The 24/7 Student Affairs Professional: A Study of How Residence Directors Make Meaning of Wellness

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by

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how residence directors, an entry-level professional staff position in student affairs administration, make meaning of wellness within their job function in order to respond to the complex needs of residential students in a diverse college environment. Utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis as the methodological approach, data was gathered from eight self-identified residence directors through semi-structured interviews. Three main super-ordinate themes emerged from the participants as having a significant impact on residence director wellness: (a) the role of institutional culture on the wellness of residence directors, (b) the role of departmental culture on the wellness of residence directors, and (c) the day-to-day residence director experience. Implications for future research and recommendations for prospective and current residence directors, supervisors of residence directors, student affairs leadership, and student affairs graduate program faculty are presented.
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Dedication Page

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“If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward.”

— Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experience of the residence director, an entry-level professional staff position that has direct oversight over a residential community. Specifically, this study sought to understand how residence directors make meaning of their wellness, and how the various aspects of their position impact their wellness. This study focused on residence directors at institutions within the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States of America. At this stage of research, wellness was defined as a state of being in which one’s mind, body, and spirit are in alignment to promote optimal health (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000). Knowledge generated was expected to broadly inform student affairs and residential life practices. Data obtained from this research was intended to provide insight into the various responsibilities residence director position, and the experiences had by individuals who serve in this role. The goal was to inform student affairs practitioners of how to best support individuals who serve as residence directors. This study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to qualitatively explore the research problem.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to residential life and the residence director position, to provide context and background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study is discussed next, drawing connections to potential beneficiaries of the work. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research question are presented to focus and ground the study. Finally, the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study is presented and explained.
**Context and Background**

Within divisions of student affairs at higher education institutions, offices of residence life or residential living are one of the most significant units responsible for the co-curricular development of college students. Numerous universities and colleges offer opportunities for students to live in a residence hall during a time period in which the student is enrolled in coursework. In regards to the significance of residence life, research supports that the residential living experience is one of the most significant ways students are involved on-campus, which positively contributes to several outcomes, including retention. Additionally, living on-campus proved to be a significantly positive experience for students regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Astin, 1999). As the residential environment plays a significant role in the lives of college students, the professional staff that provide oversight in these communities also play a crucial role.

While most residential living programs have a chief officer who is responsible for the overall direction of the program, there exists one or more entry-level professionals, typically referred to as a residence director. Due to the fact that student affairs administration as an academic discipline is considered “hidden” because it is not taught at the undergraduate level, entry-level positions in student affairs, including the residence director position, typically require a master’s degree in education, with an emphasis on higher education administration, counseling, student affairs, or college student development (Richmond & Sherman, 1991). The residence director position serves as the most common entry-point for new entry-level staff, and approximately one-third of master’s degree graduates pursue residence director positions (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Herr & Strange, 1985). The residence director has several responsibilities as
they lead the co-curricular development of a residence hall or dormitory, and as such plays a crucial role in the development of college students. In addition, the residence director has demands that differ from other entry-level staff outside of residence life, such as being required to live on-campus, typically in a residence hall amongst traditionally aged college students, work both within and outside of the traditional 9-5 timeframe, as college students live full-time in residence halls, and be a first responder to campus emergencies within their areas of responsibility. Pratt, Shambarger, Johnson, and Anchors (1999) noted that due to the multiple responsibilities of residence director position, the role is highly complex and demands lifestyle adjustments. As the position responsibilities and overall lifestyle aspects of the residence director position are unique, this study seeks to understand how residence directors understand their own wellness, and how the various aspects of their position positively or negatively contribute to their overall wellness.

As the residence director position is quite comprehensive, the residence director position is associated with high levels of burnout, and professionals tend to stay in these roles much shorter, in comparison to other entry-level positions in student affairs (Herr & Strange, 1985). This is of great concern due to the fact that the role of resident director is essential to residence life operations. St. Onge, Ellet, and Nestor (2008) articulated the significant influence residence directors play in the overall leadership of residential communities in all institutional types that universally contribute to student wellness and success. Several researchers concluded that the quality of life of resident directors serves as the primary reason as to why an entry-level student affairs staff member excludes the position from their interested opportunities, or chooses to leave the position prematurely (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Belch, et al., 2009; St. Onge et al., 2008).
Due to the aforementioned challenges of the residence director position, wellness is an important factor. Several aspects of the residence director position, such as poor work-life balance, managing student crises, living on-campus, and atypical work hours has the possibility to contribute to poor wellness. As there exists several barriers to positive wellness, when residence directors practice good wellness, they perform better at their job, which serves as a benefit to the success of college students that live in residential communities. Additionally, positive wellness of residence directors serves the managers of residential communities, as they typically have to provide broader support that exists beyond the individual student level. As burnout is referenced as a negative outcome of residence directors, positive wellness can also contribute to the retention of these professionals, which ultimately provide stability and continuity towards residential life programs.

**Rationale and Significance**

As the role of the residence director is important to the overall function of the residential life office, residence life supervisors, managers, and directors must be provided with a way of addressing the problems regarding wellness. Pratt, Shambarger, Johnson, and Anchors (1999) discovered a relationship between how residence directors perceive their work climate, and residential student satisfaction. As such, residence directors who exhibit positive signs of wellness, particulate as a result of a positive work environment, will best serve college students.

In regards to the literature pertaining to wellness, while wellness has been explored generally in regards to general student affairs positions (Beeler, 1988; Moxley, 1990; Renn & Hodges, 2007), there exists little research pertaining specifically to the wellness of residence directors. The majority of related studies have been found in dissertations. Aldana (2009)
recently completed a quantitative study focused on the wellness of residence directors, the
literature is devoid of a qualitative approach to better understanding the wellness of these
professionals. Weaver (2005) and Jennings (2005) also completed dissertations pertaining to the
experience of residence directors, but mainly focused on job satisfaction.

As the role and responsibilities of the residence director position differ highly in
comparison to comparable student entry-level positions, more information is needed to better
understand the lived experiences of residence directors, with a particular emphasis on their
wellness.

The principal research question for the proposed study is: How do residence directors
make meaning of their own wellness within the context of their job function? Several groups of
individuals within housing administration can benefit from this study. First, due to the
significant role that the direct supervisors play in the lives of residence directors, supervisors will
enhance their understanding of the lived experience of residence staff. The information learned
by managers can inform the ways in which they interact, motivate, and direct residence directors,
with the goal of understanding the causes of both good and poor wellness. Additionally,
supervisors of residence directors typically have once served in residence director positions
themselves. As such, information discovered may or may not be consistent to the supervisor’s
own experience, especially when taking in consideration differences in social identities, such as
gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and others not listed. This will aid in helping
supervisors best meet the needs of their diverse staff, and again aid in understanding how they
may or may not be a contributing factor to their staff’s wellness.
Residence Life department heads will also benefit from this study, as due to their positionality both within the department and the institution, may not be astute to the experiences of entry-level staff. As department heads have overall responsibility for student development in the entire collection of residence communities, information gained from this study will bring to fruition how to best support residence directors. Additionally, since department heads have some involvement in the recruitment of entry-level staff, the information gained from this study can potentially inform how a department head best recruit and retain residence directors.

Finally, both current and prospective residence directors will benefit from this study. Current residence directors may use the information gained in this study to better understand their own wellness and if their experiences are similar to residence directors included in the study. Additionally, current residence directors may gain direction on strategies to implement to aid in their own quest for wellness. This study will arm prospective residence directors with information pertaining to the position that they might have not known previous to pursuing positions, as institutions choose which information to highlight and promote during job search processes. Additionally, prospective residence directors will be aware of the signs of both poor and good wellness, and may be able to be more intentional about practicing good wellness in their job, or identify schools with vacant positions that have an emphasis on good wellness.

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Residential Life**: defined as an office or department that has formal responsibility for the overall experience of college and university students who reside in campus housing. The general functions of Residential Life include but are not limited to, residential education and residential operations.
Residential Education: This term is generated from a common belief that residential life provides outside-the-classroom learning opportunities for students, such as learning how to successfully live with a roommate, and navigating conflict. This term also includes the various practices Residential Life Staff use to provide educational opportunities for students, including, but not limited to programming (commonly organized by the residence director), and addressing negative student behavior.

Residential Operations: This term describes all aspects to the Residential Life that focus on the physical aspects of residential communities, such as residential community furniture, amenities, and overall condition of the community.

Residence Director: defined as an entry-level professional staff member whose primary work function is to manage the day-to-day operations of an on-campus residential community. Many colleges and universities use different titles for Resident Directors, but essentially consist of similar job responsibility. Examples of other job titles that are similar to the residence director include but are not limited to: Resident Director, Hall Director, Residence Life Coordinator.

Live-in Professional: Refers to a residence director that physically resides in a residence hall or complex that houses residents, typically a building for which they have primary oversight.

Live-on Professional: Refers to a residence director that physically resides on the actual campus, but not within a residence hall or complex that houses residents for which they are responsible.

Manager: defined as a professional staff member who serves as the formal supervisor of residence directors. Typically, these individuals have more professional work experience in
residence life than residence directors, and more often than not have previously served in the role of residence director at a college or university.

**Entry-Level Position**: defined as typically the first professional position held by a student affairs practitioner. Additionally, entry-level positions typically require the least amount of professional experience required to effectively serve in the role. Entry-level positions, such as the residence director position, typically include formal supervision of paraprofessional students or graduate students.

**Residential Community**: defined as one or more on-campus dwellings that serve as temporary “homes” to students while they are actively enrolled at the associated college or university, and function as the primary area of responsibility for the residence director. Examples of dwellings consist but are not limited to: traditional dormitories, apartments, and houses.

The following section of this chapter will include a description and discussion of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Healthy Workplace Framework which will serve as the theoretical lens for this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Introduction and Exposition of Framework**

The World Health Organization, founded in 1948, developed the Healthy Workplace Framework in 2009, to address research that supported that poor wellness in the workplace leads to increases in work-related illnesses, injuries, deaths, and a decrease in overall productivity in the workplace globally (Burton, 2010). The WHO has had a longstanding history of investigating and assessing occupational health since 1950 and promotes a healthy workplace
environment, as both a benefit and value for both the organization and the individual. This study will utilize the WHO Healthy Workplace Framework as the theoretical lens from which to examine how residence directors make meaning of their wellness within the context of their job function. As the WHO Healthy Workplace Framework outlines four critical aspects of workplace wellness. These aspects will ground this study and provide a perspective from which to examine residence director wellness. This section will provide exposition of the framework, define the framework and its signature aspects, explore an application of the framework, explore the critique of the framework, and provide justification for the use of the framework in the proposed study.

**Occupational Health and Wellness**

Occupational health and wellness are one of the fundamental issues that organizations like the WHO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) examine, in large part due to significant workplace physical and mental injuries and deaths that persist globally. The ILO reported that annually, work-related injuries and illness result in approximately one million deaths worldwide (International Labour Organization, 2016). The WHO estimated 160 million new cases of work-related illnesses globally; reports cite that back pain, hearing loss, lung cancer, and depression are the most common symptoms of poor workplace wellness practices (Burton, 2010, p. 7). While these facts represent an aggregate representation of all individuals in the workforce, The WHO noted that there do exist several differences in workplace wellness when factoring in demographics such as ethnicity and gender (Burton, 2010; Friedman & Forst, 2008; Loh & Richardson, 2004). While Loh and Richardson (2004) discovered that foreign-born workers in the United States suffer more occupational fatalities than non-foreign born workers,
Friedman and Forst (2008) discovered that African-American and Hispanic workers experience higher physical injuries in the workplace than White workers. This discrepant phenomenon deserves attention.

**Business Ethics and Legality of Workplace Wellness**

Ethically, the concept of "do no harm" is a value widely accepted in most cultures and religions. The WHO (Burton, 2010) argued that enterprises have a moral responsibility to operate in a way that promotes positive occupational health and wellness of employees. Globally, there have been several examples of businesses and enterprises that have publicly shown to cause significant harm to its employees and thus the greater communities it serves. Unions have served as one example of organizations helping to hold businesses more accountable for their treatment of employees. Such public incidents have forced businesses to examine their own ethics, and critically consider the positive and negative effects of workplace wellness. The WHO argued that attention to positive workplace wellness have several benefits, including decreased work-related stress, decreased absenteeism, and increased productivity (Burton, 2010, p. 5-6).

From a legal perspective, the WHO addressed that most laws in countries have legal provisions that require certain conditions to exist in all workplaces. The WHO stated that "differences in the distribution of political and economic power have a profound influence on the work environment and health of workers" (Burton, 2010, p. 62). The ILO, International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS) serve as examples of organizations committed to the advocacy of legislation that implements laws to promote the occupational health of employees and set standards for all
enterprises to adhere to. The WHO and ILO share the foundational understanding that the health, safety, and welfare of employees is of the upmost importance. They also believe that governments and businesses are either (a) not aware of how to create and sustain a healthy workplace environment, (b) do not value workplace wellness, or (c) do not have the knowledge and/or skills to create such an environment. It is these conditions that paved the way for the development of the WHO Healthy Workplace Framework.

**WHO Healthy Workplace Framework**

As occupational injuries, hazards, and deaths are prevalent in industries around the world, the WHO Healthy Workplace Framework assists with the development of practical solutions to address global workplace wellness in a variety of industries. The WHO Healthy Workplace Framework was developed from the 2008-2017 World Health Organization's Global Plan of Action on Workers Health. One outcome of the Plan of Action was WHO's discovery that worker health is not only impacted by the traditional understanding of occupational risk, but other factors such as employee's marginalized identities (e.g. gender, ethnicity) and lack of access to health resources played a considerably negative impact. As such, the WHO charged itself with the goal of developing a comprehensive instrument that provided organizations with a method to self-assess its "health", taking into consideration all of the factors that play an impact. The Healthy Workplace Framework serves as "global" model that can be applied across a variety of organizations, sectors, and global cultures. While this global model can serve as a helpful framework for which organizations can assess its healthy wellness, the WHO noted that the model is not "one size fits all" and is intended to be "flexible". It is important that organizations
apply this framework taking into consideration their organization's history, culture, and the characteristics of an employee (Burton, 2010).

Central to the understanding of the Healthy Workplace Framework is the definition of a healthy workplace. The WHO provides the following definition: "A healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety, and well-being of workers and the sustainability of the workplace" (Burton, 2010, p. xii).

**Four Avenues of a Healthy Workplace**

According to the framework, there are four categories or “avenues” (terminology the WHO uses) critical to the assessment of a healthy workplace:

- Physical Work Environment
- Psychosocial Work Environment
- Personal Health Resources
- Enterprise Community Involvement

The following model depicts the four avenues of a healthy workplace:

These distinct categories all-together influence a workplace, and assist in assessing its "health". The model also depicts areas of overlap within the avenues and highlights that this model is both distinct and integrative in nature. In addition to the four avenues, the Healthy Workplace Framework also incorporates a continuous improvement process that guides organizations through successfully assessing, planning, and improving their workplace practices. The following is a model that depicts the continuous improvement process:
According to the framework, if a workplace positively addresses all four avenues, it creates an environment in which the overall wellness of an employee is valued, protected, and supported. However, the model emphasizes that, while all four avenues must be considered by organizations, some avenues may be of more concern to organizations than others at certain times. As the model is global in nature, the political, cultural, and socioeconomic climate in which an organization is situated in may determine which avenues of the model are of most importance to addressing workplace wellness. The model ascertains that each avenue does not necessarily exist on its own in a vacuum, but can overlap into other avenues. An example of an overlapping concern would be an employee not given proper tools to safety complete their work,
and a lack of clear policy on the organization's commitment to providing proper tools to their employees to safely complete their job.

**Physical work environment.** This avenue focuses on the physical aspects of the work environment, and how they impact employee wellness. Specifically, the WHO, defined Physical Work Environment as “part of the workplace facility that can be detected by human or electronic senses, including the structure, air, machines, furniture, products, chemicals, materials and processes that are present or that occur in the workplace, and which can affect the physical or mental safety, health and well-being of workers” (Burton, 2010, p. 77). From a global perspective, not all enterprises and organizations operate in safe physical environments, or provide the proper tools for employees to work properly in unsafe spaces. Additionally, research shows a steady increase of physical injuries that occur in the workplace globally (Hamalainen, Takala, & Saarela, 2006). Additionally, not all governments have similar laws and standards regarding work conditions (International Labour Organization, 2016). While all four avenues of the model are significant to the holistic understanding of workplace wellness, the potential conditions of the physical work environment contributes the most to workplace fatalities, and thus cannot be ignored.

**Psychosocial work environment.** This avenue focuses on the specific organizational culture which an employee experiences on a daily basis, and how aspects of organizational culture can negatively contribute to an employee's wellness. The WHO (2010) defined this as “the organization of work and the organizational culture; the attitudes, values, beliefs and practices that are demonstrated on a daily basis in the enterprise /organization, and which affect the mental and physical well-being of employees” (p. 79). Workplace stressors is another way in
which to define the Psychosocial Work Environment. Examples such as poor supervision, lack of job clarity, poor communication, discriminatory work environments, harassment, and poor management contribute to workplace stress and thus a poor psychosocial work environment. Significant research supports successful interventions that prove to mitigate poor psychosocial work environment. Jordan et al. (2003) stated that top-level management of an organization can play a key role in addressing workplace stress by intentionally developing long-term stress intervention measures beyond a single training. Michie and Williams (2003) discovered that functional organizational communication and supportive management styles with clearly defined work roles contribute to less workplace stressors. Caulfield, Chang, Dollard, and Elshaug (2004) promoted that the most successful work stressor interventions have to be implemented throughout the organization, and thus become a part of the organization’s culture, in lieu of focusing on one single employee.

**Personal health resources.** This avenue focuses on the organization's policies and practices that actively contribute an employee's personal health. The WHO (Burton, 2010) defined this avenue as “the supportive environment, health services, information, resources, opportunities and flexibility an enterprise provides to workers to support or motivate their efforts to improve or maintain healthy personal lifestyle practices, as well as to monitor and support their ongoing physical and mental health” (p. 80). Another common term for this avenue is “health promotion”. Examples such as a lack of breaks given, no access to healthy food, health benefits, and overall workload can contribute to a work environment that lacks attention to personal health. General research supports the notion that the development of intentional health promotion initiatives, such as exercise programs, nutrition education, healthy snacks, and
smoking cessation promote a healthy workplace (Sockoll, Kramer, & Bodeker, 2009). The WHO advises that the key to successful health promotion within organizations is the involvement of employees in the planning and execution phases of health promotion initiatives, such as clinics to improve health literacy, wellness clinics, and developing collaborations between the organization and municipal health resources.

**Enterprise community involvement.** This avenue operates within the paradigm that organizations are a part of the greater physical and social community, and that an organization has a responsibility to address the concerns that are present within the community. The WHO (Burton, 2010) defined this avenue as “activities, expertise, and other resources an enterprise engages in or provides to the social and physical community or communities in which it operates; and which affect the physical and mental health, safety and well-being of workers and their families” (p. 81). Examples such as communities with poor health services, lack of safety, prominence of natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes), and lack of literacy contribute to poor workplace health, because these "community problems" are in fact the problems employees bring with them to work. Organizations that enact community involvement interventions are seen to be going “above and beyond”, due to the nature that there is no requirement for a company to participate. As such, this avenue is in alignment with the ethical value of non-malfeasance. Enterprises who engage with the community can benefit beyond the value of “doing the right thing”, but can improve their branding and reputation (Industry Canada, 2000).

**Application of Theoretical Framework**

Kar, Subita, Kalaiselvi, and Archana (2015) utilized the framework to develop a custom workplace model that best fit a software industry. Kar et al. noted that while the framework was
instrumental in helping its industry properly assess and move toward a culture of positive wellness, the framework was only useful if the particular organizational culture was open and supportive to a healthy workplace. The researchers stated three factors that, in conjunction with the Healthy Workplace Framework, were crucial to successful implementation: (a) the creation of a "healthy workplace committee" to take full leadership of the implementation of a program, and to effective communicate aspects of the implementation to all levels of management and staff, (b) full support required by all levels of both management and staff, and (c) proper assessment of the implementation process.

**Critique of Theoretical Framework**

The WHO Healthy Workplace Framework is unique in that it poses that the (a) physical work environment, (b) psychosocial work environment, (c) personal health resources, and (d) enterprise community involvement within which all employees and patients contribute to workplace wellness. While the WHO has completed extensive work to identify each of these “avenues” of influence, there exists a lack of a body of critique of this model (Burton, 2010). The WHO cited one the reasons for this is given to the "extremely limited amount of scientifically solid, evidence-based data on the effectiveness of many health protection and promotion interventions" (p. 43). Grawitch, Gottschalk, and Munz (2006) developed the “Stimulating Health and Practice Effectiveness” (SHAPE) Framework. Based from the work of Pfeffer (1996; 1998), this framework emphasizes healthy workplace practices and how these practices are implemented into various organizational settings. The five main components of the framework are: (a) work-life balance, (b) employee growth and development, (c) health and safety, (d) recognition, and (e) employee involvement. In conjunction with this framework, the
authors developed the Practices for the Achievement of Total Health (PATH) Model. The PATH Model situates the SHAPE Framework with employee well-being and organizational improvement (p. 132). The SHAPE Framework and the PATH Model served as the main foundations of the American Psychological Association (APA)’s Psychologically Healthy Workplace program. The SHAPE Framework and PATH model shares congruency with the WHO Healthy Workplace Framework in that all models recognize the responsibility that organizations have in cultivating a healthy environment for employees. Both models also acknowledge that organizations have their own unique culture and that that effective wellness promotion will look different from one organization to the next. One significant difference between the SHAPE Framework and WHO's Healthy Workplace Framework is the latter's holistic focus on workplace wellness. The Healthy Workplace Framework recognizes more factors of workplace wellness than the SHAPE Framework, and thus highlights that there are aspects beyond psychosocial wellness, such as physical work environment, that play a role in workplace wellness.

**Justification of Theoretical Framework**

While the WHO Healthy Workplace Framework was intended for enterprises to both assess and move toward a healthy workplace, the model can also be used to assess wellness on an individual level. As the model clearly depicts the variables that contribute to a healthy workplace, by utilizing the model by allowing a single employee to assess wellness within their own workplace, workplace wellness can be examined "from the ground up" rather than a "view from the top" approach. Additionally, as the framework assumes that an enterprise has to both desire and want to improve in the area of wellness, the use of this model at the individual
employee level provided valuable information about an individual's own assessment of wellness, as well as insight into an enterprise’s commitment to wellness. As such, the goal of this study was to utilize the WHO Healthy Workplace Framework at the individual level to understand how residence directors make meaning of their own wellness within their job function, which will provide both valuable insight into the staff member, as well as the organization in which they are employed. While the complete Healthy Workplace Framework includes (a) Four Avenues of a Healthy Workplace and (b) Continuous Improvement Cycle, this study only focused on utilizing the “Four Avenues of a Healthy Workplace”. The study did not utilize the Continuous Improvement Cycle, as that aspect of the framework is intended to be directly utilized by enterprises and organizations at the macro-level.

