense of belonging within the institution, but also saw it as providing them with concrete specialized development that increased personal confidence in their skills as professionals. These experiences are developmental and there should be institutional support for making meaning from them.

A third implication is that there needs to be more training on conducting informal interventions that focus on the residential life professional being familiar with the resources that are available within the institution. The participants in this study placed importance on the engagement with students and considered it an intervention strategy when working one on one. Therefore, expanding the knowledge for professionals around student engagement would be of high importance. The core components of the residential life professional’s training should ideally consist of both micro-counseling skills to help students remediate problems they may be having, and strategies to engage the student within the institution. The key activities through which the participants fostered effectiveness when a student was having a problem within the institution was not only to discuss that problem with the student, but also to help the student find ways to be more successful within the community. The participants of this study not only
focused on the problem that the student encountered, but also understood that they needed to show the student how to problem solve for themselves.

One final implication of this research is that professionals who lead departments of housing and residential life within the student affairs profession need to better understand and incorporate the role modeling of skills that they want their live-in residence life professional to emulate. The participants of this research each discussed the influences that past or current supervisors had in the way that they approached their interventions. Whether they know it or not, experienced professionals who head departments of housing and residence life are role models for their live-in professionals, who pay attention to the values of the department as they decide how to approach their positions. This study underscored that when a residence life professional is intervening with a student, they are on their own with the student, without immediate support from their supervisor. Proper training for individual interventions is important but the live-in residence life professional also needs support, role-modeling, and mentoring from their supervisor to bring their best practices forward. The best experiences that the participants of this study had were with supervisors who were positive role models and they emulated the best practices of their supervisors in their informal interventions.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study’s findings allow for an understanding of the meaning that residence life professionals made of the informal interventions that they conducted. While these findings and the study’s conclusions may be helpful to the field of residence life and student affairs, there are several recommendations for further research not only on the topic of interventions, but also on the present responsibilities of live-in residence life professionals. Recommendations for further research are:
1. Future research should include both qualitative and quantitative studies that focus on the meanings that live-in residence life professionals specifically make within their position. The live-in residence life professional is an entry-level student affairs position and staff occupying that position generally do not stay longer than 3-5 years. Current research tends to focus on entry-level student affairs workers, which includes participants of every discipline, rather than digging more deeply into the work that entry-level residence life professionals do. As such, the important work that live-in residence life professionals perform is under researched. Considering the increasing responsibilities that live-in residence life professionals have within the institution, there should be research into how these responsibilities affect these professionals, if only to address potential burnout and increase retention in the profession.

2. This suggested further research into the role of the live-in residence life professional should encompass the experiences and impacts that residence life professionals have within all of their job responsibilities. The two primary ways in which students connect themselves with their institutions are through academic or social activities within their institutional communities. Yet, there is a paucity of research about the roles, experiences, and impacts that live-in residential life professionals have while connecting students in their institutions. More research on the many critical roles that residence life professionals can have in their institutions would be important in supporting student success.

3. This study was conducted by interviewing six live-in residence life professionals in New England. The nature of IPA does not allow a comprehensive study of all residence life professionals at a given time. A study involving residence life
professionals from a different part of the country may yield different findings. New England colleges and universities tend to be small or smaller mid-sized institutions. Duplicating this study in large universities using both qualitative and quantitative methods may bring to light other meanings that live-in residence life professionals may have.

4. Some of the findings of this research bring forward questions which could be explored in depth. There are several areas that this study focused on that could benefit from future research focused on the live-in residential life professional experiences. Each of the conclusions, for example, merit further study on their own. Future studies could make a deeper examination of the personal impacts that interventions have on the residence life professional or the role that foundational values specifically play in all of the responsibilities that a live-in residence life professional has.

5. This study was conducted by a researcher who has been working in the residence life milieu for over 25 years, and while the researcher was acutely aware of bracketing, the findings may be influenced by his experiences. A future study should be conducted by educational researchers who are not affiliated with the housing and residence life functions to determine if the findings would be congruent with this study or not.