**Conclusion**

The role of the residence director is vital to not only Residential Life offices and Programs, but to colleges and universities due to their distinctive role in supporting students (Pratt, Shambarger, Johnson, & Anchors, 1999; St. Onge et al., 2008). As their roles are significant to student success, it is important to gain a comprehensive understanding of how residence directors make meaning of wellness. This is important as residence directors play a significant role in the experience and success of residential students. residence directors who exhibit poor signs of wellness will not be able to serve and support residential students at a high level, which may lead to student dissatisfaction. residence directors who exhibit positive signs of wellness will perform their job at a high level, which will result in residential students being served well, and acknowledge the research that supports the positive benefits of on-campus living for students (Astin, 1999; St. Onge et al., 2008). This proposed study on how residence
directors make meaning of wellness within the context of their job function applied the WHO's Healthy Workplace Framework to better understand the various aspects of wellness that affect residence directors. By understanding how these staff interpret their wellness, utilizing the WHO Healthy Workplace Framework, will residence life managers and student affairs practitioners in general, be able to best support these individuals so they can perform to their best abilities, and thus provide the support students need to successfully navigate higher education.

The literature review in Chapter Two presents the extant scholarship on residence directors. Chapter Two will provide context for the residence director position as well as literature pertaining to wellness. Chapter Three describes the research design.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The residence director position serves as the most common entry-point for new entry-level staff to the student affairs profession, and plays a crucial role in the development of residential college students, due to the significant role on-campus living plays in the success of students (Astin, 1999). Residence directors, in comparison to other entry-level positions in student affairs administration, have unique responsibilities, such as living on-campus within the dormitory environment, serving as a first responders for student and campus emergencies, and frequently working outside and beyond the typical 9-5 timeframe. The residence director position demands a unique lifestyle that is subject to high turnover, poor wellness, and low satisfaction (Herr & Strange, 1985; Pratt, Shambarger, Johnson, & Anchors, 1999) however, it is simultaneously essential that the residence director exhibit positive signs of wellness to set a positive example and support students in their development in college.

The goal of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of residence directors and how they maintain a level of wellness and self-care that lets them respond to the complex needs of residential students in a diverse college environment. Staff members in this role face particular challenges regarding their own wellness and health in response to the complex circumstances students face in college. Research has not effectively addressed how these entry-level staff members manage wellness. This study aimed to comprehensively identify both positive and negative aspects of wellness experienced by residence directors. Identifying these complex dynamics can assist residence directors in better navigating their professional roles and could help increase job satisfaction.
The review of the literature presented three themes that focused around the wellness of residence directors in the university and college setting. The first theme provides literature focused on wellness. The next theme focuses on the field of Student Affairs as a profession. The third and final theme of this literature review focuses on residence life as a function of student affairs.

Wellness

Wellness is a concept that has been heavily researched and discussed in the fields of psychology and counseling, as well as higher education administration. Throughout literature spanning various disciplines, the definition of wellness has been explored and modified. The World Health Organization, founded in 1948, was one of the first organizations to provide a comprehensive definition of wellness (Burton, 2010). The organization defined wellness as a positive state of being in which physical, mental, and social components contribute to one’s best self. Dunn (1959) viewed wellness as a function of one’s behavior. Dunn’s (1959) definition of wellness centered on how well one is functioning to their best potential, taking into consideration one’s environment as a factor. Dunn also added wellness is not dichotomous—that one isn’t either well or not well; but that it is on a continuum, and that the goal of wellness is to progress to a higher level of functioning (p. 282). Interestingly, in 1961, Dunn augmented their definition of wellness by omitting the role of the environment as a contributing factor contributing to wellness.

Ardell and Robins (1980) viewed wellness as an approach to life. They defined wellness as a way to approach life with the goal of realizing potential to live positively. Similar to Dunn (1961), Ardell and Robins (1980) saw wellness as focused on physical, mental, and social
elements, but added that a goal of wellness is to be a "whole person" and to provide care and consideration for not just the physical, but the mental and social. Ardell and Robins (1980) asserted that wellness is an active choice an individual can make, with agency, and that those who are committed to wellness find value and worth in being their whole self (p. 433).

Providing significant emphasis as to how an individual takes care of themselves, and the types of behavior that inhibit wellness, Travis (as cited in Beeler, 1988) viewed wellness similar to Dunn (1969) and Ardell and Robins (1980) in regards to the physical, mental, and social aspects of one’s life, however asserted that striving for wellness takes action on the part of a person, and the physical, emotional and social aspects of wellness requires intentionality and dedication (p. 282). Travis (as cited in Beeler, 1988) argued that the intentionality and dedication required to achieve wellness was accomplished by intentional positive decision-making, and that someone who achieves wellness has actively made positive decisions regarding the daily aspects of their lives that have the potential to impact their own wellness.

Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2001) defined wellness similar to Dunn (1961), Ardell and Robins (1980), and Travis (as cited in Beeler, 1988) in regards to the focus on the physical and emotional components of one’s self, however, introduced the importance of one’s spiritual self as a component. Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2001) stated that wellness is achieved when there is an alignment of the mind, body, and spirit, and believes that all humans are naturally capable of achieving a state a wellness (p. 252).

Over time, Travis and Ryan (2004) expanded on their definition of wellness, incorporating Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer’s (2001) perspective on wellness being a state of mind, and is a tangible construct that every human can achieve. Travis and Ryan (2004) added
that not only do all humans have the ability to achieve wellness, but that each human possesses the right and volition to choose whether or not they wish to achieve wellness. In alignment with other literature (Myers, 1992; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2001), Travis and Ryan (2004) ascertained that even if an individual exhibit challenges in specific aspects of wellness (e.g. a person who is physically handicapped, suffers from depression) that they still possess the ability to make progress in achieving wellness. Seligman (2008), rooted in applied psychology, provided a new perspective, and argued that most definitions of health and wellness focus solely on the absence of disease. Seligman (2008) created a new term, "positive health", defined as one exhibiting high function of various biological and subjective aspects of health (p. 3).

Models of Wellness

In regards to depicting the components of how wellness is defined, researchers developed models that emphasized the important tenets of the term. Thus, several wellness models have come to the forefront of research. Myers, Luecht, and Sweeney (2004) ascertained that wellness models provide a popular and integrative way to understand how humans function in a given environment (p. 194). This section explores the development of those models.

The Wheel of Wellness (WoW) (Myers, 1992; Sweeney & Witmer, 1991; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992) was the first wellness model developed in the field of counseling (Myers & Sweeney, 2004), and utilized a holistic approach to understanding wellness and the prevention of negative aspects to one’s health over their life (Myers, Luecht, & Sweeney, 2004. p. 194). According to Witmer and Sweeney (1992), one of the strongest aspects of the Wheel of Wellness is that the model is firmly rooted in the intersections and unions of psychology, education, anthropology, sociology, and religion (p. 140). The WoW focuses on three dimensions: (a) work
and leisure, (b) friendship, and (c) love, which is based from Adler's (1927) theory of individual psychology (Adler, 2013). The WoW only highlights characteristics that have been proven by research to play a positive role in quality of life and overall well-being (p. 194). Central to the WoW is the concept of spirituality, as Myers, Luecht, and Sweeney (2004) claimed that it serves as the important characteristic of those who are healthy and exhibit good wellness in various aspects of their life (p. 196). In regards to the composition of the WoW, Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000) noted that the WoW proposes that healthy individuals exhibit sixteen different characteristics, incorporates 16 characteristics of healthy people depicted through concentric circles and spokes. The characteristics were identified using medical and psychological research, and represent the various components of wellness that one can experience through their life (p. 262). The following serves as a graphic representation of the WoW:
Figure 3: Wheel of Wellness (WoW). Graphic that illustrates the Wheel of Wellness (WoW).


The WoW was then later enhanced to incorporate intersections between wellness and various aspects of diversity, such as cultural and gender identity (Myers & Sweeney, 2004) and self-direction, which centers on how an individual exerts discipline and control in to regulate their everyday actions (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000, p. 253). In regards to utilizing the WoW, the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle (WEL) inventory (Hattie, Myers, & Sweeney, 2004; Myers & Sweeney, 2004) was a survey instrument developed for individuals to assess their own wellness based from the WoW. Two other models of wellness were referenced in literature. Ardell (2011) developed a model that focused on eight dimensions of wellness: psychological and spiritual, physical fitness, job satisfaction, relationships, family life, leisure time, and stress management (p, 136). Additionally, Hettler (1980; 1984) proposed a six-dimension model of wellness that includes the focused on the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, occupational, and spiritual components of wellness.

**Criticism of Modern Wellness Models**

Reese and Myers (2012) criticized contemporary wellness models like the Wheel of Wellness (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992) by highlighting the fact that such models ignore the impact that the natural world has on human wellness. They coined the term "ecowellness" to include the missing aspect of wellness models that focuses on the positive contribution to wellness that nature plays. Kennedy (2014) provided another critique of current
wellness models. Highlighting the omission of the impact technology use has on wellness. Kennedy (2014) argued that technology has a significant global impact that has the ability to effect wellness, and that no contemporary models account for this factor (p. 113). While Kennedy (2014) asserted that the positive benefits of technology on wellness outweigh the negative, they argued that wellness models need to be updated to address technology's affects.

**Wellness Initiatives**

As a way to address wellness issues that arise in the workplace, companies and business have adopted incentivized workplace interventions to improve the overall wellness of their staff. As wellness is an important value to counseling and other helping professions. Myers (1992), rooted in the field of counseling, argued that if the counseling profession desires to promote an identity based on wellness and self-care, then counseling practitioners will need to actively engage in their own wellness to bring validity to its value and importance (p. 139). Considering counseling is an important aspect of student affairs administration (NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 1987), this declaration is relevant for administrators, including those who work in residence life and housing, and thus should be practiced in order to properly model to other staff and students.

While a healthy workplace promotes many benefits to both employees and employers, successful workplace wellness interventions contribute to lower health insurance costs, a significant expense for companies (Buchmueller & Valletta, 2017). Effectiveness of wellness promotion initiatives, however, is mixed across workplace sectors. While Blake, Zhou, and Batt (2013) observed positive long term success with wellness interventions within a British
healthcare organization, Liu et al. (2013) and McCarthy, Mudge-Riley, and Persichetti (2013) observed little to no benefits to employees or employers.

Robbins and Wansink (2016), versed in the research that supports the role managers have in promoting workplace wellness, developed a study to explore the incentivization of wellness promotion. Specifically, the researchers assessed manager attitudes toward the development of a program that tied managerial salary increases to the promotion of workplace wellness initiatives. Robbins and Wansink (2016) discovered that managers have a vested interest in a sustainable and healthy work environment, and supported tying their own salary increases to the promotion of wellness initiatives for their subordinates.

Conclusion

Wellness has been thoroughly explored in various academic disciplines, and throughout history, literature has shown how the definition has expanded to include various considerations such as environment, state of mind, optimal health, privilege of being well, and they also consider who has the ability to be well. Complementing the definitions of wellness, several models of wellness exist in literature, with each having its particular focus and reflective of the time in which it was developed. As time progressed, models began to evolve and new models surfaced. While these wellness models provide a strong historical lens to understanding how wellness was both viewed and examined, modern day research highlights aspects of said models that have not been adapted to reflect the advance of time, specifically regarding the role technology and the environment can play (Kennedy, 2014; Reese & Myers, 2012). Literature also highlighted the development of wellness intervention and initiatives as ways for workplaces and organizations to address issues of wellness of employees. While organizational wellness
initiatives did not always substantiate an improvement of employee wellness (Blake, Zhou, & Batt, 2013; Liu et al., 2013; McCarthy, Mudge-Riley, & Persichetti, 2013), managers and supervisors can play an important role in establishing norms that support employee well-being (Robbins & Wansink, 2016).

**Student Affairs**

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 1987) stated that the purpose of higher education is for individuals to learn and create knowledge, development as individuals, and to serve the greater society (p. 7). Student Affairs serves as a significant component of the overall makeup of divisions that exist in a college or university. While Student Affairs shares the general understanding that its work shall not compete or interfere with the academic mission and classroom experience, it serves as a partner to academic affairs in the responsibility of engaging college students in learning (NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 1987; 2004). While academic professionals, particularly faculty, facilitate learning of material and lessons within the context of the academic classroom, student affairs practitioners engage with students on learning about themselves, as well as "out-of-classroom" education that complements the in-classroom experience. When trying to understand what learning is, within the context of the college student, one defines learning as a transformative and comprehensive experience that fuses the learning a student achieves inside the classroom and the holistic development of a student (NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 2004, p. 2). Additionally, learning takes into consideration the vast ways students engage with the world around them, and
acknowledges that the diversity of students impact how they learn and develop (p. 3). As such, it is important to value the role of student affairs administrators and that their function of engaging students in the process of learning legitimizes their role as a partner in both higher education and the overall development of college students.

**Wellness in Student Affairs**

Research focusing on the role of wellness within the context of student affairs has been sparse throughout several decades. Significant existing literature pertaining to the wellness of student affairs professionals depicts that due to the counseling nature of the work of student affairs professionals, along with a large workload, professionals are known not to exercise good wellness, which leads to high levels of stress, poor work-life balance, high burnout, and decreased job satisfaction (Beeler; 1988; Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005; Burke, Dye, & Hughey, 2016; Carpenter, 2003; Renn, Jessup-Anger, & Doyle, 2008; Sandeen & Barr, 2009). Typically, the high demands of student affairs professionals are met with inadequate compensation to justify the frequently added responsibilities of these staff, which also contribute to higher levels of stress, low morale, and staff turnover (Moxley, 1990). In an attempt to better understand how the work environment affects the experience of student affairs professionals, Beeler (1988) noted that colleges and universities are unique cultures, particularly in regard to the integrated relationships of faculty, staff, and students. Moreover, colleges have a particular culture that has a drastic influence on the lifestyles of faculty and staff. Beeler (1988) argued that colleges and universities have both an overt and covert culture that directly influences employees' lifestyles, sometimes dramatically.


**Wellness Programs at Colleges and Universities**

Recognizing that wellness is a common issue faced by university professionals, researchers for decades have probed the creation and assessment of wellness programs for faculty and staff (Burke, Dye, & Hughey, 2016; Haines et al., 2007; Moxler, 1990). Haines et al. (2007) noted that health promotion programs were developed in benefit of both the employee and employer. Employees desired more services and education focused on disease prevention and health education, while employers wanted a better educated workforce, as it would result in lower costs in employee health benefits. Moxley (1990) developed a pilot physical wellness program for student affairs professionals at their institution that attempted to improve staff job satisfaction and decrease turnover. The study concluded that while participants in the program did not experience any significant improvement of job satisfaction, they were less likely to turnover, compared to non-participants. This study highlighted that while physical wellness is an important factor, tangible improvements to the on-the-job experience and direct interventions to improving job satisfaction are necessary. Burke, Dye, and Hughey (2016) piloted a study focused on improving the emotional well-being of student affairs professionals through the teaching of self-care techniques. The study determined that student affairs professionals’ intentional self-care activities to be beneficial to their overall wellness.

Haines et al.’s. (2007) study yielded positive results similar to Moxey’s findings (1990). Haines et al. determined that colleges and universities that provide health promotion programs focused on exercise and wellness positively impacted the overall wellness and health of the employee, measured by a decrease in absenteeism due to illness. Haines et al. (2007) articulated
the benefits of an employer focusing on a holistic perspective of employees, and seeing employees as more than just staff, but individuals with needs.

Within a higher education context, van Straaten and du Plessis (2016) explored how to enhance the well-being of support services staff. Using a case study qualitative method and appreciative inquiry as its theoretical framework, the researcher identified that factors such as a positive relationship between colleagues and supervisors, good salary and benefits, equality between support staff and academic faculty, and manageable workload to be the factors that most contributed to support staff well-being.

**Entry-Level Student Affairs Staff**

Within divisions of student affairs, staff serve various roles throughout the organization. While senior administrators focus on the oversight of entire departments or programs, entry-level staff provide the “on-the-ground” support necessary for departments to function at a high level. Typically, new professionals to student affairs serve in entry-level roles to gain experience. New professionals are usually defined as full-time staff who are brand new to student affairs, and who have zero to five years total work experience (Renn & Hodges, 2007, p. 367). Cilente et al. (as cited in Renn & Hodges, 2007) highlighted (a) receiving support, (b) understanding job expectations, (c) cultivating and promoting student learning, (d) progression within the field, (e) developing supervision skills, and (f) developing multicultural competencies as critical to the overall growth and development of new professionals (p. 369). Renn and Hodges (2007) stressed that entry-level staff should develop a focus on establishing balance early in their roles as new professionals in order to develop a habit of practicing good self-care. The authors also argued that the quality of professional life needs to have a higher focus among entry-level
student affairs administrators, particularly due to the transitional challenges these staff have to negotiate in their first professional experience.

Regarding how entry-level student affairs staff can best manage the professional challenges within their position, Cooper et al. (1999) proposed four factors that entry-level staff should address: (a) seek personal development, (b) pursue opportunities for professional development, (c) understand the environment of higher education and the employing institution, and (d) develop strong leadership traits. While these factors may contribute to positive signs of wellness for staff, Cooper et al. (1999) did not recommend an attention to wellness as a factor to manage professional challenges.

**Burnout in Student Affairs**

When examining literature regarding wellness is student affairs, a lack of balance and burnout are two common themes (Berwick, 1992; Herr & Strange, 1985; Keener, 1990, Tack, 1991; Toma & Grady, 2002; Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory, 2005, Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998). Specifically, the literature ascertains that student affairs professional suffer from achieving balance due to the unique nature of the work. One common result of poor balance is burnout. Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1997) identified emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of personal accomplishment in a job as the main contributing factors of burnout (p. 4). Reflecting the tenets of this definition, Lee and Ashforth (1993) developed a three-dimensional model that highlighted those three main factors of burnout. The model expanded the components of high burnout to include (a) environmental/organizational factors, (b) personality factors, and (c) demographics, such as gender and race.
Blix and Lee (1991) focused on the importance of organizational fit between an employee and the workplace, and the relationship between organizational fit and burnout. They observed that an employee's motivational style has a significant impact on their satisfaction at their job. One example of a motivational style is autonomy, where an employee thrives well in an environment where they are given freedom and independence. Blix and Lee (1991) suggested the importance for employees to actively select a career and work environment that best suits their motivational style, and that employees may experience significant challenges in their level of satisfaction in their job if they are not working in an organization that is deemed a good fit.

Research has also found that the various social identities of student affairs practitioners, such as gender and gender expression, play a significant role in their overall wellness, and particularly burnout (Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998; Beehr, Farmer, Glazer, Gudanowski & Nair, 2003, Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997). Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1997) identified that while women experienced emotional exhaustion at a higher rate than men, men experienced higher levels of depersonalization and lower levels of personal accomplishment. Consistent with Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1997), Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, and Kicklighter (1998) determined that in the student affairs workplace, women also reported more emotional exhaustion, and that men and women experience work differently, as well as have different needs in order to experience success in their position. Expanding the literature to consider gender expression, Beehr et al. (2003) explored the relationship between occupational stresses and factors that aid and negate the condition. Interestingly, in regards to the relationship between gender and occupational stress, women
and/or individuals who identify with more feminine traits react more positively to receiving social support as a way to mitigate occupational stress.

**Wellness of College Students**

Research in higher education has shown that wellness plays a significant role in the lives of college students, and that the higher education environment plays a significant role in wellness in general (Sivik et al., 1992). Traditional aged college students are forced to navigate significant changes throughout their lives during college; the transition from high school to college, developing new social networks, adjustment to college academics, and navigating sexuality and sexual health, have been noted as events that directly correlate with student wellness (Conley, Travers, & Bryant, 2013; Dusselier et al., 2005). Additionally, college students are unique in that they have specific developmental and psychological challenges, such as a lack of self-care, to navigate (Archer et al., 1987; Conley, Travers, & Bryant, 2013; Hermon & Davis, 2004). From a theoretical foundation, Chickering's (1969) psychosocial theory focuses on college student developing as a whole person, and focuses on seven 'vectors' which include managing emotions and developing autonomy (Chickering, 1969; Widick, Parker, & Knefelkamp, 1978; Hermon & Davis, 2004).

Poor mental health is one of the most common leading causes of poor overall wellness amongst college students (Carton & Goodboy, 2015; Conley, Travers, & Bryant, 2013; Dusselier et al., 2005; Gallagher, 2012). University and college counseling centers have reported an increasing trend in the number of clients seen at college and university counseling centers, and the varied types of issues college students are addressing with counselors over the past thirty years (Gallagher, 2012). Stress, use of alcohol and other drugs, self-harm, and suicidal ideation
have been identified as leading negative results of poor wellness of college students (Dusselier et al., 2005; Gallagher, 2012). Additionally, the academic commitment of college students becomes secondary, as students who suffer from poor wellness exhibit a lack of focus on and involvement in the classroom (Carton & Goodboy, 2015).

Conclusion

Wellness in student affairs is a true concern, and literature supports that the role of a student affairs administrator is demanding due to the counseling nature of the work performed, the role administrators play in supporting the wellness of college students, and the unique environment higher education represents (Beeler; 1988; Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005; Burke, Dye, & Hughly, 2016; Carpenter, 2003; Gallagher, 2012; Renn, Jessup-Anger, & Doyle, 2008; Sandeen & Barr, 2009). Student affairs administrators exhibit significant signs of poor wellness, such as high stress and low morale, and that high levels of job turnover do not benefit the institution.

Workplace wellness program initiatives have been developed as an intervention strategy to address the negative aspects of wellness that employees may exhibit. Workplaces benefit by promoting an environment that values wellness for all staff. While there have been specific efforts to develop effective wellness intervention programs specifically for student affairs administrators to address wellness concerns (Burke, Dye, & Hughey, 2016; Haines et al., 2007; Moxler, 1990), while most programs were deemed successful, the programs focused on individual aspects of wellness, such as physical or emotional, and did not address multiple factors of wellness within one comprehensive program.
Job burnout and lack of balance have been identified as largest contributors to poor wellness of student affairs staff (Berwick, 1992; Herr & Strange, 1985; Keener, 1990, Tack, 1991; Toma & Grady, 2002; Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory, 2005, Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998). Social identities, specifically employees from marginalized groups, also play a role in wellness (Beehr, Farmer, Glazer, Gudanowski & Nair, 2003; Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998; Lee and Ashforth, 1993; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997). If staff are exhibiting poor signs of wellness due to the aforementioned themes, they may not be able to perform their job functions to the best of their ability, or in some cases resign from their position in order to find an organization that poses a better fit. As college and university staff play an integral role in the lives of college students, their barriers to positive wellness pose a threat to the support and overall wellness to college students.

It is important to also consider that wellness is a comprehensive concept that can look different depending on the diversity of student affairs administrators. While literature summarized general needs of wellness amongst student affairs, it generalized staff experiences and did not take into consideration the positionality of a staff member within the organization, or the particular job function of a staff member. Residence life departments have particular responsibilities within an institution, and residence life staff are taxed with unique responsibilities due to this work that potentially contribute to poor wellness. Taking this into consideration with the positionality of entry-level residence director, the wellness of these staff needs to be further examined.
Residence Life

Residence Life is an area or office within a student affairs division that is responsible for all aspects of housing that is provided on-campus. Some of these responsibilities may include assigning rooms to students, coordinate any facilities or maintenance issues with the room or building, and coordinating emergency services for students who experience issues or concerns at any time they are in residence. In addition to providing and maintaining the space and services of a residence hall, traditional residence life programs are also responsible for providing programmatic and/or learning opportunities for students in residence.

Astin (1999) stated that amongst all of the ways students can be involved in campus life, the residence life experience served as the most pervasive form. Living in a campus residence was positively related to retention, and this positive effect occurred regardless of institution type, and among all types of students, regardless of gender, ethnicity, ability or socioeconomic status. Astin's (1999) perspective was consistent with other research that strongly supported residence hall communities having the responsibility of facilitating student involvement, both on and off-campus (Arboleda et al., 2003). Dusselier et al. (2005) noted that colleges and universities have a commitment to student success and student well-being, and that college health staff and residence life professionals, such as residence directors, play a crucial role in the achievement of such commitment. The residence hall environment plays an important role in supporting college student wellness, and concerns such as a student's ability to study in their residence hall, roommate conflicts, not feeling a sense of "home" within their residence hall, and the presence and use of alcohol and drugs negatively impact student wellness (Dusselier et al., 2005). The
authors supported that residence hall professional staff play a crucial role in developing strategies to mitigate the negative contributors of wellness for college students.

Riker (as cited in Belch & Mueller, 2003) argued that housing and residence life programs have dramatically changed over the last forty years, and that several goals have been achieved: (a) the professionalization of residence life as a core function of student affairs, (b) the development of uniform guidelines and standards for professional practice, and (c) robust professional development opportunities (p. 29). Regarding the implementation of college student involvement, Astin (1999) encouraged administrators to focus on not just the aspirations of how college students develop, but to learn the ways in which students are engaged, including their motivation and dedication to learning (p. 526). Astin's (1999) perspective highlighted the importance of student affairs administrators, and their commitment to supporting the outside-the-classroom development of college students. Entry-level residence directors play an even more important role in this, as their main focus is to oversee the residential experience of students.

**Residence Directors**

While there are several individuals who perform various roles in residence life, one of the most important roles is that of the residence director, an entry-level professional position. Belch and Mueller (2003) indicated that the entry-level residence director serves as an important doorway for new professionals into the student affairs profession, typically due to the abundance of these positions in comparison to other graduate and entry-level student affairs positions. As residence director positions are typically entry-level, individuals in this role tend to be some of the youngest student affairs professionals, which highlights age as an important factor when further exploring the needs and issues of this group (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997).
Frederick (as cited in Belch & Mueller, 2003) established that the housing and residence life career field has become a primary provider of basic student affairs professional work experiences and in so doing offers an excellent experience foundation for other career fields within student affairs…Beyond serving as an entry point into the professional, residence life staff have emerged as essential collaborators in the development of community and engaging students in the learning process. (p. 29)

Due to the nature of college students spending time in their residence hall beyond the traditional nine to five work day, the residence director is typically a live-in position, in that the professional lives on campus in the area that they oversee, and is available during nights and weekends for additional learning opportunities as well as coordinating emergency services. In addition to the listed responsibilities, other responsibilities of the residence director that will depend on the goals and direction of the institution, student affairs division, and/or residence life department. Despite having unique responsibilities, literature supports the importance of the residence director position, particularly in the role of the support and development of college students. St. Onge et al. (2008) stressed that entry-level residence life positions not only play a significant role within the individual residence life office, but are integral to the promotion of the educational mission of the institution.

The residence director position is traditionally responsible of the oversight of a subset of residential students who live in one or more residence halls and dwellings. Typical additional responsibilities of the residence director are to coordinate any issues regarding the physical room (e.g. maintenance, occupancy), serve as the direct campus resource to all residential students, and
to supervise paraprofessional student staff, typically referred to as Resident Assistants, in providing programmatic opportunities for student learning and growth (St. Onge et al., 2008).

Riker and Decoster (2008) noted that the residential community is formative to the experience of college students, as it is an environment that cultivates interpersonal development within a particular environment or community (p. 81). Additionally, the authors asserted that residence directors have the ability to engage individually and directly with students, and as such have the ability to significantly impact a student’s experience by enhancing the interpersonal aspects of a student’s experience. Additionally, the authors stressed that the residence director plays a critical role in providing counsel and support to students, especially in the area of promoting academic success. Pratt, Shambarger, Johnson, and Anchors (1999) discovered that when considering the role residence directors have on college residential students, the most significant outcome was that residential students benefitted most from having a residence director who both invested time in establishing positive relationships with their residents, and cultivating a sense of community within the actual hall. Literature also discussed the role residence directors have in directly connecting with students. As residence directors are entry-level positions, and tend to be occupied by those young in age, in comparison to other student affairs staff, their age gives residence directors the unique ability to connect with students, as they are closer than age to them (Belch & Mueller, 2003). Totman (2012) highlighted the importance of the residence director role with working with the current millennial population, and that students have a heightened sense of entitlement, strong sense of ambition, and dependent on authority figures. Additionally, the field of student affairs is now seeing residence directors who are also millennials, which aids in the way in which these professionals connect
with students. Residence directors, thus, have the ability to positively affect the experience of students, by capitalizing on their ability to connect better with students closer than age.

**Residence directors’ role in supporting college student health.** Research stressed the role student affairs administrators have in promoting the value and importance of health to students (Jackson, Tucker, & Herman, 2007; Joyce-Brady & Rue, 2006). Student affairs administrators must take action in helping students develop behaviors that lead to a healthy lifestyle, which benefit students within and beyond the college environment. Additionally, Joyce-Brady and Rue (2006) highlighted the complexity of college student health in the current century, and that student affairs practitioners have a unique positionality that college health staff do not have. While the authors noted health educators and providers as the main facilitators of assisting college students in developing and maintaining healthy lifestyles, due to the significant interpersonal nature of residence life, student affairs staff, and particularly residential life staff, play a strong role in promoting a healthy lifestyle. As residence directors are typically live-in staff and are highly visible to residential college students, they have both the opportunity and responsibility promote wellness and current student health information relevant to students. Joyce-Brady and Rue (2006) recommended that student affairs administrators develop collaborative partnerships with college health staff, in order to provide the most current and relevant student health information.

**Wellness of residence directors.** According to Herr and Strange (1985), one-third of those who earn a graduate degree in higher education administration or student affairs administration secure a residence director position within housing or residence life offices. While research clearly depicted student affairs positions as those that experience high burnout
(Berwick, 1992; Herr & Strange, 1985; Keener, 1990, Tack, 1991; Toma & Grady, 2002; Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory, 2005, Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998), the residence director position is one subject to high burnout due to the close student proximity, live-in aspect, and high workload (Herr & Strange, 1985). This is of great concern due to essential role residence directors play in the leadership and management of the college student residential experience. Additionally, the residence director role is found to be a significant job regardless of institutional type (St. Onge et al., 2008). Several researchers concluded that the quality of life of residence directors serves as the primary reason as to why an entry-level student affairs staff member excludes the position from their interested opportunities, or chooses to leave the position prematurely (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Belch, et al., 2009; St. Onge et al., 2008). As such, dedicated research to the wellness of residence directors is important and necessary.

**Recruitment and retention of residence directors.** The residence director position is a common entry level job for both young and new student affairs practitioners. The recruitment and retention of entry-level residence life staff has proven to be a significant challenge over the years in the office of residence life and housing. Literature ascertains that residence life and housing offices serve as an entry point for the majority of entry-level professionals, and due to the abundance of these positions, there are not significant opportunities for advancement to management positions, as there are less positions beyond the residence director position in departments (Dunkel & Schreiber, 1992; Janasiewicz, 1983). Scheurermann and Ellett (2007) highlighted that the recruitment and retention of residence directors was first identified as a significant problem within the field of housing and residence life over fifty years ago. Even
more concerning, the issues that were identified over fifty years ago as factors that contribute to poor recruitment and retention (compensation, support of domestic partners) still emerge as challenges in current times. Scheurermann and Ellett (2007) added that while residence life programs do not necessarily suffer from a lack of candidates applying for residence director positions, institutions are still challenged in attracting and retaining the highest quality candidates, regardless of institution type. Diversity and inclusion also play a significant role in attracting and retaining staff (Scheurermann & Ellett, 2007).

Collins and Hirt (2006) stressed the importance of an individual’s first job experience in the field. Specifically, one’s experience at their first job has the potential to set the tone for both how professionals interpret working in student affairs and whether or not they remain in the profession and seek positions beyond entry-level in either housing or other areas. Ultimately, the recruitment and retention of residence directors is important, and their wellness plays a significant factor, especially in regards to retention.

The Association of College and University Housing Officers (ACUHO-I) led the charge in examining the concerns of the recruitment and retention of entry-level staff (Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2008) discovered several reasons graduate students who were offered entry-level jobs in residence life turned down offers: (a) geographic location, (b) salary, (c) institutional fit, (d) position responsibilities, and (e) quality of life. When investigating why entry-level staff left positions in housing, the following reasons were cited: (a) the desire to leave the housing profession, (b) lack of advancement opportunities at the current institution, (c) quality of life, and (d) position responsibilities. As such, both prospective entry-level staff both identify quality of life and position responsibilities as a significant negative factor in both the recruitment and
retention of them in residential life. Regarding the quality of life of entry-level staff, the following issues were identified: (a) lack of privacy, (b) burnout, (c) domestic partnership restrictions, (d) isolation as a result of living on-campus, (d) size of on-campus apartment, and (e) the phenomenon of living where one works.

Belch and Mueller (2003) developed a focused study to better understand the phenomena of the attrition of residence directors, specifically why entry-level professionals were not interested in residence director positions, or why residence directors prematurely left their positions. The authors noted that quality of life, live-in requirement, and the “feminization” of the student affairs field, were reasons why candidates were not interested in the position (p. 30). Of the factors identified, Belch and Mueller (2003) also discovered that for entry-level staff, quality of life is the largest factor as to why young professionals do not pursue working in residence life, and instead entry-level positions in other student affairs functional areas. This factor is well-known by senior housing/residence life staff, and has served as a challenge in their recruitment efforts. In addition, the researchers discovered that senior housing officers also identified quality of life as a reason why entry-level staff are not as interested in residence director positions compared to other entry-level positions in student affairs (p. 39). In regards to understanding these results, over the past few decades, student affairs scholars have articulated that new professionals do not want to succumb to the demands of a live-in entry level position (Belch & Mueller, 2003). Kearney (as cited in Belch and Mueller, 2003) noted that this is a noted generational shift, and that today’s generation are less willing to live-in, work beyond the 9 to 5 timeframe, and receive low compensation, in comparison to previous generations. As the field has professionalized and require residence directors to possess an advanced (e.g. Masters)
degree, the present generation feel that residence director positions do not compensate at a level in respect to their degree (Belch & Mueller, 2003).

Collins and Hurt (2006) examined the retention of residence directors. The authors asserted that the turnover of residence hall directors comes from two potential sources. First, due to the short tenure of those in these entry-level roles, residence hall directors may not invest the time to build the type of relationships with other faculty and staff that would keep them sustained on campus. Second, due to the front-line nature of the position, residence hall directors might experience isolation from other major aspects of university life (p. 21).

St. Onge et al. (2008) developed a study to greater understand the factors and issues that pertain to both the retention of residence directors. This interest stemmed from the researchers’ observation that both recruitment and retention is a concerning issue for the residence director position. While burnout, connected to retention, was thought to be one significant outcome of the study; however, the authors also identified that recruitment of staff would also prove to be an important factor to consider. The authors stressed that housing and residence life programs, and the greater student affairs division suffer in quality and ultimately a poor residential student experience if the recruitment and retention of residence directors is not appropriately and aggressively addressed. The authors developed several findings from their study. First they noted that participating institutions reported that while there were no problems with the recruitment and retention of entry-level staff in all functional units of a student affairs division, concerns regarding both recruitment and retention indeed existed for residential life departments (p. 20). Specifically, in regards to the residence director position, most individuals who occupied this role stayed between two and three years, and a very small percentage left during their first
year in the position (p. 20). This finding suggested that the attrition of residence directors may not be of grave concern. St. Onge et al. (2008) identified that several factors, including supervision, professional development opportunities, and actual job responsibilities played a significant role in the retention of staff.

Davis, et al. (as cited in Belch et al., 2009) agreed with other literature highlighting the importance of the retention of new professionals in student affairs, and stressed that residence directors play an important role in helping students succeed academically (Belch & Mueller, 2003; St. Onge et al., 2008). Davis et al (as cited in Belch et al., 2009) also argued the weakening of the student affairs field and residence life program if staff are not properly retained (St. Onge et al., 2008). The authors developed a study with the goal of analyzing the factors that contribute to the recruitment and attrition of residence directors. However, this study heavily focused on the culture of residence life departments as a potential catalyst for the experience of residence directors.

Belch et al.’s (2009) study emerged four themes: (a) clear mission, (b) culture of engagement, (c) culture of professionalism, and (d) culture of opportunity. In regards to a culture of engagement, the authors discovered that the institutional culture of the residence life environments plays a positive influence in the experience of residence directors if it is engaging (p. 184). The study identified that autonomy and responsibility were important factors for entry-level staff, and thus created a positive culture of professionalism that aided institutions in retaining their staff. Finally, the study supported that institutions of best practices provided a wide variety of professional development opportunities both within and outside of the institution, and communicated this with prospective candidates and current entry-level staff (p. 186).
Burnout of residence directors. Current literature supports the notion that burnout is a great concern for residence directors (Herr & Strange, 1985; Moxley, 1990; St. Onge et al., 2008; Palmer, Murphy, Parrott, & Steinke, 2001), and that burnout has been a concern for the residence director position for several decades. Within the context of the student affairs profession, Palmer, Murphy, Parrott, and Steinke (2001) defined burnout as a lack of motivation, mental concentration, physical and emotional energy that result in poor job performance (p. 36). The authors also noted that poor sleep, fatigue, a poor attitude, lack of satisfaction, weight changes, mood changes, and frequent illness are signs of burnout (p. 42). Herr and Strange (1985) asserted that viable solutions to address residence director burnout are necessary, and that assessment of the various environmental aspects of the job could aid in determining the largest contributors to burnout. As such, the authors developed such a study that attempted to identify the specific factors that contributed to the burnout of residence directors. The study emerged two findings: (a) there was a significant positive relationship between the personal accomplishment of hall directors and the combination of involvement and peer cohesion in the work environment, and (b) the combination of involvement, peer cohesion, supervisor support, autonomy, and control in the work environment was significantly related to the emotional exhaustion of female residence directors (p. 14). Emotional exhaustion is an example of poor wellness, and according to the study could lead to burnout. The authors suggested that supervisors can play a significant role in mitigating staff burnout by developing a supportive and cohesive work environment that encourages staff to succeed as well as seek help if needed. Regarding the difference in gender, the finding suggests that men and women experience the residence director differently, and as such experience burnout differently. These results are consistent with the general literature.
pertaining to the wellness of student affairs practitioners (Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998; Beehr, Farmer, Glazer, Gudanowski, & Nair, 2003, Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997). One question raised is that if this finding correlates with Belch and Mueller’s (2003) observation of the supposed feminization of the student affairs profession.

**Management of residence directors in relation to retention.** Significant literature pertaining to the wellness of residence directors highlights on the supervision received by the entry-level staff member, and depicts that supervisors play a significant role in the retention and wellness of residence directors (Henning, Cilente, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2011; Palmer, Murphy, Parrott, & Steinke, 2001; Palmer, 2005; Scheuermann & Ellett, 2007). Scheuermann and Ellett (2007) articulated that successful mentorship and effective supervision are key factors in the retention and development of entry-level staff (p. 17). Henning, Cilente, Kennedy, and Sloane (2011) stressed the importance of supervision and mentoring of residence directors, because these play a critical role in their development, satisfaction, and overall wellness. Palmer, Murphy, Parrott, and Steinke (2001) observed that supervisors serve as role models to residence directors, and that they have the opportunity not only to promote good wellness by themselves practicing it, but also by intervening and directing their staff to be aware of their well-being. This is particularly important, as student affairs supervisors and managers may not effectively manage their own wellness, and how that may affect their staff (p. 42). The authors suggested that opportunities for professional development, involvement in professional organizations, recognizing the hard work, and referrals to professional counselors may also aid in the support of entry-level staff. As such, managers have the ability to play an important role in the overall
wellness of residence directors. Managers who are supportive and in-tune to the needs of their
residence directors may aid in mitigating burnout.

Conclusion

Offices of residence life are one of the most significant units of a student affairs division,
and plays one of the most integral roles in the overall development of college students. Within
residence life, the residence director position is an essential role that supports residential college
students, due to their unique responsibilities of having direct access to students, and being able to
provide immediate support. Given their responsibilities of supporting students, residence
directors play a critical role in supporting the well-being of students, which in turn contributes to
academic student success. Literature has supported the notion that residence directors are
important yet demanding positions, and that burnout and staff dissatisfaction largely contribute
to wellness. Due to the unique responsibilities of the residence director position alongside
position requirements such as living in a residence hall, staff recruitment and retention have been
identified as central core issues experienced by residence life managers and supervisors. While
research has identified that proactive supervisors and managers who are attuned to the needs of
residence directors have helped these entry-level staff in mitigating some of the challenges they
experience, wellness still remains to be of great concern.

Summary

This review of literature explored how wellness has been studied, defined, redefined, and
expanded in definition and practice over the decades. Throughout the iterations and expansions
of the concept, wellness has always been seen as an important construct for all human beings
(Ardell & Robins, 1980; Beeler, 1988; Burton, 2010; Dunn, 1959; 1961; Myers, Sweeney, &
Witmer, 2000, Travis, 1981; Travis & Ryan, 2004). Specific literature pertaining to higher education also supports that wellness is important to both college students (Archer et al., 1987; Carton & Goodboy, 2015; Conley, Travers, & Bryant, 2013; Dusselier et al., 2005; Gallagher, 2012; Herman & Davis, 2004; Sivik et al., 1992), as well as higher education professionals (Beeler, 1988; Moxley, 1990; Myers, 1992). In regards to the field of student affairs, literature supports the importance of the existence of student affairs and the essential role these professionals play in the lives, experiences, and education of college students (NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 1987; 2004). Literature also examined the unique and important role that residence life plays in the lives of college students (Astin, 1999; Belch & Mueller, 2003). Within offices and departments of residence life, the literature has clearly defined and outlined the roles, responsibilities, and importance of the residence director position, and its significance to the holistic development of college students (Belch & Mueller, 2003; St. Onge et al., 2008). Due to the various responsibilities both in role and function of entry-level residence life staff, the concept of wellness is a constant problem, and thus leads to low levels of satisfaction and/or retention (Collins & Hirt, 2006; Belch & Mueller, 2003; Belch et al., 2009; Herr & Strange, 1985; Moxley, 1990; St. Onge et al., 2008; Scheurrermann & Ellett, 2007; Wilson, 2008).

While literature has depicted the potential negative symptoms of poor wellness of entry-level residence life staff (e.g. burnout, lack of retention, high turnover), there is a void in the literature in that not much is known of the lived experiences of these individuals; specifically, from their perspective, what is their own perception of their own wellness and which elements of their job and their own identities contribute positively and/or negatively to wellness. The
purpose of the proposed study is to investigate the lived experiences of the residence directors and how wellness impacts their role. By understanding the positive and negative factors that contribute or detract from the wellness of entry-level residence life staff, the researcher has identified five positive contributions this study can make: (a) it can identify tangible strategies of maintaining wellness within the entry-level residence life position, (b) it can ascertain common struggles and pitfalls in the wellness management of entry-level residence life staff, (c) student affairs practitioners who are considering the entry-level residence life position can acquire a better understanding of the position, and make better informed decisions regarding their own fit within the position responsibilities (d) current entry-level residence life staff members can better manage their own wellness, and (e) departments and offices of residence life can experience greater levels of retention of the entry-level position, which will correlate into a stronger department and ultimately a better residential experience for college students. The following chapter will outline in detail the research design that will be used for the proposed study.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The aims of research in this particular doctoral program is to examine a complex problem of practice, generate knowledge from data gathered at the research site, and provide context and strategies for introducing systemic change to help resolve the problem of practice. The goal of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of residence directors and how they maintain a level of wellness and self-care that lets them respond to the complex needs of residential students in a diverse college environment. The following chapter provides information regarding the research design of this study as well as provides support for methodological approaches utilized. This chapter will begin with discussing the research approach. The second part of the chapter focuses on the participants and procedures utilized in the study. This section will include detailed information on how the study will analyze received data, as well as how this study will address ethical considerations, trustworthiness, researcher bias, and possible limitations.

Qualitative Research Approach

This study utilized a qualitative approach to understanding the research problem. The goal of qualitative research is to best understand people and how they experience situations they encounter. In this type of research, the researcher's goal is to build an understanding of the participant's experience, taking into account that the researcher brings their own lived experiences, thoughts, and perspectives into what is being studied (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). Unlike quantitative research and a positivist paradigm, being objective is not an underlying principle. While quantitative research focuses on the test of hypotheses within a
controlled environment, qualitative research is best utilized for situations in which a researcher wants to learn more about a participant's perspective within a particular phenomenon.

A paradigm is a collection of related assumptions about the world that provides both a philosophical and conceptual framework for how to study the events within a world (Ponterotto, 2005). Philosophically, this study best aligns with the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm (Butin, 2010; Ponterotto, 2005). Within a constructivism-interpretivism paradigm, it acknowledges that the world is highly complex, and that it is a story that is shaped by the persons and cultures involved (Butin, 2010, p. 60). Unlike a positivist paradigm that assumes reality is true, and postpositivist paradigm that assumes that reality is flawed, the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm accepts and validates multiple realities. Additionally, Ponterotto (2005) argued that these accepted realities are subjective, and are shaped and influenced by situational context, a participant's experience and perspective, as well as the interaction between a participant and researcher (p. 130). When examining the epistemology of constructivism-interpretivism, the relationship between a participant and researcher is not unbiased and objective, unlike a positivist and postpositivist paradigm; the relationship is indeed transactional, and the researcher and participant are jointly exploring and unraveling the participant's lived experience of a phenomena (Ponterotto, 2005). The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm is best suited for the research problem within this study, as the goal is to explore meaning making, and to allow the participants of the proposed study to examine their experiences and narratives, as well as how their own background, culture, and environment impacts how they make
meaning. Within the family of qualitative research, this study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the methodological approach.

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

This study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a specific qualitative approach to gathering and interpreting data (Smith, 2006). IPA, in comparison to other qualitative methodological approaches, is relatively new, and originated from the field of psychology. IPA was discovered by Jonathan Smith in 2006, and main focus is to best understand how people make meaning of experiences in their lives. Smith observed that the field of psychology mostly utilized quantitative analysis, and desired to improve the ability of psychologists to examine experience. IPA is primary used in the field of psychology, but has also been used in other various social sciences, due to its focus on human behavior and interaction (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Using an IPA approach allows a researcher to gather an in-depth perspective of a specific experience on a personal level. When exploring the roots of IPA, this methodology stems from the larger qualitative approach of phenomenology along with elements of hermeneutics and ideography, to which the following will go into deeper detail (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

**Phenomenology.** At its roots, phenomenology focuses on understanding an experience, or phenomena. When conducting research, phenomenology first requires a phenomena to be identified, such as one transitioning to a new job, or suffering from an illness. Then, as a researcher, the goal is to identify and recruit participants that have first-hand knowledge of the given phenomena so that they can share their lived experience (Creswell, 2013). The researcher
processes the participants' narrative in order to best understand the phenomena itself, and how the participant experienced the phenomena. The information discovered from the participants serves as the results in a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). Within the field of phenomenology, there are several theorists who have their own interpretation of the philosophical approach. This study will focus on the interpretations of two significant theorists, Husserl who brings a descriptive perspective to the approach, and Heidegger who leads with an interpretive perspective rooted in hermeneutics.