6. A final area of future research that emerges is the effect of the 2016 FLSA law, which was scheduled to be take effect in December 2016. In May 2016, changes were made to the Fair Labor Standards Act with increased the minimum salary of overtime non-exempt employees from $27,660 to $47,476. Higher education institutions struggled with the decision of either increasing the amount of pay to
their live-in residential life professionals to keep that at the non-exempt level, moving them to an hourly paid position, or eliminating the professional position altogether in favor of using graduate students. This would be what Schlossberg (2011) would call a non-event transition, because action was taken by higher educational institutions in anticipation of the law being enacted, yet was not enacted in December 2016. A study of how residence life professionals who have been moved to an hourly paid position or graduate students who have taken over former full-time residential life positions make sense of the individual interventions that they conduct may yield results that are different than in this study.

**Concluding Thoughts**

This study attempted to shed light the meaning that residence life professionals took from the informal individual interventions that they conducted with first-year students. Overall, the study demonstrated that informal interventions have a profound effect on the live-in residence life professionals within the institutional community. The stories shared by the dedicated residential life professionals who participated in this study not only illuminate the field of residential life within student affairs, but also help to understand the experiences that professionals working in other areas within the student affairs profession have when meaningful interactions with students occurs. These findings also show how residence life professionals benefit from professional acceptance and institutional belonging through the intervention experiences they have.

The findings of this research study highlight the important role that residential life professionals can have on the success of first-year student on campus. Residence life professionals have a duty to intervene informally with students and need professional support
and development that addresses the skills needed to develop meaningful relationships with students. This study found that the six participants held profound meanings around the interventions that they had conducted, not only because they saw the impact on the student, but also because they recognized the impact that these interventions had on them as well. These findings represent a contribution to the existing body of literature in that it illuminates the experiences that live-in residential life professionals have had when they informally intervene with students, and clarifies the developmental needs and support outside of normal training activities that these professionals require.

I believe that student affairs professionals who lead departments of housing and residential life, like myself, have asked the live-in professionals they work with to intervene individually with students without understanding the support that these professionals need to do so. Live-in residence life professionals, who are the generally the youngest, least experienced staff within a student affairs division, have the most contact with students than any other student affairs staff. It is important to pay attention to, research, and uncover the experiences that these staff members are having with an eye to developing them both personally and professionally. By supporting live-in residence life professionals, we can improve the experiences they have, which has the potential to improve the student experience and ultimately benefit the institutional organization.
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Appendix A

Institutional Research Board Approval

(Attached)
NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: April 1, 2016  IRB #: CPS16-02-12
Principal Investigator(s): Atira Charles
                        Phillip Bernard
Department:            Doctor of Education Program
                        College of Professional Studies
Address:               20 Belvidere
                        Northeastern University
Title of Project:      A Phenomenological Study of Effective Individual
                        Interventions by Live-In Residence Life Professionals
Participating Sites:   N/A
DHHS Review Category:  Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents:     One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval:   12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: MARCH 31, 2017

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
   recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
   information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must
   be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
   prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
   other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix B

Letter/Email to Participants

(Attached)
Dear Colleague:

I hope this letter finds you doing well. I am a doctoral candidate at the Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. I am involved in an important research study titled *A Phenomenological Study of Effective Individual Interventions by Residence Life Professionals*. This research is intended to discover the background and practices which inform residence life professionals who have effective informal individual interventions with first-year students. Because you are a residence hall director who works with and intervenes with first-year students, you have insights into what makes up an effective individual intervention. I would be honored to have you participate in my research.

If you volunteer for this study, you will participate in at least one face to face individual interview. I will schedule the interview at a mutually agreeable time and at a location of your choice. The first interview will last approximately one hour. Participation is voluntary and you will be compensated with a $25.00 gift card for your participation. If you would like to participate, please fill out the consent form and send it back to me via email or in the envelope provided.

I would like you to know that your insights about a specific intervention that you conducted to help a first-year student succeed at your institution are important and may help administrators and faculty at other institutions of higher education understand the practices that they can use to help students. In addition, you may also benefit by knowing that you are contributing to the knowledge related to the residence life and student affairs profession in higher education.

I look forward to receiving your materials and having this opportunity to speak with you about the intervention skills that you successfully employ to support first-year students. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at bernard.p@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Atira Charles, by email at a.charles@neu.edu.