Husserl was known as one of the founding founders and contributors to phenomenology. Husserl was particularly interested in identifying a means of how one can come to know their own experience of a particular phenomenon. Husserl stressed the importance that phenomenology requires one to “disengage”; to step outside of their natural everyday experience, in order to successfully reflect on said experience in an unbiased and non-distracted way. Husserl also believed that an important component of understanding phenomena is to “bracket off” all of the assumptions one has in how they understand and interpret the world and thus be completely objective, as it would ultimately alter and distort the understanding of the phenomena. To Husserl, successful phenomenology was when a truly unbiased “essence” of a particular phenomenon was discovered and brought to fruition. Husserl’s contributions to IPA were significant in that he allowed the importance of reflection on the part of a researcher to be a central cornerstone to IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Heidegger, a student of Husserl, was also a significant contributor to phenomenology, but brought a particular interpretive approach to phenomenology that differed in assumptions to Husserl. Heidegger believed that people are naturally integrated into a very complex and layered
world and that each person possesses a unique perspective, informed by their relationship with the world. While Heidegger’s perspective aligned with Husserl in the importance of reflection, Heidegger viewed Husserl’s philosophical understanding of phenomenology as too theoretical and abstract, and believed that it was impossible for one to be complete objective in understanding phenomena (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Heidegger ultimately felt that the best one can do is interpret phenomena by not “bracketing off” or divorcing biases, but instead to acknowledge assumptions and how those assumptions may inform one’s interpretation of a phenomena. Heidegger highlighted hermeneutics as an essential component to their interpretation of phenomenology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

**Hermeneutics.** Hermeneutics is the practice and study of interpretation, and the goal of research rooted in hermeneutics is to understand perspective with the assumption that experience matters, and that the phenomena is something of importance to the participant. Historically, hermeneutics stemmed from an attempt to better interpret biblical texts, and then expended to be utilized to interpret other texts deemed important. Hermeneutics desires to uncover the original intentions and meanings of texts as the author wrote them. Heidegger stressed that hermeneutics is essential to understanding phenomenology as it assumes an initial state of a phenomena in which very little is known, and there exists a goal to discover and interpret the true meaning of such phenomena.

Important to IPA research is its double-hermeneutic nature. While IPA allows the participant to interpret phenomena, the researcher is also interpreting the participant interpreting the phenomena. Another way of understanding double-hermeneutic, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggested is that the researcher plays two dual roles. In the first role, the researcher is a
human, like the participant, interpreting how a participant makes meaning of a particular phenomenon. In the second role, the researcher is not a participant, and that they can only understand the phenomena “second-order”, or through the lens of the participant.

**Idiography.** Idiography focuses on the “particular” and treating an individual case as an individual case and the avoidance of generalizations and predetermined outcomes. In contrast to the goal of phenomenology, IPA focuses on the meaning-making of an experience within a particular context. While IPA suggests specific analysis in generating themes from the data, the influence of idiography forces the importance and value of each single case. The value of idiography tends to result in a lower number of participants included in a given study; this allows each participant to have value, and for the researcher to thoroughly extract data from each given participant.

**Rationale for use of IPA.** The goal of this study was to understand the phenomena of wellness. Specifically, this study desired to understand how entry-level staff make meaning of their wellness, because the actual job poses significant stressors that contribute to these positions that result in several negative outcomes, including burnout. Qualitative research was best suited to answer this question, as this study was geared toward learning more about an experience. IPA was best suited as the methodological approach because it allows a free-form process to best explore and interpret this phenomena, and allowing each participant to give their voice to the subject matter explored in the study, leading to rich data. Additionally, IPA pushed this study to discover truth from the participant beyond the researcher’s own opinions, biases, and positionality related to the topic, and how they could affect the interpretation of the phenomena of the participants. Lastly, IPA offered the ability to address the research question, but the
process did not assume what that answer could be. Despite the existing research on the wellness of residence directors, it was possible that the results may contradict the literature, and thus the researcher, may have needed to follow that direction to better understand the phenomenon within the given study.

Participants

IPA recognizes the power of the individual narrative, and allows for participants to provide significant information on how they interpret a given phenomenon. While several research methodologies support the notion that a high number of research participants is important to generating themes, IPA emphasizes the power of the individual narrative; while the development of themes is present, it is accomplished in a way that does not diminish the individual experiences of the participant. As such, IPA focuses on an intensive exploration of the narrative of the individual participant (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006), and small samples of participants are utilized, as opposed to a large number, as this takes a significant amount of time, given the dedication a researcher needs to take on analyzing the participant's data, as well as the idiographic approach to IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Wagstaff et al., 2014).

The participants in this study identified as a live-in or live-on entry-level residence life professional role (residence director or equivalent in job title) and have served in the role for at least one academic year. As the researcher is located in Pennsylvania, the participants from this study worked at institutions within the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. States in the Mid-Atlantic region include: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, and West Virginia. Additionally, the researcher is an active member of the Mid-Atlantic Association of College and University Housing Officers.
(MACUHO), an organization dedicated to the education, professional development, and networking of housing and residence life staff within Mid-Atlantic institutions of higher education. Due to this, participants were identified as members or affiliates of this organization, and the researcher utilized email lists to recruit participants.

This study identified eight adults who met the proposed criteria. This sample size is commensurate with current studies which have used IPA (Nuzum, Meaney, & O'Donoghue, 2017; Rabbitte, Prendeville, & Kinsella, 2017; Racz, Kalo, Kissai, Kiss, & Pinter, 2017; Redding, Maguire, Johnson, & Maguire, 2017; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As IPA is idiographic in nature, purposeful sampling was utilized, as this study desired to gain information directly from residence directors (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Procedures

The research question for the proposed study was: How do residence directors make meaning of their own wellness within the context of their job function? In order to investigate this question, this section described the steps involved in conducting the study. The researcher first obtained approval through Northeastern University’s Internal Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. This step was not only required, but ensured that the project met all research standards set forth by the institution. Obtaining IRB approval also demonstrated that this study adhered to a set of ethical considerations that is required by Northeastern University. After IRB approval was successfully obtained, the researcher proceeded to identify participants who qualified for the study to participate.

The researcher identified qualified participants based on the set forth criteria of participants of the study. The primary recruitment method utilized was targeted emails that were
sent to members of the MACUHO member listserv. Members of MACUHO who received the email were also encouraged to distribute the email to other qualified participants. Once eight participants were identified, the researcher communicated to them through email to schedule an interview. Interviews are a popular form of data collection in qualitative research (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). While there was no set time limit for each interview, interview lasted between fifty minutes and one hour and twenty minutes. Given that the researcher desired to interview participants that work at institutions of higher education throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, Zoom, an online video conferencing platform, was utilized to conduct each interview. Literature supports video conferencing software such as Zoom as an effective qualitative tool due to its ability to allow a researcher to interview a participant located anywhere in the world, as distance can serve as both a physical and cultural barrier, allows interviews to be completed faster due to the lack of travel required, and requires little financial resources in the researcher and participant meeting in-person (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014; Lo Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016). Some of the barriers to utilizing video conferencing software is that technology can serve as a barrier to those not comfortable with technology, which tend to be older participants. Another barrier is that rapport may be difficult to establish between a researcher and participant. Literature has been inconclusive on determining if technology serves as a barrier to rapport. Finally, another barrier to video conferencing software is that while facial cues may be observed, body cues may be missed (Lo Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016). Zoom video conferencing software contained the capabilities for the video interview to be recorded, and both the video interview and a
separate audio file of the interview was retrieved. The separate audio file provided the capability for each interview to be successfully transcribed.

Once the participants were identified, the researcher developed an interview schedule prior to the data collection (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interview schedule served as an outline of the type of questions that was asked of participants, and an order for the questions to be presented. In order to allow for the participant to feel comfortable to address the posed questions, the researcher utilized the beginning of the interview to develop a positive relationship with each participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Jacob and Furgerson (2012) recommends asking basic introductory questions, such as information pertaining to their background to begin to build rapport. The order of the questions in the interview schedule also progressed in difficulty, to allow the rapport built in the beginning of the interview to allow the participant to be more comfortable with answering more personal or controversial questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). During the interview, the researcher attempted to maintain proper eye contact and kept detailed notes in a personal research journal.

After the researcher concluded each interview, participants were informed that their interview was to be transcribed. Once transcribed, participants received a copy of the transcription and were given one week to review. Participants were encouraged to contact the researcher with any questions or concerns about the transcript, as well as an opportunity to participate in a follow up interview. The purpose of the follow up interview was to help clarify anything the researcher does not understand, and ensured that the participant agreed with the information they presented in the first interview. Additionally, the follow up interview allowed for the researcher to ask early interviewed participants questions that may have been present in
later interviews (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). No participants in the study requested a follow up interview.

All interviews were digitally recorded. Once all interviews were collected, the researcher sent all audio files to Scribie, an online transcription service (http://www.scribie.com). Scribie's transcription services guaranteed confidentiality between the researcher and the employees of the company, and provides the user with the ability to delete all audio files provided to them. The transcriptions were delivered with at least 99% accuracy, and allowed an opportunity for the research to review and edit any aspects of the transcription that might not have been clear, due to audio quality. Once the completed transcriptions were received by the researcher, the researcher deleted all files stored on the Scribie server.

Data Analysis

Guided by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), in IPA, data analysis involves interpreting the data in an organized, systematic, and transparent way, as well as identifying significant patterns in the data through the development of emerging themes. The goal is to produce a narrative account of the data and present it in a meaningful structure, taking into account the double-hermeneutic nature of IPA. While IPA is double-hermeneutic, the data analysis serves as a representation of the researcher’s analysis of the subject matter (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 80). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) provide the following steps to ensure a thorough analysis.

Once the researcher received the written transcripts of participant interviews from Scribie, the researcher first immersed themselves within the data in a way that ensured that each individual participant was the focus. Specifically, the researcher listened to the original audio
recording of each interview, and reviewed the written transcriptions in order to develop a fuller understanding of the experience of participants. To be fully immersive in the data, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggested that the data should be re-reviewed, so the researcher performed several iterations of reading and listening to the data.

The second step in data analysis was taking detailed notes of both the audio recording and written transcript of the participants. While notes that pertain to what is actually observed by the researcher, the researcher also documented personal comments, which reflect the researcher’s own thoughts and opinions of the data. The main objective of note-taking is to include and not dismiss the interpretation of the stated text. The researcher is free to take detailed notes of anything they observe that is of interest. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) stressed that this step is the most important and time consuming, and involves the researcher to devote the time to take notes that accurately reflect the true lived experience of each participant. As a method to ensure a comprehensive, participant-focused documentation, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggested an “exploratory commenting” process that focuses on three distinctive types of comments: (a) descriptive, (b) linguistic, and (c) conceptual.

Descriptive comments refer to words, phrases, statements, and explanations a participant uses that reflect their lived experience and ultimately what matters to them. Linguistic comments refer to how language is used by the participant. While attention is being paid to the reflections that matter to the participant, observations such as emotion, pause or hesitancy in speech, tone of voice, and repetition should also be noted. Linguistic comments provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of a participant’s lived experience and gives an opportunity for the researcher to see through the eyes of the participant. Finally, conceptual
comments refer to a more interpretative approach to analysis, and not necessarily viewing the data at face value (descriptive comments serve this purpose). Conceptual analysis may take different forms such as the researcher reflecting their own lived experience and assessing if it reflects the experience of the participant, or the researcher noting questions regarding what the participants have stated. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) noted that as IPA is interpretative in nature, while a researcher cannot use their biases outside of the given study to influence the interpretation of data, thinking abstractly about how participants make meaning of their experience could prove valuable.

The next step in data analysis was the development of emergent themes within the data. The notes gathered through exploratory commenting, alongside the original audio and written transcripts collectively represented a large amount of data. The overall goal in developing emergent themes are to identify connections, patterns, and relationships within each participant. To assist in the analysis of the researcher’s notes and comments, the researcher utilized NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to assist in the analysis of all written transcripts and to identify emergent themes that lie within the data. The researcher then identified excerpts from each transcript that connected to the research question of the study and assigned themes to each excerpt. Through this process, emergent themes within each participant’s transcript were identified. After the emergent themes were identified within the data, the researcher then searched for connections amongst the emergent themes. NVivo also assisted the researcher in this aspect of data analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Once emergent themes were identified and connections amongst the themes had been made, this process was then applied to each and every participant within the study. Smith,
Flowers, and Larkin (2009) stressed that as the researcher progresses from participant to participant, they will need to “bracket off” each participant’s own lived experience, to ensure that one participant’s experience or the researcher’s comments about one participant’s experience, does not influence another (p. 100).

Finally, once emerging themes were developed amongst all participants within the study, the researcher made connections between the themes across participants. Assessing how a theme in one case influenced another proved helpful in understanding the collective lived experiences of the participants. While this step resulted in a more collective understanding of the lived experiences of participants, IPA stresses each participant as having value; as such the researcher was still encouraged to highlight unique findings if they contribute to a greater understanding of how participants experience a phenomena.

**Ethical Considerations**

Creswell (2013) stressed the importance of maintaining a high level of ethics in all research studies, which includes the storing data and information securely. The researcher conducted all interviews on their personal computer, which is secured by a password known only to the researcher. Additionally, all data was stored locally on the researcher's personal computer, and backed up on both the researcher's secure Google Drive, a cloud-based folder that only the researcher has access to, as well as a personal USB drive that was kept in a private space at the home of the researcher. The researcher's journal will also be stored privately at their home. The audio files of each interview was properly labeled with care (Aldridge, Medina, & Ralphs, 2010), and participant pseudonyms and a distinctive code will be applied to each. The pseudonym will further assist with protecting the confidentiality of the participant (Groenewald, 2004).
Trustworthiness

As quantitative methodological approaches have concrete methods for establishing trustworthiness, its establishment has been more questionable in qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). Guba (1981) and Shenton (2004) both proposed that trustworthiness in qualitative research can be assessed by four distinct categories: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

Credibility. Credibility within qualitative research is a criteria analogous to internal validity within quantitative research. As such, credibility in research pertains to how the study measures what it is actually intended to accomplish. As one of the important steps in ensuring overall trustworthiness, this criteria was acknowledged within the study (Shenton, 2004). One way in which this study addressed credibility is that the researcher established familiarity with the culture of participants within the study. As all participants in the study were employed at an institution of higher education, in addition to interviews, physical and electronic documents of said institution of higher education available to the researcher will be reviewed. Specifically, institution and residence life unit websites, as well as any physical documents made available to the researcher were obtained for review.

Another step in ensuring credibility is the triangulation of participants (Shenton, 2004). As this study reached out to a wide variety of institutions within the Mid-Atlantic region, a diverse selection of participants was obtained; participants with potentially different experiences who also represented different work environments and cultures. Another way of ensuring credibility was the dissemination of directed reminders to the participants that participation in the study is voluntary; this ensured that the participants are participating at their own free will and
provided honest and true data (Shenton, 2004). An additional measure of ensuring credibility was the use of a reflective journal by the researcher. This journal contained detailed notes of the study throughout all stages, as well as the researcher's own thoughts of the study, and allowed the researcher to channel their own reflections in a way that did not fundamentally impact how the study was conducted. Finally, the researcher offered all participants the opportunity to review the written transcript of their interview as well as a follow up interview, with the purpose of not only exploring additional questions, but to ensure that the researcher accurately captured the statements provided by the participant.

**Transferability.** Transferability refers to the ability of a localized study to be applied and generalized to a wider population. Referred to as external validity within quantitative research, transferability can be a challenge in qualitative research due to the small number of participants. Shenton (2004) stressed that despite these limitations, qualitative studies should be clear in providing the clear context and bounds of the study. As such, this study provided background information on the participants using pseudonyms and provide information on the type of institutions present within the study. As all participants within the study work within offices of residence life, generalized information pertaining to those offices (e.g. number of professional staff, counts of entry-level staff versus managerial staff) was also provided. As this information was provided, while the study cannot be generalized across all institutions, consumers of the study will be well-versed with the bounds and limitations of the study.

**Dependability.** Dependability refers to a studies ability to be replicated by a different researcher. Ideally, a study should clearly depict all steps involved in its planning and execution, and should read in a way in which if someone replicated the study with the same participants,
similar results would be obtained (Shenton, 2004). To ensure dependability, the researcher was
clear in documentation of all steps of the study, including how it was implemented and executed.
Additionally, the documentation included the purpose and use of supplemental tools, such as
documents used to recruit participants, audio files of participant interviews, and notes included in
the researcher's reflective journal.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability refers to a researcher's ability to maintain objectivity
throughout the study, and thus the data obtained represents the thoughts and reflection of the
participants of the study. As IPA is double-hermeneutic, the researcher is also providing a
"second order" assessment of how participants make meaning of a particular phenomenon
(Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Despite this, it is important that the researcher's own
predispositions of a phenomena do not affect a participant's own interpretation. Much of this is
addressed in the researcher’s acknowledgement of their biases and positionality within the study,
which is provided in the following section. Additionally, the researcher developed and used an
interview schedule that only contained objective questions. Finally, the reflective journal served
as an important tool for the researcher to document their own personal reflections, so that the
researcher maintained objectivity in their interactions with participants.

**Potential Research Bias**

In phenomenological research, the role and relationship between the researcher and
participant is important. IPA involves a double-hermeneutic, meaning that the researcher is both
required to understand how the participant is making meaning of a particular phenomenon, and
at the same time develop their own meaning-making of the participant (Smith, Flowers, &
Larkin, 2009). As this process requires engagement on the role of the researcher, the researcher's own biases affected how the meaning-making can be interpreted.

The researcher has previously identified as an entry-level residence director who has experienced challenges regarding wellness within the position. The researcher served as a residence director for three and a half years. As such, the researcher held particular biases based on their own interpretations and reflections of their own experience, and that they much ensure that their own experiences do not interfere with the participant’s own meaning-making process.

From an identity perspective, the researcher held several social identities that influence the way in which they make meaning. The researcher’s salient identities of being male, African-American, Christian, and bisexual played a role in their perceptions of wellness. Of the given salient identities, being male and Christian are examples of dominant or privileged groups that have significant advantages in American culture. Residence directors who do not identify as male (e.g. female, transgender, agender), or Christian (e.g. Muslim, Atheist) may have different experiences or different ways in which they make meaning of wellness. The researcher aspired to celebrate different perspectives and promote marginalized identities, as diversity and inclusion is an important value of the student affairs profession, and provided a level of depth in the analysis of wellness in the study. It is also important to recognize that the researcher’s marginalized salient identities of being African-American and bisexual also influenced the meaning-making process of wellness. The researcher not only wished to bring voice to marginalized identities, but also highlighted the experience of dominant identities, as the field of student affairs hosts a diverse group of individuals, both dominant and marginalized.
The researcher currently serves in a mid-level managerial role where they have supervisory oversight of entry-level residence life staff. The researcher has served in this role for approximately four years. As such, the researcher viewed the residence director position different than when they served in the role of residence director. As a researcher, it was important to acknowledge the bias in that they did not have lived experience of these individuals in this given time, and that the researcher’s own experiences as a residence director did not relate to those interviewed in the study. While acknowledging the bias, as the researcher currently serves as a supervisor to residence directors, it was possible to utilize the interview process to establish rapport with the participants on basis of this identity with a potential outcome of participants recognizing the positionality as a supervisor committed to improving the experience of entry-level staff.

Limitations

This study utilized the WHO Healthy Workplaces Framework as its theoretical framework for the study (Burton, 2010). While this framework was chosen due to its expansive view of wellness within workplace settings, its intended purpose was to be used by organizations to assess wellness dimensions on an organizational level. The purpose of this study was to explore how residence directors make meaning of wellness, and the Healthy Workplaces Framework was used to inform the questions presented to study participants through the interview schedule. As the framework is not being used in its intended purpose, the yielded results of the study were different in nature with studies that use the framework in its intended purpose.
As this study utilizes IPA, qualitative in methodology, and is constructivist-ideologist in research paradigm, a small number of participants were included. While the data obtained by the participants will be both valuable and informative in understanding how residence directors make meaning of wellness, the data cannot be applied to a large population. As such, the results of the study will cautiously acknowledge its applicability in informing student affairs and offices of residence life.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

The goal of this study was to better understand how residence directors make meaning of wellness within their job function. The analysis of the interview data yielded three super-ordinate themes and nine corresponding subthemes. The super-ordinate themes and their subthemes were: (1) Institutional Culture, with the subthemes of: (a) Institution type, mission, and values, (b) Commitment to wellness, and (c) Commitment to diversity and inclusion; (2) Departmental Culture with the subthemes of: (a) Supervision, (b) Navigating departmental politics, and (c) Cultural identity acceptance from colleagues; and (3) Day-to-day residence director experience, with subthemes of (a) Job benefits, (b) Job condition, and (c) The live-in experience. Super-ordinate themes and subthemes were identified as those recurring in at least four of the eight participants’ interview data. Table 1 provides a listing of the super-ordinate and subthemes that manifested through the analysis process, as well as the recurrence of each theme across participants.

Table 1

Identification of Recurring Themes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Themes Subthemes</th>
<th>Aryn</th>
<th>Kendall</th>
<th>Derrick</th>
<th>Marissa</th>
<th>Iris</th>
<th>Xavier</th>
<th>Chance</th>
<th>Christina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Institutional Culture</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Institution Type, Mission, and Values</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Commitment to Wellness</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Commitment to Diversity &amp; Inclusion</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Departmental Culture</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Supervision</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Navigating Departmental Politics</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Cultural Identity Acceptance from Colleagues</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Day-to-Day Residence Director Experience</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Job Benefits</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Job Condition</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The Live-In Experience</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Institutional Culture

Colleges and universities are unique in that each contains its own history and culture. Commonly, an institution’s history shapes its own distinctive culture. While institutional culture is rooted from an institution’s own history and past, culture is dynamic, not static, and has the ability to change with leadership, time, and through external factors such as current challenges faced in the community, state, or country of the institution. Common factors that impact institutional culture include but are not limited to an institution’s commitment and practice of its mission, served student population, geographical location, method of teaching (classroom versus online learning), and role of sports and leisure. Additionally, the relationship between staff, faculty, students and the institution contribute to culture. The researcher discovered that institutional culture played a significant role in how residence directors made meaning of wellness; participants who had a positive connection to an institution’s culture experienced positive wellness; and conversely, participants who did not connect with an aspect of an institution’s culture experience experienced negative wellness.

Within institutional culture, the researcher discovered three distinctive aspects that constituted a core focus amongst participants. First, the researcher discovered that residence directors who have a positive connection with their current institution’s type, mission, and values experienced positive wellness. Second, the researcher discovered that an institution’s overall commitment and practice of wellness throughout all aspects of college and university life is an important factor in residence director wellness. Third, an institution’s commitment and practice to diversity and inclusion played a significant role in how residence directors experience wellness. In conclusion, the three subthemes discussed in subsequent sections will be: (a)
Institution Type, Mission, and Values, (b) Commitment to Wellness, and (c) Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion.

**Institution Mission, Type, and Values**

Within this study, residence directors shared their overall experiences at their current institution of employment. The connection between residence directors and an institution’s mission, institution type, and values served as a reoccurring theme across participants. Several residence directors shared a profound connection with their institution; for some, their own religious affiliation and practices connected to their institution’s own identity, which resulted in positive wellness. For other residence directors, a connection existed between their ethnic background and an institution whose mission was devoted to the advancement of said ethnic background. Additionally, some residence directors highlighted that the values espoused by an institution were in alignment with their own personal values, which resulted in positive wellness.

Institutional mission serves as a focal point for colleges and universities; it serves as a depiction of the values espoused by an institution, and communicates an institution’s overall beliefs and goals. When interviewed, Aryn, a residence director at a small Jesuit institution, shared the importance of her connection to the Jesuit institutional mission:

I really connect with the Jesuit identity of the institution… I think it's more so the fact that the way that the Jesuits kind of approach education and social justice while not perfect by any means is definitely the way that I like to do, the work that I do; very high care, very
relational. And so on paper when I was reading it, I knew I was like this is how I like to do my work. It dovetails really nicely with counseling."

Aryn shared that the Jesuit mission is important due to its focus on self-care, and the fostering of authentic relationships. As Aryn has an educational background in counseling, and a strong belief in social justice, she has found herself at an institution that validates and nurtures the way in which she approaches her work with students.

When interviewed, Xavier, a self-identified Caucasian male worked at a small Christian college in a rural setting. When asked about his connection and reflection on the Christian mission of the institution, Xavier shared:

"There's a wide gambit of Christian institutions and how their faith impacts what they do. At least out of the places I've been to, [this institution is] one of the stronger. It feels there are a lot of explicit, "Here's why we're doing what we're doing, and it pulls back to our faith." That comes across within the way people try and care for each other.

Xavier shared one specific practice of his institution reflected in the Christian faith tradition that resonated with him:

"Prayers are really common support tool. It feels like you're doing a disservice to the concept of prayer to describe it as a support tool, but it's a really common thing to see people gathered to pray for someone who's going through a hard time. There's five of us [residence directors], and we take some time in our weekly meeting to pray for our students. We believe that it does inspire change, and I think it's a way that we feel we can care for our students."
For Xavier, Christianity is an important part of his identity. As Xavier’s Christian beliefs set the foundation for how he approaches his work, Xavier finds his work to be highly reflective and providing of opportunities to engage in the deeper meaning behind how students navigate their college experience. Xavier finds Christianity to serve as an appropriate way to support and care for students, which is in alignment with the mission of his institution. As he shared, the practice of prayer and other faith-based traditions, are embraced and are used as tools to provide intentional support to students. The alignment between Xavier’s religion and his institution provides a sense of comfort that positively contributes to Xavier’s overall wellness.

Cultural identity can also serve as a way in which individuals are connected to their work. When interviewed, Christina, a self-identified African-American woman, worked for a public-private partnership, which is a company or organization that has a formal partnership with a college or university to operate some components of residential life operations on behalf of the institution. Christina worked for a public-private partnership with a historically Black university (HBCU), and shared that she entered this position with high expectations for her experience working for an HBCU. She shared the following reflection regarding her actual experience when she began her role, which did not align with her expectations: “They do hold their students to perform at a very high academic level. As well as they do push their employees to kinda set the platform for what student affairs, particularly at HBCU should look like.” Christina also reflected on how her identity as an African-American woman connects with her position:

I would say that sometimes when you're coming into a new environment, I at least, I felt like I had to kinda put on this persona that I'm this businesswoman. And I feel like a lot of that came from the fact that I'm used to working predominantly with white
counterparts. So to now be in an institution where we all look alike, as far as our skin color, and a lot of us have very similar upbringings, it has kinda been like, okay, I can just take the mask off and just be me.

In this extract, Christina shares that she enjoys working at institutions that are academically demanding, and that the high expectations set forth for administrators such as Christina, mimic the expectations students have to succeed academically. Additionally, Christina finds comfort in working at an institution that not only support Black students, but Black staff as well. She expressed that within the HBCU environment, she has the ability to be herself, and not have to perform in any type of way to make her seem more palatable to non-persons of color.

When interviewed, Iris, a self-identified Latina and Italian woman, worked within residence life at a community college. Community Colleges traditionally serve commuter populations, however, few offer on-campus housing for students. Iris shared that in comparison to her undergraduate institution, her community college was the most culturally diverse institution she had worked at. She also shared the following reflection on her connection to the institution mission of being student-centered: “My favorite thing about this school is that you can tell that they're all about the students… I had a very, very difficult time in college, so I understood… I think it's very important to be in a school that centers around their demographic.”

Similar to Christina, Iris tells us that she finds value in working at a diverse institution, and that her current experience at her institution supports students better than the support she received at her own undergraduate institution. Unlike Iris’ undergraduate institution, the vast presence of cultural diversity demonstrates the institution’s general commitment and value to serving a diverse student population.
As depicted in these reflections, residence directors find value in the ability to connect with their institution, particularly when such connections are tied to aspects of identity that are supported by the institution. The ability to have one’s identity connect with the institution creates a deeper sense of purpose, and residence directors find greater meaning to the importance of their work with students. The institutions represented by this theme have a cultural or religious commitment to their mission, and when residence directors see an aspect of themselves reflected in said mission, they experience positive wellness.

**Commitment to Wellness**

Wellness is increasingly becoming an important value in higher education, and institutions develop initiatives at both departmental and institutional levels. Frequently, institutions represent wellness efforts via committees, commonly, overseen by Human Resource departments. First, data obtained suggests that institutions that promote successful institution-wide wellness initiatives play positively in the experience of residence directors and contribute to a culture where staff can regularly discuss wellness factors in the work environment. Iris shared that her institution branded her wellness committee’s programmatic offerings, specifically referred to as “Wellness Warriors.” Iris shared that the Wellness Warriors developed and launched various wellness programs for faculty and staff. Aryn commented on their appreciation of their institution disseminating information about wellness opportunities throughout the institution, and suggested that institution size may impact how wellness initiatives are communicated:

They're [current institution] also very upfront with that information. So I think working at a larger public institution previously, I had to search for wellness benefits, but at my
current institution I heard about it when my orientation started, I heard about it at my second orientation where I got to meet and mingle with everybody. My colleagues are constantly talking about it.

Aryn’s reflection shows a sense of appreciation for the transparency of wellness opportunities and benefits provided by her institution. Transparency serves as an example of how an institution communicates the values important to them, and for Aryn, it contributed to her conclusion of her institution supporting wellness.

Consequently, negative wellness persists amongst residence directors when institutions don’t provide wellness opportunities, or if the commitment to wellness isn’t genuine. Aryn shared her reflections of her previous employer to her current institution, in which wellness initiatives were not disseminated at an institutional level:

There were a lot of attempts to talk about wellness but nothing ever really came to fruition. We started a wellness group and that kinda fell through, just among the staff. We never really talked about self-care, stuff like that…They did a professional development session but like three people attended.

For Aryn, she can easily identify her current institution’s commitment to wellness beyond their transparency, due to her previous work experience. Aryn received little to no messages from her prior institution regarding wellness initiatives, and her desire to create wellness initiatives with other staff show the importance of wellness initiatives in Aryn’s work experience.

When interviewed, Derrick, a residence director at a highly selective liberal arts college, reflected on the institutional values of wellness, and believed that while his institution did
provide staff opportunities, that the motives for promoting wellness were purely financial.

Derrick shared the following reflection:

I think it's they've built it so much in their minds now, that they see this as a commitment to wellness because they lose track of the “Oh, if we do this we're gonna need the insurance break,” but they now more see it's like a "Oh, we're making a commitment to wellness because we wanna make sure the betterment of our employees," because they've been doing it this way for so long and that's what they've been telling themselves. And it's a win-win for everyone, but now they...just the thought of the insurance because they've been doing it this way for so many years.

In this extract, Derrick shares a lack of faith in his institution to be truly committed to wellness. Derrick felt that wellness initiatives are necessary for institutions to support staff, and if employees are aware that institutions may receive financial gain from the offering of wellness initiatives, wellness can be perceived as a superficial value. As shared, Derrick felt that the institution views wellness as a “win-win” if they receive financial benefit, however, to Derrick, wellness initiatives are not a “win-win” concept, but should be offered simply because it is the right thing to do, to best support employees.

With regard to institutional wellness programming, some residence directors reflected on the importance of the timing and location of programmatic opportunities. Derrick shared that despite wellness programming being offered:

Institutionally, we don't really have the time to do that and if we are able to kind of get that work out time in or whatever else might be some wellness-based activity...For us,
we're constantly surrounded by students that do that, so we can't physically separate our home life from our work life because we're surrounded by those that we work with.

Iris’ reflection was similar, but she focused on the actual timing of programs. Iris shared:

I have a hard time getting to the programs because unfortunately, I'm not in the building that the programs occur in because I'm in the residence hall, and the residence hall is removed from the main building and the main part of campus…We end up being very busy in the residence hall, so it's hard to find our way over there sometimes.

When asked about the timing of programs, Iris shared that “they don't mesh with my schedule because they occur at 11 or 12 o'clock during a lunch break, but you know who else also has lunch breaks? The students.” Both Derrick and Iris highlighted that it is not enough for institutions to simply offer a cadre of wellness programs, but to ensure that said programs work for the schedules and workflow of residence directors. For Derrick, the challenges of working and living in the same location contributed to his ability to not participate in institutional wellness offerings. While Derrick hinted that the amount of work he has to complete in his position does not allow for him to participate in wellness initiatives, Iris shared a willingness of wanting to participate in initiatives if they were more compatible with her schedule.

As depicted by the reflections from residence directors, an institutional commitment to wellness initiatives through programs and opportunities contribute to positive wellness. Institutional wellness initiatives must be genuine and residence directors need to feel that institutions do not gain any benefit beyond the desire to have a healthy and productive
workforce. Additional benefits gained by institutions, such as monetary benefits, have the ability to contradict the message of the importance of wellness.

**Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion**

Diversity and inclusion serve as critical components of institutional culture. The values of diversity and inclusion are demonstrated at colleges and universities in numerous ways. The recruitment and retention of marginalized student populations, as well the recruitment, hiring, and retention practices of a diverse staff, serve as significant examples of an institution’s commitment to these values. Of the total eight participants in the study, three identified as persons of color, and four identified as queer (one participant self-identified as a queer person of color). As 75% of the participants represented either a person of color, queer, or both, the researcher discovered that residence directors from marginalized populations are very attuned to the institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion, and this plays a significant role in how they make meaning of wellness.

Several residence directors spoke to how their marginalized identities were both embraced and supported by their institutions, and thus played a significant role in residence director wellness. Iris shared that when reflecting on her own undergraduate experience, she was one of few persons of color. When reflecting on the environment of her current institution, Iris shared:

> It was very interesting coming into this position and being surrounded by diversity…And when I mean diversity, I mean surrounded by people from all backgrounds, from all different places, cities, country, suburbs. Countries being all across the world. We have
international students that are [from] Russia, China, Colombia, Ecuador, The Ivory Coast and it's very interesting to see that all of those people have all found themselves in this area and I think that's really great.

In this example, Iris highlighted the importance for her to work in a diverse student environment, as that was not represented in her previous educational experience. Iris also shared that she views diversity beyond race and ethnicity, but to be inclusive of the student experience. Iris’ role as a residence director allows her the opportunity to work directly with a wide variety of students, which positively contributes to her sense of wellness.

Christina, a residence director who was working at a public-private partnership for an HBCU, reflected on her current experience, compared to working previously for a predominately White institution in a similar role. Reflecting on her experiences at predominantly White institutions, Christina stated that “Being a black woman, I have to work twice as hard.” When reflecting on her more recent experiences working at an HBCU, Christina shared that "to now be in an institution where we all look alike, as far as our skin color, and a lot of us have very similar upbringings, it has kinda been like, okay, I can just take the mask off and just be me.”

Related to Christina, when interviewed, Kendall, a queer identified residence director at a large public research institution, reflected on his queer identity and the institution’s embracing him and diversity in general. Kendall shared that “I'm obviously lucky that I live in a place...that I have colleagues that are accepting of gayness and…I'm thankful for that, and I know that [in a] lot of places, that's still a very tricky subject.” Christina and Kendall’s excerpts show that they both possess salient marginalized identities, and that they are appreciative to be at institutions that
affirms and supports their identity. For Christina, her identity as Black is more embraced than when she worked at a predominately-White institution, and her ability to be herself positively contributes to her sense of wellness. For Kendall, his reflection served as a reminder that there exists institutions that are not affirming of those who identify as Queer, and that being at an affirmation institution positively contributes to his sense of wellness.

While residence directors shared the positive ways in which institutions embraced and supported diversity and inclusion, some residence directors experienced the opposite; examples of how their respective institutions did not show a sustained or genuine commitment emerged. Derrick shared that he was one of only two openly non-heterosexual individuals within his entire student affairs division, which proved challenging. Previously, Kendall shared that his queer identity was welcomed within the institution. While this proved to be a positive experience for him, Kendall also shared concerns about other aspects of diversity he felt were not well addressed. He stated: “There's a significant problem with the way that we deal with diversity issues on this campus, that feels, I think, to a lot of people very outdated. And it's only gotten worse honestly over the last year.” Kendall provided context in that his campus experienced a student death by murder that was considered a hate crime based on the student’s identity as African-American. Kendall reflected that this incident and resulting campus tensions stemming from the current American political climate of intolerance and discrimination, highlighted his institution’s lack of sustained commitment to diversity. Kendall stated:

With the election and everything else, there's been a number, even in my building, there's been a number of race riots incidents. I have encountered some serious issues with, even this Fall, over response to that, the incidents that were happening in my building. So
there's a sense that, to me, that the upper, the administration at this university does not have good priorities. They seem mostly interested in making money, and becoming a football school, and leaving a legacy, and seeing a big deal in the big sense. That seems to be the main goal of this university.

In this excerpt, we see that institutional commitment to diversity is multi-faced; while an institution can be affirming to some identities, at the same time, it can be unwelcoming to others. While Kendall previously shared a sense of comfort in his Queer identity being supported by his institution, the lack of management of race-related crises, demonstrates a lack of commitment to students of color. For Kendall, the sense of a lack of commitment to racial situations on his campus are further heightened due to his campus’ over-promotion of athletics. The observation of information pertaining to sports teams is abundant in relation to campus racial tensions, and sends a message that an institution values sports more than the lived experience of students of color.

When interviewed, Chance, a male-identified residence director at a public research rural institution, reflected on his marginal identities as Gay and African-American. Chance shared his significant struggles to find acceptance at his institution, and he relayed that he did not see his identity as being embraced and supported at an institutional level. Chance also reflected that being in a rural area of the country plays a role into how an individual is perceived. Specifically, Chance shared that:

Definitely being African-American and then also being a homosexual male and that's something that's a big challenge for me, especially being here in West Virginia…at…a
PWI. And there's a big difference especially because I did grad school at HBCU, when coming back here in more of a rural setting, especially living in Atlanta which is a urban setting, is definitely a struggle.

For Chance, he experienced significant challenges in being affirmed of his marginalized identities when he transitioned from living in a more urban environment in Atlanta than a rural area of West Virginia. Additionally, Chance lost a sense of affirmation of his racial identity when he transitioned from working at an HBCU to a predominately-White institution. In comparison to the testimonies of other residence directors, Chance’s lack of affirmation in his marginalized identities is impacted by his institution’s geographical location and mission of advancing the education of all students, regardless of racial identity, unlike to mission of HBCUs. While these qualities shape and inform the mission and values of an institution, his institution does not have the ability, for example, to change its geographical location. Regardless, the overall lack of affirmation of Chance’s identities due to his institution’s location and mission negatively contributes to his wellness.

Conclusion

As explored in this super-ordinate theme, institutional culture plays a significant role in how residence directors make meaning of wellness within the context of their job function. As the residence director position is an entry-level position and frequently serves as the first job for a new student affairs professional, more experienced administrators may not understand how these staff are attuned to the functions of an institution on the whole, and specifically its culture. Typically, residence directors come into their roles well versed in higher education administration from their Master’s level coursework, and thus have at minimum, a basic
understanding of the function of an institution. As such, residence directors observe and critique the values, missions, and commitments of the institutions they work for. This section highlighted that residence directors who both believed and were invested in the mission, values, and commitments of diversity, inclusion, and wellness at an institution, exhibited positive wellness.

From a researcher’s perspective, residence directors are more apt to make their own assumptions about institutional culture if there is a lack of information about the culture shared with these staff. Information regarding institutional culture, such as an institution’s values, and its commitment to wellness, diversity, and inclusion can be disseminated from a wide array of sources, such as institutional websites, correspondences from institution Presidents and other administrative leaders, institutional branding (e.g. apparel), emails to the community.

Finally, it is possible that residence directors may experience negative wellness if they do not connect with an institution’s mission, values or institutional type, however there may be some aspects of institutional culture that an institution has little ability to change. While all institutions have a commitment to the promotion of diversity and inclusion, there are aspects of institutional culture that are difficult to change, as they represent a core function of an institution’s identity. Institution type plays a significant role in this; as an example, a large, public, land-grant research institution situated in a rural area is not expected to significantly change, as characteristics such as its geographical location are essential to an institution’s history and mission.
As this section explored the ways in which institutional culture impacted the wellness of residence directors, the subsequent section explores the second sub-theme that emerged from the data, Departmental Culture.

**Departmental Culture**

While institutional culture focuses on the mission, values and actions that influence and impact all facets of an institution, there exists a sub-culture within the individual departments and units within an institution. Residence Life departments are no exception; they have their own unique culture that co-exists within the institutional culture. While institutional culture is comprised of the mission and values of the institution, departments similarly operate under their own missions and values. Usually, departmental culture is often informed or impacted by the institutional culture. Within institutional culture, college and university presidents, boards of trustees, and president cabinet staff (e.g. vice president of student affairs) play a significant role in setting the direction and vision for the institution. Within residence life departments, directors in conjunction with senior student affairs staff such as assistant or associate vice presidents are responsible for the vision of residence life.

The previous section explored the connection between residence directors and institutional culture. One important finding was that that congruence between residence directors and facets of institutional culture yielded positive wellness. The researcher discovered a similar relationship; residence directors who are in congruence with departmental culture also tend to report positive wellness. Incongruence between the residence director and departmental culture leads to reports of poor wellness of residence directors. Within departmental culture, the researcher discovered three distinctive subthemes that were a core focus amongst participants.
First, the supervision of residence directors played a significant role in wellness. Supervisors who were supportive to the needs and challenges of residence directors, and who exhibited a self-awareness of wellness within their own position, contributed to the positive wellness of residence directors. Second, the researcher discovered that residence directors who felt empowered to navigate through departmental politics also yielded positive wellness. Third, for residence directors who possessed marginalized identities, for example, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, positive wellness was linked to being in a department in which their identities were accepted and embraced. In conclusion, the three subthemes discussed in subsequent sections will be: (a) Supervision, (b) Navigating Departmental Politics, and (c) Identity Acceptance from Colleagues.

**Supervision**

The relationship between a residence director and their direct supervisor is one of the most important factors in the overall experience of a residence director. The supervisor plays a significant role in the lived experience of residence directors, as they hold formal responsibility for setting their responsibilities and expectations as it pertains to the work of a residence director. Typically, supervisors of residence directors have previously served in the role of residence director, so they bring a similar perspective and understanding to the work. Supervisors also play a critical role in the onboarding of residence directors new to the institution, which is important, as for many, the residence director position is their first full-time position in student affairs profession. Additionally, supervisors who have previously served as residence directors have the ability to intervene regarding the varied challenges residence directors experience in all areas of their work. Supervisors serve as role models for residence directors, and residence
directors develop their understanding of the role, and cues on how to approach the work from their supervisor. All of this strongly suggests that residence directors would experience positive wellness if they have a positive relationship with their supervisor.

Several participants in this study commented on the positive relationship they had with their supervisor as positively contributing to their wellness. Almost all participants highlighted the importance the supervisor’s knowledge and understanding of the untraditional work schedule of the residence director, and how supervisors promoted a balanced work schedule and taking time off. Aryn, for example, shared that “my current supervisor is really supportive of taking time”. Christina shared that she had a supervisor who supported taking time off and who also suggested strategies to aid in balance. Christina stated that her supervisor “promotes not having your email on your phone if you don't want it.” Christina also added that her supervisor consistently maintained awareness of how Christina was taking time off. She stated that she has a supervisor who “makes sure like, "Okay, you haven't taken some time off in the past month, what's going on? And who ensures that I don't need to work 40 physical hours in the office to make sure that I'm doing my job.” Christina also highlighted the following exchange between her and her supervisor that illustrated an understanding of balance in the residence director role, and offered flexibility in how Christina accomplished her work:

I understand that you're used to having to work 40 hours a week, but next semester, you can't be in the office for 40 hours a week…No. You're gonna do 20 hours, physical hours in the office, and then you do with the rest of those 20 hours that you deem fit. Whether that's being with students, whether that's going on campus for events, whatever you wanna do with those 20 hours, it's up to you."
For Aryn and Christina, they both share a sense of appreciation of having a supervisor who is knowledgeable of the work demands of the residence director position. It is clear that their supervisors are aware of the high workload and non-traditional hours worked by staff, and combat these challenges by communicating their philosophy of managing workload. The result of this depicts the importance for supervisors to emit a sense of care and understanding to residence directors. Supervisors being intentional about the workload and communicate strategies for balance and flexibility in the position, result in positive contributions to residence director wellness.

Derrick shared that his supervisor encouraged him to try and work a balanced schedule. Derrick stated “she very much pushes myself and my other half to practice the 8:30 to 5:00 as much as she can.” Derrick also highlighted an example of how his supervisor’s recent transition from the residence director role into a supervisor role informed her supervision:

She's only been overseeing professional staff now for about a year and a half, and she actually used to formally hold the other version of my position. So in that context, she understands more of the nitty-gritty details, stuff going on in the day-to-day basis, so that is where if you need to take the extra vacation time, stuff comes up, she is very flexible. She understands these things. If we need to just take some time for our own health or our mental sanity, she's like, "Sure go ahead”.

Similar to Aryn and Christina, Derrick’s excerpt the importance of supervisors exhibiting flexibility with residence directors, in respect to time. Derrick’s reflection also depicts a sense of appreciation for his supervisor’s previous role as a residence director at the same institution.
Supervisors who have been residence directors, particularly at the same institution, have a deep sense of the role and how it is best accomplished. Additionally, supervisors who are promoted from residence director to supervisor at the same institution, represent a sense of respect for the department and institution, as evident by the promotion, and this respect can be disseminated to the residence director.