Sincerely,

Phillip M. Bernard
276 Walden Street #2
Cambridge, MA 02138
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

(Attached)
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask the researcher any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are residence life professional who has potentially had an effective individual intervention with a first-year student.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research will be to discover the background and practices which inform residence life professional have effective informal individual interventions with first-year students.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to be interviewed one time during a face to face meeting to discuss your experiences with the subject. This interview’s audio will be digitally recorded.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take approximately 1 hour. You may be asked to do a follow up interview at a time and place that is convenient for you.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no reasonable foreseeable risks, harms, discomforts or inconvenience.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
You may benefit by knowing that you are contributing to the knowledge related to practices within the field of residential life and the student affairs profession in higher education.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researcher on this study will see the information about you and listen to the audio recordings of the interviews. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project. Your personal information will be protected. The interviews will be sent to an on-line transcription service. After transcription, audio recordings will be destroyed, as audio is considered identifiable information even as no names are included. Transcriptions will be destroyed after the writing is completed.
**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would have otherwise.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
If you have any questions or problems regarding this study, please contact the principle investigator, Phillip M. Bernard at bernard.p@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact the Dr. Atira Charles at a.charles@neu.edu if you have any additional questions.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
You will be given a $25 gift card upon completion of the interview.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There are no costs to participation, other than time taken during each interview.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**
At this time, there is no other pertinent information that the participant needs to know. If you agree to be interviewed, you will be contacted after the researcher receives this form.

**Yes, I agree to take part in this research.**

---

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

Printed name of person above __________________________

Please return in envelope provided to:

Phillip Bernard  
276 Walden St. #2  
Cambridge, MA, 02128

Or copy and email to bernard.p@husky.neu.edu.

Thank you very much for your consideration.
Appendix D

Data Collection Protocol

(Attached)
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EFFECTIVE INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTIONS BY RESIDENCE LIFE PROFESSIONALS:

The purpose of this research will be to discover the experiences, background, and practices which inform residence life professionals who have conducted effective informal individual interventions with first-year students. During this student, the researcher will be asking the residence life professional to recall and discuss a single effective informal individual intervention that the residence life professional conducted. This study is being done by a doctoral student from the Northeastern University School of Continuing and Professional Studies through face-to-face interviews in the Northeast United States.

Questions:

1. Tell me about your background and how you came to be working as a residence hall director with first-year college students.
   
   *Possible prompts:* How well were you trained? What type of interventions training did you have? What does being a residence hall director mean to you?

2. At this time, I am going to give you a few minutes to think about an effective informal intervention that you have had with a first-year student. Please let me know when you are ready to discuss this.

3. Describe for me a time when you conducted an effective individual intervention with a first-year student?
   
   *Possible Prompts:* What prompted the intervention? How did you know you had to do an intervention? What does the word “intervention” mean to you? How did it affect you when you knew you had to do an intervention?

4. From your perspective, what made this intervention an effective one for the student?
   
   *Possible prompts:* What does effective mean to you? How did you feel?
5. Describe for me what doing this effective informal intervention means to you?
   
   *Possible prompts:* On a personal level? On a professional level? How does that feel?

6. Describe for me how well you knew the student prior to the intervention?
   
   *Possible prompts:* Describe your relationship with the student now? Why do you describe it like that? How does that feel?

7. Tell me about the skills or tactics you used when you intervened with this student?
   
   *Possible prompts:* Where did you learn these? How did you use these? How did it feel to use these? What influenced using these?

8. What were the influences that helped you conduct this intervention?
   
   *Possible prompts:* Personal cultural influences? Institutional cultural influences? Values?

9. What were the prior experiences that you had that helped you during this effective intervention?
   
   Prompts: Personal? Professional? What meaning did you make about your experiences during the intervention? How did that make you feel?

10. What was your behavior like during this effective individual intervention?
   
   *Possible prompts:* Why? How did it feel?

11. How do you see yourself after this intervention?
   
   *Possible prompts:* How have you thought about yourself since this intervention? Why?
   
   How does that make you feel?

12. How do you think other people see you after this intervention?
   
   *Possible prompts:* Students? Work/professional colleagues? Supervisors? Friends? Partner?

13. Are there any other thoughts that you may have about this effective intervention that I haven’t addressed?
Prompt: How do you feel about ‘reliving’ this experience? Why?

Thank you for your participation in this interview process. Your name and employment location will be kept confidential. I have three quick follow up questions.

1. Would you like to receive a copy of the transcription of this interview and/or the final report from this study?

2. Would you allow me to speak with you again if I need to follow up on any questions?

3. What questions do you have for me regarding what I have asked you today?

Adapted from Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009.