Beyond support of the hectic schedule of the residence director, participants shared other examples of the ways in which their supervisors demonstrated support within departmental culture. Aryn shared the following relationship she observed between her supervisor and the institutional mission which set the tone for her departmental culture:

I think because my director and the leadership of our office buy into that Jesuit identity so much, it really is. And that really is how I think she runs her department and she knows that she can't have... If she's not caring for all of us, like the whole person, then she's not gonna have an effective practitioner on the ground as the first responder. So I do believe that she really has bought into that care for the whole person concept.

In Aryn’s excerpt, we learn that she values her supervisor’s affirmation and enactment of the institutional mission. Her director’s supervisory style is informed by the institutional value of wellness, which further demonstrates to Aryn that wellness is truly valued at both the institutional and department level. It is this commitment to wellness that positively contributes to Aryn’s own sense of wellness.

Xavier shared a unique example of his appreciation of his supervisor tapping into his own expertise as an experienced residence director:
I've been here longer than she has, I know the culture in my buildings a little bit better. So she has tried to create a good space for me to say, "Hey, I need help. I don't know how to navigate this."

For Xavier, beyond respect of time, he values his new supervisor’s ability to be self-reflective and be truthful about the aspects of the job that they do not yet understand. The lack of understanding from the new supervisor does not depict weakness from the perspective of the residence director, but allows the residence director to be respected for their work knowledge, and allows them to feel confident in their role. This dynamic contribute to the trust-building necessary between residence director and supervisor, and ultimately positively contributes to wellness.

The respect of time and balance in the residence director role can develop into a core tenet of departmental culture. Marissa, who identified as female, Caucasian, and Gay, serves as a residence director at a large urban research institution. In the following excerpt, Marissa shares a powerful reflection of how the supervisor’s superior practiced wellness, and how that demonstrated that wellness was valued within departmental culture:

Our associate director has made it a point of leaving every day at 4:30. And we know that's so that he can get home to his family. He may answer and send email ridiculously early in the morning but he has made that very visible to us so that we know that we are allowed to disconnect. I think also that one of the things I really appreciate about my department as a whole is it's very flexible when life events come up, in terms of being able to take time and people covering for one another. There is a very big culture of
supporting one another in either a family member died or is sick, or you're going through health complications, or someone's taking parental leave. There's just a lot of support for making sure that people can take that time.

In Marissa’s except she shared an appreciation for her supervisor to be human, and communicate the commitments that are important to them outside of work. Family is generally seen as an important value to many, and the ability for the supervisor to communicate their own wellness needs, helps staff to develop their own sense of priorities, and enable them to comfortably communicate their needs to their supervisor. For Marissa, this value is echoed across her department, and serves as one of the most important contributions to her own sense of wellness.

While several participants in this study shared many positive reflections and examples of how their supervisors were supportive in regards to balance and taking time off, some staff shared examples of how supervisors were not supportive. Chance reflected on his supervisor’s lack of awareness about balance and taking time off. When asked if he had a supervisor who would be more proactive about discussing balance and taking time off with Chance, Chance shared that:

It would actually show me that my supervisor understands where I'm coming from and would help try to alleviate with some of the meetings that we have throughout the day and appreciate my time throughout the day as well. It would make it more available for me to do the things that I'm supposed to be doing throughout the day during my actual office hours. Because a lot of times the meetings that I have, half of them are set up by my supervisors or other people in the central office.
Chance’s reflection shows the need for supervisors to be aware of the workload of residence
director. Chance did not enter his position with this innate understanding, especially lacking
familiarity with the institutional and departmental cultures around wellness. This reflection
highlights the importance for supervisors to be proactive about communicating workload
expectations and strategies for balance within the role.

Derrick reflected on his supervisor’s inconsistency in advocating for him and other
residence directors, which he found ultimately unsupportive. Derrick stated that:

I think she does advocate for us on certain things, such as the on call stuff because it also
affects her. So if it's something that also affects her in the sense, she's more likely to
advocate for it. If it's not, she'll say she'll talk about it, but she really doesn't fight for it.

Derrick’s excerpt highlights a sense of selfishness from the supervisor; in that they only advocate
for things that benefit the supervisor and not the residence director. This connects to Derrick’s
previous reflection of wellness being a disingenuous value of his institution, and not being done
simply for the benefit of staff. Derrick’s sense of wellness is highly impacted by authenticity,
and it is important for supervisors to exhibit this value when advocating staff. The lack of
authenticity communicates a lack of investment and care to the residence director, and negatively
contributes to wellness.

While Kendall shared his satisfaction of his supervisor’s awareness of taking time off and
balance within the residence director position, he expressed concern for the lack of safe spaces to
share feedback about the functioning of the department, along with how information travels from
upper department leadership to supervisors, and in turn from supervisors to residence directors.
Kendall shared an example of a time where he was in a meeting with other staff and the director of the department and shared his feedback for a new initiative. Later, he recounted an interaction with his supervisor, who was not present at the meeting. Kendall shared a conversation that implied sentiments of confusion and mistrust between Kendall and their supervisor:

“[I] heard about what happened at RD roundtable and it sounded like you were very combative.” And I'm like, "What? Combative?" Well, something feels wrong about this, I'm not sure where this is coming from," this, that and the other. And she was like, "Well, you know, I have also heard similar things." I was like, "Where is this coming... " I was like, "I've never gotten feedback like this before in terms of how I carry myself in professional setting, in meetings and things like that." I was like, "That's the first time I've ever been... " And she was like, "Well, how did you feel that conversation with [the Director]?" And I said, "I thought it went great. And everyone around me told me that they thought it was great, and they thought I handled it exceptionally well." And she was like, "Well, so you didn't say this?" I was like, "What? No, I didn't say that, I didn't trash [the Director] at all. I didn't scold her, I just said, 'We need to figure out something else, what are your ideas?'" I can see it on her face she was befuddled because what I was giving her was not matching what she had been told.

Ultimately, the experience left Kendall with the following reflection about the support of residence directors: “Like, is this a place where I can't give my honest opinion about things? It just really sort of... I don't know”. These excepts depict the importance of supervisors providing fair and observed feedback of the residence director. Poor feedback can create a sense of distrust and dissent in the relationship between the residence director and supervisor. Additionally, poor
feedback also impacts the way in which residence directors are invested and engaged in the department and institution; residence directors need the ability to feel comfortable sharing feedback with their supervisor, positive and negative, about their work experience.

Finally, in regards to the role of supervision of residence directors, some participants shared that while they may have experienced positive support from their immediate supervisor, inconsistent messages and practices were observed amongst department leadership above the level of their supervisor. Derrick reflected on an example where he communicated with the department leader regarding gaining more support staff for after-hours on-call support. Derrick shared the following experience:

We have been giving suggestions to our Dean to bring to her supervisors…We've been advocating to push the increase the level of first-level on call. We had a meeting with our vice president ‘cause she came to our staff meeting we vocalized the concerns to her, she's like, "Oh, I've never heard of these before." We've been making this campaign since August. Then, her response to that was, "Oh, you know that's interesting, because so and so was actually just saying we should actually decrease the size of on call."

Marissa shared an example of her interpretation of department leadership above her direct supervisor, and how it differed from her understanding of the work and was impacting her wellness:

I think one of the things that has arisen occasionally for myself, and has been said by others who are resident directors, is not necessarily from our supervisor, but there are some upper admin who... Like everything is a crisis. And just everything is important and
to the same level of emergency, when they don't believe that. Like, the upper ma... It's just how they kind of operate. They need the information now and this needs to be done now and you're trying to balance many different responsibilities. And so it falls to the direct supervisors of RDs to sort of manage that. And occasionally that trickles down.

Derrick and Marissa’s excerpts both prove that residence directors pay attention to the actions and decision-making of managers above their direct supervisor. Residence directors want to feel that managers beyond their direct supervisor, care about them, and understand how the residence director role supports the needs of the entire department and/or division. While managers beyond the direct supervisor may believe that it is the role of the direct supervisor to support residence directors, managers can also negatively contribute to residence director wellness.

**Navigating Departmental Politics**

Another subtheme that emerged from the data highlighted how residence directors navigated departmental politics. Departmental politics focuses on how decisions are made, who has the ability to make decisions, how change is managed, how staff communicate with each other, and how the department works with other departments with shared interests and goals. Some residence directors, particularly those new to the role and new to student affairs, were not yet aware of departmental politics, or could not articulate their observations as politics. Other more experienced residence directors were able to reflect on the overall operations of the department. The researcher discovered a negative relationship between residence directors and departmental politics: residence directors who cited challenges with navigating politics within the department reported poorer wellness. Challenges residence directors reported focused on
departmental communication, creating political capital, working with other departments, and creating change within the department.

While Christina had been serving in the capacity of residence director at several institutions, she has been at her current HBCU for less than one year. Christina reflected on the challenges of being new, specifically regarding her attempt to advocate for an easier approaching to scheduling on-call responsibilities amongst all residence director staff: “And what happens with that is people have always seen it done a certain way that this woman who's been here for four months is not gonna really come in and tell me how it should now be done.” When Christina was asked about how she was going to rectify this challenge, she provided the following insight that highlights her understanding of the political nature of her department:

You just have to go with the flow, and not go with the flow because you think it's right, but go with the flow until you've built enough rapport for the people to trust that your decision is one to be thought of.

Kendall also reported challenges regarding how change was brought about within the department. Kendall identified a process where residence directors were asked to select committees to serve on for the academic year, which did not work well at all with their schedules. Kendall shared the following challenge to the process for committee selection and his attempts at creating change:

Because all we see is the call for committees goes out at the busiest time of year, mind you, in the middle of RA training, it's comical. And I've brought this up every year, and
I've asked it to change, and nothing happened. Like the one time of year we just don't have the energy or time to put any thoughts to that.

Kendall shared the following reflection that highlights why creating change is important to him and critical to his development as a professional within student affairs; yet, he had become frustrated repeatedly trying to implement it.

I wanna be able to do cool stuff that makes me feel like I have a future in the field of student affairs, that I have potentials and possibilities... Every time I've tried to get my foot in the door, I get too much resistance.

Derrick also experienced difficulty around creating change around specific job responsibilities, and was met with resistance. Derrick shared the following reflection that highlighted his attempt to address the workflow within his position, and the response he received from department leadership:

In our daily role in working with the amount of students that we do, we've also made advocacy like "Oh, could we bring in this or could we shift around some responsibilities so we're all not doing conduct on daily basis?" Which we all love conduct, but it does take up a good amount of time, when we have to also focus on our staff and everything else, and the comment to that was like, "Well that's not how the office is arranged. It hasn't been arranged that way for years, we're not gonna go back to it because this is now the way it's always been.

The excerpts of Christina, Kendall, and Derrick highlight a lack of empowerment to create change within their respective departments. For Christina, the lack of empowerment comes from
her lack of tenure at her institution. Kendall’s excerpt showed that after repeated attempts to suggest change, nothing has been done, nor has Kendall received feedback for why change is not possible. Derrick’s excerpt shows a lack of desire for his department to change; and that managers with longer tenure at his institution are comfortable with the current practices of the department. In all three examples, the residence directors do not possess the necessary political capital in which to enact change. Political capital is mostly derived from tenure in a role or institution, as well as positionality, and as residence directors are entry-level staff, it can prove difficult for them to create sustained change at the departmental level. The lack of political capital and ability to create change negatively impacts residence director wellness.

Derrick and Marissa also expressed challenges regarding the management of relationships with other offices. They both expressed challenges in forming relationships with other offices, due to the lack of a cohesive working culture between departments. Derrick shared the following example that depicts how other offices expected him to complete additional responsibilities due to his live-in status:

Our office is eight of us, and we do res-life, orientation, all that jazz. Our Student Activities office, they have four individuals. They have a director and then three assistants. And then... Five technically, the administrative assistant. Now, the interesting part in that, is that where I say kinda maybe this is where it comes to us being more understaffed on things, is that frequently they have events and they do not wish to cover, such as late night events and their campus programming space, etcetera. Their first inclination is to pass it on to our office to cover it, because we're gonna live here anyway.
Marissa, meanwhile, worked closely with a private-public partnership that provided operational support for the residence halls she managed. Regarding departmental politics, she highlighted negative observations of the departmental culture of the public-private partnership, and how it impacted the way in which she worked with the staff team:

I was constantly comparing the culture of resident life to the culture of what was going on in our public... Our private partner. There was a very hostile work culture in that partner culture. People would get in trouble because I stopped to chat with them to learn about how their weekend went and how their kids are doing in soccer and trying to build relationships with my co-workers in that private partner because we work very closely for a lot of functions. And I learned a little while later that, from someone higher up, that they would get into trouble for wasting time because I stopped to talk to them and be a person.

The reflections of Derrick and Marissa reflect a desire for residence directors to build positive relationships with other departments. While the lack of relationship-building led Marissa to not wanting to interact with the public-private partnership, Derrick felt that he was being taken advantaged due to this live-in status, which led to him not feeling valued in his role. For both Derrick and Marissa, the ability to have collegial relationships with other departments, is important, and positively contributes to their sense of wellness.

Kendall had served as a residence director for two institutions for a total of seven years, with his tenure at his current institution lasting over five years. The researcher observed that Kendall’s work experience elicited a strong awareness of departmental politics compared to
some of the other participants. Kendall expressed the following sentiment that revealed his lack of comfort with navigating the politics of his department, and how this navigation affected him:

It can be a very... I don't know what, political... I don't know if that's the right word or not. But it can be a very, I guess, political place where if you are not in with the right people, then there's nothing you can do. And so for me that's challenging, that's stressful, because I don't have the energy and the time... I'm not good at... I'm not skillful at networking and building relationships for the sake of getting things done.

When asked to reflect on how he works through the challenges of navigating departmental politics, Kendall expressed the following sentiment that depicts the extent of the decision-making power within the division, how it had affected his ability to make decisions, and ultimately how it was negatively detracting from his wellness:

There's all of these weirdly antiquated bureaucratic, some that have always been there because they've always been there, that dictate how we do our work sometimes that I think makes it really difficult to take any power, and I think it keeps community staff without any power. In terms of how that plays into wellness, it becomes a very defeating prospect to think about doing anything awesome, like trying to do anything really cool, or that feels like I'm making a big difference here where I work.

From Kendall’s excerpt, we learn that he is not comfortable navigating the political climate of his department. His previous excerpt where he shared that he repeatedly tried to create change in his department and was not listened to, nor provided response, further creates a sense of confusion on how decisions are made within a department, and who has influence to make
said decisions. Further, the fact that Kendall has worked as a residence director for over five years depicts two possibilities. First, it is possible that residence directors at Kendall’s institution do not have the political capital to create change at the departmental level. As Kendall works at a large institution, and thus works in a large residence life department, residence directors may be significantly challenged create departmental change. Second, it is also possible that Kendall and Kendall’s supervisor do not actively discuss departmental politics and how change is managed within the department. As Kendall shared a sense of discomfort in navigating departmental politics, his supervisor can play an important role in communicating the operations and decision-making processes of the department beyond the residence director position. The researcher believes that both of these possibilities co-exist, and collectively negatively contribute to Kendall’s sense of wellness.

**Identity Acceptance from Colleagues**

Expressed in a previous subtheme, the values of diversity and inclusion are important at an institutional level. It is important to note that from the perspective of residence directors, commitment to diversity and inclusion are not just of importance at the institutional level but also at a departmental level. This study revealed that residence directors are attuned to their own identities, especially those with marginalized identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. The researcher discovered that it was important for the residence directors who participated in this study to be in departmental environments that both affirmed and supported their multiple identities, as well as the marginalized identities of all employees within the department. The interviews revealed that when the residence directors felt accepted and affirmed within their departments, enhanced wellness resulted.
Christina shared that her identity as an African-American woman was indeed affirmed within her departmental culture, and this affirmation had a significant and positive impact on her work experience, as compared to her experiences at a previous institution. Christina also highlighted how her identities had been affirmed working at an HBCU:

To now be in an institution where we all look alike, as far as our skin color, and a lot of us have very similar upbringings, it has kinda been like, okay, I can just take the mask off and just be me. Not that I couldn't be me at those other places, it's just it took a little more polishing and fine tuning. Like I couldn't bring chitterlings to the staff potluck. But [here] they're like, "Well, who's bringing the chitterlings?" So it's just having that cultural understanding without really having to say much is nice.

In this excerpt, Christina illustrates the deep cultural connection in which she shares with her department and institution culture. It this connection that enables her to be her authentic self within her work environment.

Marissa, who did not identify as a person of color, reflected on her experiences with how she perceived women of color being supported within the department. Aware of her own positionality, Marissa spoke about how she considered her department to be ahead of the curve in providing a supportive environment for staff of all identities:

Our department has a group just for the black women of our department to talk about professional development and what it's like to be a black woman in the field. I think particularly my department has... I hear a lot of talk about wellness and balance. I think our department is also ahead of student affairs as a whole. When major things happen on
campus, our department processes those things. Like, in almost every single meeting
you'll start with processing first.

Melissa’s reflection highlights her pride in her department’s commitment to allowing intentional
spaces for affinity groups to exist. The presence of an affinity group to support persons of color
demonstrates a departmental commitment to the experience and professional development of
staff of color. Additionally, this excerpt shows Melissa, a non-Black staff member as an ally to
persons of color in her department. To Melissa, she feels that her department does not just
commit to her experiences, but the experience of other staff from marginalized groups.

While some residence directors interviewed shared examples of where their marginalized
identities were validated at the departmental and institutional level, other residence directors
identified singular examples where one or more of their identities were not being supported or
embraced by the department. This led to poor wellness. Chance, who identified himself as
African-American, shared the following reflection that captures the lack of support his
department exhibited of his racial background, which he attributed to an overall lack of cultural
representation of other persons of color:

The biggest struggle for me is I think, connecting with some of my coworkers, because as
far as the area coordinator staff, I am the only African-American male on staff, and in our
entire office, there's only two African-American individuals in our entire pro staff office.
The other is our associate director who's been here for 15 years, so I'm the newest
African-American employee.
Chance’s excerpt highlights the burden persons of color and other staff from marginalized populations have to negotiate when being there are little to no other staff members within the department that have shared marginalized identities. Chance also shared a desire of wanting to connect; not necessary with a staff member that is in his same position, but any other member within his department. It is possible that the difference in age between Chance and the associate director may impact the lack of connection Chance has with his department, and may suggest that Chance is wanting to connect with someone closer to his age and experience.

Chance also reflected on the overall cultural competency of his department. Outside of his own identities, he reflected on a time when he observed the situation of a graduate assistant he was supervising, who identified as a woman of color:

I feel bad for my grad assistant because she is a darker skinned Indian woman. And so a lot of times people really don't know how to identify her. A lot of times she gets questioned about her race. I remember even one time, someone... They were like, "Oh your skin is so pretty", and the lady didn't know what the right question to ask her, so she asked her, "What is your denomination?"

Through this reflection, Chance expressed that beyond how he was treated, his observation of how his graduate assistant’s cultural identities were not affirmed in the department also negatively impact his own wellness, because he felt that he needed to provided support to her, while simultaneously managing his own lack of identities not being affirmed. Chance also shared an example of poor mistreatment of his graduate assistant that highlight feelings of isolation and lack of acceptance:
She would tell me before I got hired how they wouldn't invite her out to different stuff because they didn't know her religious background or anything like that as well or they felt like because she was a woman of color that she was a little bit more aggressive in tone than them. And so she would tell me that, in the evening time she'll go home after RA training she would just cry to her boyfriend because she just did not feel like she fit in with everyone else.

Thus, not only was it important for Chance to have his identity supported departmentally for him to experience a feeling of wellness and belonging, but how others he worked with were treated affected him, too, pointing to a need for collective departmental well-being. To Chance, he desires an environment that not only affirms his own marginalized identities through increased departmental diversity and cultural competency, but for other staff from marginalized identities to also feel supported and affirmed.

Previously, Christina shared several reflections of how her African-American identity had been supported not only at the institutional level, but departmentally as well. Further reflection, however, revealed that Christina was one of the few women in her department, and that she did find herself having to prove that she was just as capable as the male-identified staff members in her office:

And so I think being here at HBCU where at first my supervisor was a white female and now it is black males, it's like, "Okay, now I have to show myself as a female. Like, I got this." When it comes to moving or something I'm like, "Okay, I could lift these boxes. Like, guys, I can help these people move in." And they're like, "We're men. We have this."
It's okay." And I'm like, "No." Like, "I got this. Let me show you that I can carry the student's case of water. Let me show you that I can do this."

In this excerpt, we observe how staff negotiate multiple marginalized identities. While it is possible for staff be affirmed of one of their social identities, they may not feel support for others. While Christina embraces her identity as Female, her identity as African-American is also salient, particularly working at an HBCU. The excerpt highlights the importance for all staff to feel affirmed in all of their identities, and that department staff from marginalized identities have the responsibility to be an ally to other identities to which they do not identify.

Thematically, the researcher observed that several participants of queer identity experienced various challenges with this aspect of their identity being affirmed in the workplace. Derrick shared the challenges of being queer at a small private liberal arts institution in a rural setting, with fewer staff, compared to large institutions: “Within my [student affairs] division, I am one of two people who identifies as anything other than heterosexual.” Chance, who identified as both African-American and gay, shared similar sentiments as Derrick in regards to being one of very few queer-identified staff members in the department: “And when it comes to my sexuality, being a homosexual male, I am the only homosexual individual on our staff as well when it comes to our professional staff.” Chance also reflected on how staff members in his department made further assumptions regarding his religious identity, solely based on the fact that he identified as gay:

People a lot of times assume that because I am a homosexual male, that I don't believe in God or I don't attend church. And I know a lot of times my coworkers, they connect on
the basis of going to church or something like that. It's like just because I'm a homosexual male doesn't mean I don't go to church. So I think that's how they connect, over traditional views or family values and stuff like that. And a lot of times I think they believe I don't have those, so there wasn't really any support or connection from the very start.

Both Derrick and Chance highlighted sentiments of dissatisfaction with being the only queer-identified staff member within their department. This was similar to Chance’s feelings of being one of few Black individuals within his department, and thus he experiences a “dual effect” of having two salient identities not represented. Chance’s excerpt also highlights the danger of staff using one salient identity to make an assumption about another identity. To Chance, his identity as gay has no relation on his religious beliefs, and these assumptions contributed to a lack of being accepted and valued by those in his department.

Another aspect of queer acceptance emerged from staff who had same-sex partners. While the topic of same-sex partners will be explored in more depth in subsequent subthemes, the researcher discovered that for some staff, navigating their queer identity and relationship status resulted in a lack of affirmation and support from the department. Kendall shared that he had a live-in partner, and observed possible discrimination they had received as a couple from a member of a different department who had access to their staff apartment. Kendall filed a formal grievance with the human resources department, and an aspect of the process was for Kendall to work closely with an assistant director within his department to address the concern. Kendall shared that initially he felt that the process would result in changes to staffing to enable both him and his partner to feel safer, however, at some point during the grievance process he felt like he
was given false assurance by his department. This false assurance resulted in a sustained feeling of possible homophobia that was not supported by his department. Kendall shared the following depiction of the experience:

She [(Human Resources)] had set up this intermediation meeting between me and an assistant director, where she had set up like, "Oh, this is how you're protected. These are how we protect staff apartments..." She's gotten everything set up and ready to go, to kind of ease fears. And then we got to that meeting and the assistant director changed her story completely, and it's like, "Oh yeah, he has access to all of your keys." Nope. Not like, "Sorry, not sorry." And I was like... I lost it. I cried... [chuckle] I started, I just lost my shit... And I started bringing up this idea of I've had this homophobia fear for a few months now. This has now exacerbated it entirely more. It's just really highlight...

In this excerpt, Kendall shared his sense of frustration when the expectations of how his department was going to manage this situation changed. Kendall expressed sentiments of fear, and that he did not find the department or institution supportive nor effective in managing the situation. The lack of support given to Kendall created a sense of distrust between him and department staff, and perpetuated a feeling of a lack of safety for several months.

**Conclusion**

As explored in this super-ordinate theme, departmental culture plays a significant role in how residence directors make meaning of wellness within the context of their job function. A department serves as a “home” for residence directors, especially considering that this role commonly represents a first job for a new student affairs professional. Residence directors are
seeking an environment where they can be their best. Residence directors interviewed for this study shared that on a departmental level, proper supervision, guidance in navigating departmental politics, and having their identities affirmed and accepted all combine and play a significant role in how they can do their best, and thus, contribute to positive wellness for them and those they both supervise and serve.

When reflecting on supervision, it is important to note that the interviews revealed that trust is imperative in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. A residence director, the data illustrated, has to be able to trust that their supervisor has their best interests at heart, and is creating opportunities for them to thrive in the workplace. For the role of a supervisor, there are several “behind the scenes” aspects of the work that may be unbeknownst to the residence director. The participants stressed the importance of supervisors keeping the lines of communication open and learning how to properly communicate well and often to residence directors. Additionally, part of this communication needs to address any issues that residence directors have raised as concerns. Several examples shared by residence directors highlighted that supervisors may not be advocating for the needs of staff. On the contrary, it may be possible that supervisors are properly advocating, however, if the supervisor does not share those efforts with residence directors, staff develop their own narrative of what is or is not happening.

Alongside the importance of the role of the direct supervisor in the wellness of residence directors, it is also important to note that residence directors are highly observant of departmental and divisional leadership. Departmental and divisional leadership are perceived as having the power to influence change, dictate departmental politics, and set the tone for the overall work experience for residence directors. Supervisors, the participants explained, who typically serve
“in-between” residence directors and departmental and divisional leadership, can play an important role in advocating the needs and issues of residence directors to leadership. This allows leadership the opportunity to develop policies, practices, and traditions – in a sense, organizational culture – that will support the needs of residence directors.

On a similar note to the role of supervisors, department, and division leadership play in the experience of residence directors, it is also important to highlight the navigation of the complexities of department politics. Departmental politics, an aspect of departmental culture, is unique to each department and institution. What makes this aspect of culture unique is that navigating departmental politics is not something that can be taught, and residence directors are typically unaware of how departmental politics operate and affect their roles. This facet of departmental and institutional culture is something that has to be experienced. Departmental leadership, and more specifically, the supervisor, can play a critical role in helping residence directors to understand the political structure of the department. As supervisors have a deeper understanding of how decisions are made, where power lies, and how change is managed, by instilling this information to residence directors, these staff will have both an increased sense of how to best navigate the department, and what power lies within residence directors to affect change for their wellness and that of those that surround them.

Finally, as observed in this super-ordinate theme, identity acceptance within the department emerged as important to the residence directors who participated in the study. This theme is not directly correlated with the work responsibilities of the residence director, but it plays a critical role in a residence director’s ability to complete their work. Residence directors whose marginalized identities are not affirmed or supported in their department, not only have to
complete their jobs, but have to do so while simultaneously having to manage the lack of affirmation and support. This contributes to poor wellness, and in several cases in this study, led to residence directors strongly considering leaving their jobs.

The support of marginalized identities within a department can prove to be challenging to supervisors, departments, and divisional leaders. For some institutions represented in the study, a location in a more rural setting led almost inevitably to a more homogenized staff population; this created a “one only” factor where diverse staff feel as if they are the sole staff member of a particular identity within the department. While recruiting practices can be observed to ensure a diverse candidate pool, supervisors and leaders cannot change institutional aspects such as location. However, identity acceptance within a department is not solely about “one only” factor, but how staff are supported. Supervisors and managers must develop a level of cultural competency to develop and sustain a departmental culture that can support staff of multiple identities and genuine respect for intersectional diversity.

This section explored the ways in which departmental culture impacted the wellness of residence directors, the subsequent section explores the third and final super-ordinate theme that emerged from the data, Day-to-day residence director Experience.

**Day-to-Day Residence Director Experience**

While institutional and departmental culture were identified as critical factors to the wellness of residence directors, this theme focuses on the day-to-day and on-going lived experiences of residence directors. As explored in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the residence director role is unique due to its live-in requirement, on-call responsibilities, and the non-
traditional hours involved. Within this theme, the researcher discovered three distinctive subthemes constituting a core focus amongst participants. First, the researcher discovered that residence directors are highly aware of the benefits in the areas of housing and access to university services, for example, they receive in their role. While some benefits are equal for all residence director positions across institutions, such as receiving an on-campus apartment at no additional cost, other benefits are unique to the institution. Residence directors emphasized that benefits such as the ability to utilize personal counseling as positive contributors to their wellness. Second, the researcher discovered that the participants also described the employment conditions of the residence director position, such as their overall workload and their supervision of student staff, at attributes of their wellness. Third, the researcher discovered that the live-in aspect of the residence director role distinguishes this position from other entry-level positions in student affairs, and negatively contributes to the wellness of residence directors.

Benefits

Benefits are integral to all employment positions in higher education, and they serve as one factor assisting colleges and universities in the recruitment and retention of qualified employees. Participants in this study reported that they received several benefits that contributed positively to their wellness. One common benefit reported by residence directors was the proximity of the institution of employment to their home. While this is not a tangible benefit a college or university can offer, employees who desire to live close to home value having employment that allows this to occur. Aryn shared that, prior to her current residence director role, she was a residence director at a position located far from home. Aryn’s following reflection reveals the importance of being close to family: “And so [I] knew that the goal was
always to kind of come back to be closer to immediate being my mom, my dad, and my brother specifically. And so [I] knew that I wanted to be closer to them.” Chance also expressed similar sentiments regarding proximity to his family; similar to Aryn, he had previously held a residence director position at an institution farther from home. He shared that “I found a position here…so it's about a four-and-a-half-hour drive home for me, so it's a lot closer than living in Georgia or Florida, in terms of being close to my family.” Aryn and Chance’s reflections depict a desire to be close to family. The ability to visit and interact with family members is important to Aryn and Chance, and positively contributes to their sense of wellness within their job.

Residence directors also receive benefits from campus-provided housing at no cost to them. While there are definite reported challenges of living in on-campus housing, several residence directors highlighted the benefits. Christina said she appreciated the housing opportunity because it allowed her a degree of financial freedom to complete other goals: “So I get free housing, which helps me to meet some other financial goals of paying off student loans, helping my family back home. And so that is another great perk of the job.” Kendall shared similar sentiments, and also expressed the importance of housing because it allowed him to retain his position for over five years; the benefit made him cautious about finding a new position:

"Obviously, having a free place to live is a tremendous boon. That has helped keep me in the RD job longer than I've really wanted to stay. Because the monetary value of getting a free place to live with no utilities is really hard to beat…so when you add the value of my apartment [to my salary], it makes it actually really challenging to find a job that is even equal in overall compensation value."
These excerpts highlighted the value of free housing to residence directors. To Christina, the ability to be provided with free housing allows her a sense of financial freedom, to which she can manage other financial commitments in her life. For Kendall, his free housing resulted in being retained as a staff member for over five years. While Kendall’s presence in his position for over five years can be seen as positive, he also shared that the benefit of free housing deters him from considering other next step professional opportunities, as they may not provide free housing.

An additional benefit that participants identified in this study was the ability to receive free counseling. Because the residence director often manages conflict and crisis situations, this benefit provides additional support, and relieves the residence director from the burden of seeking counseling independently. Chance shared his insights regarding his institution’s encouragement of staff seeking counseling resources: “There are some resources available to us, through the counselling services. That definitely does promote positive wellness. One of the things that they're trying to do more, is trying to get professional staff members to do counselling.” Xavier highlighted that his institution’s counseling center not only supported students, but staff as well: “Our Counseling Center does a lot to care well for people's overall health. And even for employees. We are allowed a certain number of counseling visits a year.” Kendall’s institution had counselors exclusively dedicated to staff: “There are two therapists essentially that work in the health center who are physically dedicated to meeting with faculty and staff for free.” Marissa reflected on a formal faculty and staff assistance program, a benefit several colleges and universities offer to staff and faculty that provides counseling and other personal assistance. Marissa described the program as “where you can go and faculty and staff
have like 10 free sessions with a cognitive behavioral therapist. That seems to be what their specialty is. To help you work through various stresses at work.”

These reflections show the importance of counseling to residence directors, and its significant contribution to wellness. For residence directors, they directly benefit from the ability to meet with counseling staff that are solely dedicated to the needs and concerns of staff, which also destigmatizes the barriers associated with seeking counseling.

Some participants highlighted benefits that either were restricted or not provided as aspects of the position, which contributed to poor wellness. Chance and Kendall both expressed concern, for example, over their department and institution’s policy to not allow residence directors to have a pet. Kendall stated “I would love to have a dog. I think that would do a lot for my emotional well-being and I know a number of RDs who agree.” Kendall attempted to address this issue with management within his department, with no resulting policy change, but he was instead offered the suggestion to seek an emotional support animal under the Fair Housing Act. Kendall described the following process in addressing this issue with department management:

That's been a whole saga, trying to argue that one. Like I said, you can get an emotional-assistance animal, but that requires going to a doctor and being diagnosed with anxiety disorder, clinical depression or something like that, and then getting prescribed a pet which is a whole process, but... I don't know... Does that get what you're going for?

Chance also expressed similar concerns regarding his institution’s policy to not allow pets. Similar to Kendall, Chance was given information about emotional support animals as a way
around the policy. Chance expressed how not having a pet affected his wellness, and stated that he was permitted to have an animal in a previous residence director role. He also expressed how not having a pet affected his relationship with his live-in partner:

But the negative aspect to that wellness is, we do not have a pet policy. And so in order to actually get a pet on campus you have to go through the whole emotional support animal process and it's just a long process. And so it's really hard especially if you're a new person here and you do have a pet because we actually had a pet when we moved...to here. And that's when I found out we didn't have a pet policy, so we actually had to let the pet go and that kind of did affect my partner more than myself, when it came to the wellness factor.

These excerpts communicate the importance and need for residence directors to be allowed to have a pet in-residence. Pets can provide emotional support to residence directors, and while most individuals can have a pet while living off-campus, the ability to not have a pet creates a barrier for residence directors to want to live-in, which is usually a requirement of the position. These excerpts also suggest that some departments and institutions may encourage staff to seek an emotional support animal as an alternative process. This, however, requires the residence director to acquire qualifying documentation that substantiates a disability, to which residence directors may not qualify. Departments and institutions that deliberately encourage residence directors to pursue an emotional support animal in lieu of allowing pets demonstrate an avoidance of addressing a reasonable desire of a residence director, and thus negative contributes to wellness.
Another benefit that residence directors highlighted as a contributing factor toward wellness was complementary access to a gym. Some residence directors did receive complementary access to a gym and shared the benefit it provided to their physical wellness, but other residence directors commented on not receiving this benefit. Christina shared that she was employed through a public-private partnership with an HBCU, and that contractually she did not receive the same benefits as those that formally worked for the HBCU. Previous to her current employment, Christina worked for a different public-private partnership at a predominately White institution, and she had a contractual agreement to receive gym benefits at the institution. Upon reflection, Christina did not hold the current HBCU responsible for not providing this benefit, but placed the onus on her partnership company:

I've been pushing them to offer us complimentary gym memberships to a gym of our choice. So it could be Planet Fitness, it could be LA Fitness. But I do think that they should offer us some type of gym membership. I noticed other corporate places offer it but I think that will be a nice little touch to have just to get us started.

Kendall also shared that he did not receive gym benefits; he paid to be able to use the campus-provided fitness center. He said he believed that, given that he was live-in, his department could do more to support the physical wellness of employees: “We have to pay for our own gym membership as staff members and the gym is cheap, but it's still, the department can do something.

Kendall and Christina’s reflections highlight the importance of physical wellness to residence directors. While residence directors have the ability to purchase a gym membership to use at or
outside work, due to their live-in status, there is a convenience to using gyms provided at their institution. Institutions that provide gym memberships to staff demonstrate an institutional commitment to physical wellness, which positively contributes to the wellness of staff.

**Job Condition**

The workload and balance of the residence director position was addressed by a large majority of the participants in the study. Overall, residence directors were aware that the position required untraditional hours, however, what differed among the participants were expectations of the position and the level of freedom they enjoyed to complete their work. The researcher discovered that, even though residence directors understood that their role was not a typical “9-5” job, each brought their own approach and philosophy to the work. In some cases, residence directors shared that their approaches changed as they after holding the position for more the one year.

Aryn and Iris both shared that they approached their work with a balanced mentality. Aryn shared the following insight articulating both her understanding of the residence director role as having non-traditional work hours, and empowerment to strive for balance in the position: “I'm a 9:00 to 5:00. I'm not gonna answer anything after 5:00. I'm not like that, that's not how I do my work, but I could say it, I know that I feel empowered and able to say it.” Iris applied a similar approach to her work, but also spoke about creating a separation between her personal and work life:

I think it's very important to note that I try and draw a very hard line between my professional life and my personal life…I don't mind sharing what's going on in my life,
but if I leave my office, I leave my office. If I'm not working at the moment, I will make it clear. "I'm not in my office. I'm not working, can you please go find the resident director who is on call for that question?"

These excepts show that the traditional “9 to 5” work schedule represents a sense of normalcy, and balance. While there is acknowledgement that the residence director position does not work 9 to 5, residence directors possess a mindset to create a balance between work and personal life that is achieved in a job with traditional hours.

Kendall and Xavier were both residence directors who were not new to the roles. Kendall had served in the role at his current institution for over five years, and Xavier was, at the time the interview was conducted, serving his fourth year. Kendall and Xavier shared that they had been able to find balance in the role, but that after being in the role for a few years, they developed a different approach to how they thought about the work. Kendall shared that he considered the residence director position as a job and only one aspect of his life. He did not see the job as a fundamental aspect of his identity, which allowed him to prioritize other aspects of his life. Kendall shared:

I sort of divorced myself from identifying myself with my career, and the calling...I gave that up a long time ago. It's my job, and it's how I pay my bills, and meet my obligations, and to do something good for some people, and that's it.

Xavier said he felt he was almost finished with his residence director career. He reflected on his view of the residence director position in year four, and provided insights regarding why residence directors find new roles: “And it's just the story that I hear from most RDs, they last a
couple of years they get a little bit burned out, they go and find other work that maybe has more boundaries.”

These excerpts show that more experienced residence directors evolve in their perspective toward the position. Experienced residence directors develop an understanding of the role being a job and not a salient aspect of their identity. Additionally, Xavier’s excerpt suggests that the residence director role is conditioned to be a role that one cannot do for a prolonged amount of time, and that a transition to a job with more traditional hours and healthier boundaries between work and personal life is normal and to be expected.

Chance expressed significant challenges with balance, compared to other residence directors interviewed for the study. Chance shared that he typically worked until 10:00pm every day, averaging 12 hours each day. Chance shared that he was not required to do this, but chose to do so on his own volition. He shared the following glimpse into his average work day and overall approach to his position:

For me, I don't see this job as a nine-to-five job and I know for a fact the other area coordinators see this as a nine-to-five. So they go in, their hours probably start about 10:00, they take the hour lunch, they do their meetings, and then they go home for the day. But me, I can't. [chuckle] I wish I could but I can't. I always come back to my office. Even, I have an assistant director who lives right next to my office and he'll come home around maybe 5:30 after leaving the central office like, "...you need to go home." I'm like, "No, I have so much work to do. I need to get this done."
In this extract, Chance shares that he understands that the residence director role is not a traditional “9 to 5” job, and will work late hours until his job is complete. Interestingly, Chance is aware that other staff members in his department value balance within their position, yet still does not. The researcher believes that Chance has not established a sense of balance within his role, unlike others in his department, which knowingly or unknowingly to him negatively contributes to his wellness.

Derrick also expressed challenges with establishing balance in his role. He attributed much of it to both being at a small institution where he was asked to fill multiple roles that extended beyond his residential life responsibilities. He shared:

I very often have days that I don't necessarily get to have my lunch, because I'm tied up in some meeting with my students, because I do have this dual role where I occasionally will be having to use my lunch hour time to meet with students to get all the work done I need to do, to again, fit in that 8:30 to 5:00 time block that we're expected to really be working in.

Derrick also expressed concern about both being understaffed and a lack of equity on how work was allocated amongst existing live-in staff. Derrick also reflected a concern about non-live-in staff not understanding the burden live-in staff members experience:

In looking at how we divvy up our duties, it's not equivalent, it's not equitable, it's not anything of the sort. It's just the three of us who would do all the student stuff. We do all the student stuff, everyone else they make programmatic pieces, they can kind of care less about the day to day operations. They trust the three of us to do everything there. So I
think, in the three of us, we feel we're understaffed because there's just three of us
managing 2800 people. But for the rest of the office they don't necessarily see it that way
'cause they are not in day to day.

Unlike Chance, Derrick’s attributes his high workload to the lack of additional staffing, and lack
of equity within his department and division in assigning responsibilities. While Derrick is
aware that smaller institutions have less staff, live-in staff tend to be assigned work that occurs
outside of traditional hours, in comparison to staff that live-off. This dynamic negatively
contributed to Derrick’s sense of wellness.

A common responsibility of residence directors is the supervisory responsibilities of
resident assistants, who are student employees that serve as counselors, educators, and safety
managers in residence halls. When assessing how student staff supervision negatively contribute
to wellness, residence directors reflected on challenges such as holding staff accountable, and
student staff turnover. Marissa commented on the challenges of supervising resident assistant
staff that were not meeting expectations. She shared that at her institution, student staff
termination was not common, and staff were given several chances to correct their deficiencies.
Marissa added:

You've tried creative and different ways to help them improve in different aspects of their
job and they're still not meeting their expectations, like the basic expectations of the job,
keeping the community safe, getting their work in on time, interacting with their team
mates well and being a good team member, then you should be able to, at the very least,
not renew their contract.
Marissa shared that she felt that the amount of energy she had to spend working with resident assistants who did not meet expectations detracted from the time she could spend supporting and celebrating staff accomplishments. She stated:

I could be devoting it to better noticing and celebrating when some of my staff do some really amazing things and have great creative ideas, but instead spending time having a conversation for the sixth time with an RA about the same exact thing and trying to come up with a sixth creative way to make it work.

In this extract, Marissa shared a sense of frustration with the amount of time devoted to the supervision of student staff members that do not meet job expectations. To Marissa, she is limited in the mechanisms she can use to manage staff performance deficiencies, including staff termination. This results in more time spent by Marissa to manage low-performing staff, and less time supporting the staff members that are meeting job expectations. These challenges negatively contribute to staff wellness.

Iris, a residence director at a community college, also had unique challenges in resident assistant supervision. Due to students being at her institution for two years, she faced frequent staff turnover, which resulted in more time devoted to training. Additionally, Iris shared that resident assistants were high-profile student leaders on her campus, and are usually were asked to fulfill other job and student leadership responsibilities. Iris reflected on the multiple roles her resident assistants served, which meant she needed to invest more time into training, which caused her stress:
Our RAs and mentors, they also hold different hats in the building. They're pretty, in the
college, they're pretty involved students. So I have a couple of RAs that are student
ambassadors. And then I have like a couple other ones, they work at the front desk. Or
some people work in the Learning Center and the career center and they're just involved,
so they end up doing a lot. One of our staff members is the vice president of student
senate. So they tend to also wear a lot of hats.

Different from Marissa, Iris’s reflection showed that the multiple roles played by her resident
assistant staff resulted in high turnover, and more time devoted to staff training. Collectively,
Marissa and Iris value how their time is utilized, especially given the non-traditional hours
required of the residence director position. When residence directors are required to devote extra
time to additional staff trainings, and managing student staff performance, they cannot focus
their time on aspects of their job they find to be more important. This dynamic encourages the
high workload expectation of the position, and negatively contributes to staff wellness.

Technology emerged as a component of the job conditions of residence directors that
contributed both positivity and negatively to wellness. Residence directors generally utilize a
wide array of technology to complete their work, and how technology is embraced within the
department and institution impacts their experience. Several residence directors discussed the
role of their computer as a source of negative and positive wellness. Specifically, residence
directors appreciated the ability to have a laptop as a means to be mobile, but they recognized
that a desktop in their office would allow them to only complete work in that setting. Aryn used
a desktop computer and said she believed that it inhibited her productivity. She stated that her
use of the desktop computer “Creates that weird balance of like, ‘Okay, I need to go downstairs
to do work.’ When maybe I could easily do it upstairs in my apartment because it's after hours or something like that.” Chance also used a desktop computer but understood the positive and negatives of using a desktop versus a laptop computer: He stated: Some of the times I like the fact that I have the office computer because it actually forces me to go to my office and to actually complete all my assignments in my office space. And also for me sometimes it's like a separation for me, especially, it's hard because I work where I live. So if I had the laptop at home I know for a fact that I'll be just working all the time.

Derrick used a laptop in his role, and similar to Chance, acknowledged the pros and cons:

So that's nice in the fact that I can kind of take my work and do it wherever I need to do it, but that's also kinda the double-edged point of the fact too, that it's when I'm in an office that we say "Only work 8:30 to 5:00", but there sometimes is that expectation, little confusion to not, it's very easy to just take your laptop home and go home, which then creates more inclination to be doing more work at home.

These excerpts show that residence directors have different needs in regards to technology and the role in which technology prohibit or supports the non-traditional work hours expectation of the position. Generally, residence directors want the ability to select the technology that they believe will positively contribute to their wellness.

**Live-In Responsibilities**

The residence director position is traditionally considered “live-in” and requires staff to reside in college-provided housing at no cost to the employee. Typically, residence director housing is situated in an on-campus residence hall in close proximity to residential students.
Residence directors serve as some of the only campus employees required to live on campus due to their on-call responsibilities to support after-hours student concerns. The researcher discovered that, while there were some positive attributes to the live-in responsibilities of residence directors, significant challenges negatively impacted their wellness.

Reflecting on wellness, the majority of residence directors in the study addressed their on-campus apartment as an aspect of wellness. This included the apartment’s proximity to their office, the ability to have a pet or live-in partner, and the ability to separate work life from personal life as positive contributors to wellness. Aryn and Iris both had apartments close to their offices, and they appreciated the close proximity. Both residence directors shared that they each enjoyed a 30-second commute from apartment to office. For Iris, the proximity allowed her to take necessary breaks throughout the work day. She added: “I'll have my cup of tea, I will sit down and watch a quick clip on YouTube. I'll do whatever I need to do to quickly rejuvenate, and then return back to my office to continue doing work.” Derek and Kendall also enjoyed apartments close in proximity to their offices, but they noted an appreciation that these spaces were actually separate. Derek shared his thoughts on how he benefited from having separation between his apartment and office: “My physical office is in one of the three buildings that I oversee, as my apartment is, but they're in different buildings which is...great...because I am able to have a little bit more separation between work and home.” Marissa, Chance, and Xavier also noted an appreciation for close proximity between their apartment and office. They both commented, however, that there still endured challenges by living on-campus. Marissa shared that she had challenges creating separation between her personal and work life due to how the close location of her apartment to student residential spaces. She shared the following reflection:
I have to be careful because the apartment that I live in, the door between the hallway and my apartment has probably like an inch and a half gap at the bottom, which means as you're walking... I very well know that as you're walking through the building, if someone is talking or having a loud conversation or even just like a medium-high volume conversation, you can hear it from the hallway. So I have to take into account like, what's my volume, are we in a bedroom or are we in the common room, and what time is it, are there people walking outside.

Chance also shared a similar example and highlighted that the entrance to his apartment was through the residence hall, which further created challenges:

Because we don't have a private entrance, so we have to walk past the desk. And then a lot of times as well, we wanna have the private time with your partner or something like that, these rooms are so small and so close to the front desk, a lot of times people will hear those conversations that you have with your significant other.

In these extracts, both Marissa and Chance reflected on the challenges of living close to students, and that privacy is difficult to establish. As residence directors have to manage the ways in which they communicate in their staff apartments being in close proximity to students, this condition negatively impacts wellness.

Another aspect of residence directors having an on-campus apartment was the ability to have a live-in partner. Within this study, all residence directors who desired live-in partners were allowed to have one. Aryn and Kendall reflected on their experiences with live-in partners. Aryn shared that she was encouraged to think more about wellness and balance in her position
due to having a responsibility to another person. She shared “I think a lot about, ‘Okay, so how... Is my bucket full so I can serve my best capacity at work?’ That's wellness for me as well as, ‘How can I serve the best to my family?’” Kendall had endured experiences at work that forced him to critically think about how the live-in experience impacted his partner. Kendall shared that one staff member created an experienced imbued with threats in Kendall’s residence hall. Kendall further shared:

This guy threatened to shoot up my building, so what am I supposed to do with that?” It introduced a new element of like, "Wow, shit, I'm actually kind of scared of this guy now because I don't know what he's capable of...I don't know what's being done to protect me. And now I have a boyfriend living with me that I have to worry about, too," so I had to have this conversation with him and he was like, "Well, I don't know how to react to this."

In these excerpts, both Aryn and Kendall expressed that the live-in experience not only impacts them, but their live-in partner as well. Challenges that exist when living in a residence hall not only negatively impact residence directors, but their associated partners. For Kendall, when concerns of violence impacted his residential community, he also had to focus on the needs and comfort of his partner. The burden of focusing on the partner’s adjustment and navigation to living on-campus can negatively contribute to staff wellness.

Kendall and Chance both shared that they have same-sex live-in partners. One challenge to having same-sex partners is the disclosure of sexual orientation to those can manage the live-in
partner process. Chance reflected on his interview experience where he had to disclose this information to employers:

I think for me the challenge started after my interview, because that was one of my main questions was like, "Hey, are we allowed to have significant others to live with us on campus?" And then in that conversation, you're kind of awkwardly forced to tell them about your significant other and also your sexuality in that aspect.

Chance also experienced the act of disclosing his sexual orientation to student employees who lived in his residence hall. He shared:

I get the question of, "Is that your brother? Is that your cousin? Is that your friend?" So there's a lot more of people questioning me and my relationship to my significant other, especially even from the housekeepers to the RAs. They wanna know, "Who is that living with you?"

In this extract, Chance discussed the negative impact of having to disclose his sexual orientation to other colleagues. Residence directors with same-sex partners are not only burdened to disclose their sexual orientation to their employers should the partner wish to live-in with their residence director, but disclose relationship status to other staff members that may work in the building to which the staff apartment is located. This burden can create significant barriers for Queer-identified staff to feel comfortable within the department and institution, as these challenges only exist due to the requirement to live on-campus.

When considering the live-in responsibilities of residence directors, the majority of residence directors addressed their on-call or duty responsibilities as a negative factor of
wellness. For several residence directors, when examining all aspects of their position, being on-call contributed most to negative wellness. Aryn shared that “I had to think about the one thing that affects my wellness the most, it's being on duty.” Xavier shared the following reflection regarding how being on-call impacted him, “And that's one of those things during that week, that is not necessarily the best week of overall health. Derrick expressed the following sentiment about being on-call in a system in which he was one of few individuals that hold on-call responsibilities: “Just looking at our office and the fact that when we figure on call, that essentially in the semester each of us has about a month where on call system works, that's extremely unhealthy.” Chance was also working at an institution where he was one of few individuals participating in on-call responsibilities. He shared the following example of the burden he carried when he is on-call:

Because personally, like when I'm on call, and I tell people this all the time, I just really don't sleep, for the entire week because you never when you'll get a telephone call. And the tricky thing about here is when you're on call, you're really on call for the entire campus because that one person, the area coordinator, or assistant area coordinator, you're on call for all the buildings and so it's really in your hands when you're on call.

These excerpts highlight how being on-call contributes to the overall poor health of residence directors. While this aspect is a known requirement of the position, staff feel burdened by this responsibility, and it worsens when staff have more on-call responsibilities, like those at smaller institutions.
Aryn, Xavier, and Christina all shared that the on-call responsibilities constituted the one aspect of the residence director position that could easily lead to their eventual departure from the role. Aryn shared the following thought regarding the on-call aspect of her job: “Everytime I leave, like my week on call, I'm like, ‘I'm gonna get a consulting job that doesn't require any of this.’ and then I'm like, ‘No, I won't. I love what I do.’ Xavier said he believed that the on-call responsibilities of the residence director position were intangible contributed to the residence director lifecycle. He expressed:

I think personally where I am at in year four, yes. But I also... I understand why there is...
The nature of the work that I do it make sense. I'm getting closer to the end of my Residence Life career. And it's just the story that I hear from most RDs, they last a couple of years they get a little bit burned out, they go and find other work that maybe has more boundaries.

Christina was one of the few residence directors in the study that worked at a large institution where on-call responsibilities were shared amongst a larger group of residence directors. Even though she believed that the amount of on-call responsibilities she had to complete was manageable, she shared the following reflection about how being on-call combined with living on-campus impacted her career trajectory:

I am looking... Starting to look for other jobs because I'm interested in an off campus position, not living with students as neighbors, and not having to be on a duty rotation. All of the other things that my department does are so positive, and so... And I'm very
grateful for a lot of that. I've benefited from a lot of that. But duty is tough. And being around your students 24/7 is tough.

Through the reflections of Aryn, Xavier, and Christina, the on-call responsibilities of the position create an environment to which work-life balance is difficult to achieve. As residence director positions all require some aspect of on-call responsibility, staff feel that there is no easy remedy to negate the negative contributes this has to staff wellness. Staff shared that this aspect of the role significantly contributes to staff transitioning from these roles, which impacts overall retention. To residence directors, the desire to depart the residence director role due to on-call responsibilities is normal and understandable.

**Conclusion**

While the day-to-day residence director experience reflects the tangible daily challenges and benefits staff receive in the role, it is clear that several aspects of the day-to-day experience of the participants posed significant challenges to wellness. As shared by several residence directors, this aspect of the work – particularly the live-in component – had the propensity to ultimately result in staff turnover. Understandably, as residence directors are asked to complete these responsibilities, which are significantly different than other comparable entry-level student affairs staff, managers would benefit from both acknowledging and anticipate that residence directors will not typically consider their positions as permanent opportunities. Despite that, managers also have a unique opportunity to prolong the eventual departure of residence directors by creating favorable opportunities for staff to experience flexibility and freedom while completing their live-in responsibilities.
Benefits of the day-to-day experiences, however, were also highlighted as mostly positive contributors to residence director wellness. Benefits such as counseling services and a complementary staff apartment promoted positive wellness. Additionally, the allowance of a pet can also contribute to positive staff wellness; it permits residence directors to feel more at home, given that their work environment usually also has to serve as their home. As different institutions have the ability to provide different benefits, it is important for managers to be transparent with candidates about what an institution has to offer, as well as what they cannot provide. This information would help prospective residence directors make more informed decisions and potentially not have someone depart the role prematurely.

When considering the job conditions of the residence director role, it became evident that residence directors perceived wellness and balance differently. Supervisors and managers should not assume that staff enter these roles with this innate knowledge. As residence directors may not be aware of how to make sense of balance and wellness within the role, supervisors and managers can play a critical role in both guiding staff through department expectations regarding how to accomplish job responsibilities, as well as helping staff to develop their own ways to manage a healthy balance between work and life. Several residence directors noted that one challenge of workload was the lack of live-in staff. This puts the burden of crisis response and after-hours support on these individuals, which can negatively contribute to staff wellness. Residence life departments and student affairs divisions may need to assess this issue and explore the possibility of additional residence director positions, or having additional existing staff serve as live-in.
When examining the live-in responsibilities of the residence director, this aspect contributed a significant amount of negative wellness for the participants. While several residence directors interviewed were challenged by the live-in responsibilities, this requirement of the position was known by candidates well advance of staff accepting their roles. Additionally, while staff who were newer to the role did not experience as many challenges with the live-in responsibilities, residence directors who had served in the role for several years more commonly had a desire to seek a new employment opportunity that did not require them to live-in. While the residence director is an entry-level position and not typically seen as a permanent job, supervisors and managers can play an important role in helping staff negotiate this known challenge. As previously mentioned, improving the on-call responsibilities aspect of the job by increasing the number of staff who live-in and serve on-call may alleviate some of the stress residence directors experience. Additionally, managers and supervisors can play a supportive role in improving the live-in aspect. Suggestions would include the allowance of pets, and having an apartment that is both private yet in close proximity to offices. Additionally, managers and residence life departments need to examine their policies and practices for the allowance of domestic partners, to ensure that live-in partners feel safe and comfortable. Particular consideration needs to be given to residence directors with same-sex partners to ensure respect of sexual orientation identity in the process of registering their partner as live-in.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to share the analysis of interview data from the study. The goal of this study was to examine how residence directors make meaning of wellness within their job function. Through the examination of interview data, three super-ordinate themes emerged:
(a) Institutional culture, (b) Departmental culture, and (c) Day-to-day residence director experience. Within Institutional culture, the researcher discovered that residence directors were aware of the institutional culture that permeates through their organizations. Residence directors expressed that they experienced positive wellness when they felt connected and committed to the mission and values of their institutions. Additionally, residence directors also experienced positive wellness when their institutions exhibited a sustained commitment to the values of wellness, diversity, and inclusion. When considering the theme of Departmental culture, the researcher discovered that residence directors who were interviewed expected their departments to serve as environments in which they could thrive and accomplish a high level of work. Specifically, residence directors in this study sought a departmental culture in which they felt supported by an invested supervisor, learn to successfully navigate the departmental politics, and having their marginalized identities acknowledged, affirmed, and embraced. Finally, when examining the Day-to-day residence director experience, residence directors who participated in the study reiterated that they desired to have benefits that directly supported their challenging work, a balanced personal and work life, and a live-in experience that provides both amenities and a respect for time and boundaries as if they lived off-campus. The final chapter will further discuss these findings, as well as provide implications for practice and for future research.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how residence directors make meaning of wellness within their job function in order to respond to the complex needs of residential students in a diverse college environment. The extant literature on the experience of residence directors solely focused on their job satisfaction, and was mostly quantitative in nature. In contrast, this study utilized a qualitative approach to better understand the lived experiences of residence directors to identify the aspects of their work that significantly impact wellness.

Given that this study focused on human behavior and interaction, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized as the methodological approach. IPA allows a researcher to gather an in-depth perspective of a particular experience on a personal level (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The World Health Organization’s (WHO) Healthy Workplaces Framework was utilized as the theoretical framework of the study. IPA and the WHO Healthy Workplaces Framework were used in conjunction in the development of the study; three findings emerged from the data: (a) the role of institutional culture on the wellness of residence directors, (b) the role of departmental culture on the wellness of residence directors, and (c) the day-to-day residence director experience.

In this final chapter, each of the three findings will be discussed and situated within the context of the extant literature and analyzed through the theoretical framework. Following a discussion of the findings, recommendations for practice will be presented. Finally, the chapter will conclude by offering recommendations for future research.

The Role of Institutional Culture on the Wellness of Residence Directors
The first finding within this study outlines in detail the impact of institutional culture on how residence directors make meaning of wellness. As Beeler (1988) shared, institutions are unique cultures, due to the integrated relationship of faculty, students, and staff; this culture significantly impacts faculty and staff lifestyle. Within institutional culture, the researcher discovered three distinctive aspects that constituted a core focus amongst participants. First, the researcher discovered that residence directors who have a positive connection with their current institution’s type, mission, and values experienced positive wellness. This finding is consistent with the literature regarding the importance of student affairs staff connecting to institutional missions (Hirt & Robbins, 2016). Newman and Carpenter (1993) argued that "Employees will survive (and thrive) by assessing the organizational culture and understanding its norms. They should also be aware of their own personal needs and preferences, as well as those of influential others" (p. 223).

Even when the mission of an institution is stated in purportedly positive terms, faculty and staff must comprehend the tenets of institutional culture to adapt the norms to meet their needs in positive ways. New student affairs staff need proper orientation and socialization to their institution, to learn and understand its culture (Amey, 2002; Katz & Tushman, 1983). Blix and Lee (1991) stressed the importance of organizational fit between an employee and their workplace, as poor fit leads to burnout, and consequently, negative wellness. When reflecting on the importance of staff connecting to an institution’s mission, Barr (2000) articulated that “Failure to understand, appreciate, and translate the mission of the institution into programs and services can rank among the biggest mistakes a student affairs administrator can make” (p. 25). Similarly, Blix and Lee (1991) focused on the importance of organizational fit between an
employee and the workplace, and that a lack of organizational fit between the employee and employer leads to employee burnout. Literature also stresses the importance for residence directors to be nimble in their adherence to institutional missions, as this capacity for flexibility may dictate their ability to progress through the profession. Hirt and Robbins (2016) shared that “There is little doubt that institutional mission shapes professional practice for student affairs professionals, yet recognizing and appreciating differences in mission provides an avenue of professional mobility within the student affairs profession” (44-45).

Second, the researcher discovered that an institution’s overall commitment and practice of wellness throughout all aspects of college and university life is an important factor in residence director wellness. The literature pertaining to institutional wellness initiatives is generally consistent to this study’s findings. Research has highlighted the importance of the cultivation of a healthy workplace and recognizes that wellness is a common issue faced by higher education professionals. As such, colleges and universities are very involved in the development, promotion, and assessment of wellness programs for faculty and staff (Burke, Dye, & Hughey, 2016; Haines et al., 2007; Moxler, 1990). The literature contends that wellness initiatives not only improve benefits to staff and faculty, but they bring with them lower costs of healthcare paid for by institutions (Buchmueller & Valletta, 2017). While this is generally positive, the findings of this study revealed that staff need to feel that their institution is genuine in the promotion of wellness, and financial gain benefitting the institution must not be the primary motivator that shapes the structures articulating and enacting the institutional culture.

Third, an institution’s commitment and practice to diversity and inclusion played a significant role in how residence directors experience wellness. Residence directors interviewed
for this study across the board valued an institution’s demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion, and this finding was consistent was supported with limited research. According to Harris (2013), the overall benefits and inherent value of institutional diversity in higher education allows colleges and universities to succeed in their mission and objectives. Additionally, the vast diversity represented by colleges and universities require a vast number of institutional responses to challenges. As all colleges and universities are uniquely diverse, it is impossible for an institution to be able to respond to all presented challenges that pertain to the diverse need of constituents (Harris, 2013). Within the study, gender and race were noted as specific aspects of identity to which student affairs professionals experience challenges. Regarding gender, McEwen, Williams, and Engstrom (1991) shared that the student affairs profession tends to be more commonly comprised of women due to the high number of women that work in the field along with the higher proportion of women matriculating in colleges and universities. This result, however, does not take into consideration the intersecting identities of gender and race, and how the experience of women of color differs from the experience White women. When examining how race and ethnicity intersect within predominately white institutions, Jackson (2003) reflected: "There are serious questions about the success of predominately White institutions in solving the dilemmas of administrative diversity" (p. 10). McEwen, Williams, and Engstrom (1991) asserted that student affairs staff need to be as diverse as the student body, and shares:

Particularly within student affairs where it is of great importance for the profession to reflect the increasing diversity of our student populations, we must consider the degree to which the profession’s reflection of Anglo, Euro-American values promotes a cultural
environment that is not responsive to visible racial and ethnic group members of the student affairs profession. (p. 445)

Overall, to the experience of residence directors, institutional culture impacts wellness. As reflected, institutional culture comprises of several aspects, including commitments to diversity, inclusion, and wellness, as well as overall mission and values. While some of the onus is on the residence director in identifying institutions whose institutional cultures best align with their own values, institutions must be clear in the communication and practice of their institutional culture, taking into consideration wellness, diversity, and inclusion, in order to articulate a welcoming and nurturing workplace for residence directors. In relation to the importance of institutional culture, departmental culture played a similarly important role to the wellness of residence directors, which will be discussed next.

The Role of Departmental Culture on the Wellness of Residence Directors

The second major finding of this study pertains to the role of departmental culture on how residence directors make meaning of wellness. Departmental culture serves as a subculture of institutional culture, and it usually reflects institutional missions, values, and practices. While there was extant literature regarding the impact of institutional culture on staff wellness, there was limited literature pertaining to departmental culture. Most of the extant literature pertaining to the impact of departmental culture on wellness focused on the impact of supervision (Creamer & Winston, 2002; Tull, 2006). Literature pertaining to supervision generally focused on the supervision of new student affairs professionals and was not specific to residence directors.

Creamer and Winston (2002) identified that the quality of supervision received by new student affairs professionals in their first or second jobs directly impacts staff attrition. One
finding of the study focused on residence directors sharing their need for a supportive supervisor who assisted them in their adjustment to the department, as well as being aware of the unique demands and challenges of the residence director role. In short, the reflections of the participants highlight the importance of supervisors enacting a supervisory style that takes into consideration the unique challenges and complexities of the residence director role. Tull’s (2006) finding was similar in that the author asserted that supervisors need to be able to provide adequate support, specifically in the area of helping new staff adjust to the institution and department, in order to best retain staff. Additionally, Tull (2006) identified that the use of a synergistic supervision model positively impacts student affairs staff retention. Synergistic supervision focuses on a supervisor communicating regularly with their employee on the following areas: (a) general feedback, (b) examples of good performance, (c) examples of inadequate performance, (d) attitude, and (e) long-term career interests (p. 466). While this model was not specifically referenced as a preferred supervisory style by participants within the study, several participants did share examples of their received supervision that directly correlate with the components of synergistic supervision.

Within departmental culture, navigating departmental politics was highlighted by the participants in this study as a factor of residence director wellness. While the literature pertaining to departmental politics is limited, given that departments operate both within the larger organization and independently, literature pertaining to organizational politics within student affairs can also be analytically extrapolated as valid at the departmental level. Newman and Carpenter (1993) argued that student affairs constitutes a political environment due to nature of the work, limited resources, and the dynamics that exist amongst employees. They also
asserted that “Individuals wishing to cope within an organization and managers responsible for managing the culture require a clear understanding of the nature of organizational politics” (p. 220). Within the study, it was shared that residence directors do not know how to navigate departmental politics and that this is something that is not inherently learned but taught and/or experienced. Additionally, Newman and Carpenter (1993) argued that "Although political behavior occurs at all levels, political skills should be learned at the entry level and honed on the way up just like any other skills" (p. 223). While this is true, residence directors interviewed expressed indirectly that they did not adequately know how to develop and hone their political behavior. Examples of this included how to enact changes in policies at the departmental level, as well as how to seek out opportunities to further professional growth. As such, residence directors need specific guidance from a supervisor on how to best navigate organizational landscapes, from the departmental to the broader comprehensive institutional level.

Residence directors also shared the importance of having their cultural identities be accepted and embraced within the culture of their department. Within the context of the study, gender, race, and sexual orientation were the marginalized identities referenced by participants as experiencing challenges within the departmental culture as being accepted and validated. While no specific research exists on the impact of cultural identity acceptance within departmental culture, existing literature supports the importance of cultural identity acceptance within student affairs environments, and how various social identities of student affairs practitioners, such as race, gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation, play a significant role in staff wellness, and burnout persists when staff are not supported in their identities (Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998; Beehr, Farmer, Glazer, Gudanowski & Nair, 2003, Maslach,
Jackson, & Leiter, 1997). Within the study, Queer-identified residence directors, residence directors of color, and residence directors who share both identities were highlighted as not having their identities affirmed within their department. This resulted in these staff members feeling disengaged with their position, and negatively contributed to wellness. Literature supports that Queer-identified student life practitioners struggle with identity acceptance (Irwin, 2002). Irwin (2002) outlined this finding pertaining to the discrimination of queer student affairs staff: "the perpetrators of this behavior [(discrimination)] were most likely to be work colleagues employed either at a similar level or in a more senior position than the recipient of the homophobic behavior" (p. 71). Irwin shared that queer staff need a safe and inclusive work environment, as supported by the department, that discourages the practice of homophobia and other discriminatory practices on the basis of sexual orientation (p. 77). Researchers have also explored the challenges faced by persons of color in the profession. One significant challenge that emerged was the overall lack of persons of color in the profession; staff of color feel affirmed and valued when they work closely with others that share in aspects of their identity (Flowers, 2003; Jackson, 2003). As mentorship was identified as a major tool in the retention of staff of color by some participants interviewed for this study, increasing the diversity of professionals of color is of utmost importance; mentorship cannot happen if there are no persons of color to serve as mentors (Gaston, 2003; Holmes, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Reason, 2003).

In summary, based on the experience of residence directors interview in-depth for this study, departmental culture impacts wellness. Departmental culture is comprised of several aspects, including supervision, navigating departmental politics, and cultural identity acceptance. Residence directors require supportive and compassionate supervisors, who not only provide
structure and support of their role, but who can also guide residence directors through navigating the political dynamics of the department. Additionally, managers and supervisors have to be attuned to the overall diversity of a department; managers need to be reflective and ask themselves how the values of diversity and inclusion are both practiced and reflected in their department. Supervisors and managers who strive to cultivate a departmental culture that affirms the marginalized identities of their staff, positively contribute to the wellness of residence directors, especially those who are traditionally underrepresented in student affairs.

**The Day-to-Day Residence Director Experience**

The third major finding of this study focused on the day-to-day experience of residence directors, and the unique aspects of their job that impact wellness. As the residence director position is unique due to its live-on-campus aspect and on-call responsibility, several aspects of the day-to-day experience negatively impacted wellness. Within the day-to-day residence director experience, the researcher discovered three distinctive aspects that constituted a core focus amongst residence directors. First, the benefits provided to residence directors by an institution can play a significant role, both positive and negative, to the wellness of residence directors. Moxley (1990) shared that the high demands of student affairs professionals are commonly met with inadequate compensation, which also contribute to higher levels of stress, low morale, and staff turnover. Within the study, residence directors shared a general sense of satisfaction in the benefits received, and particularly highlighted the benefits of on-campus housing at no cost, and free counseling, as positive contributors to wellness. This finding was consistent with Totman (2012) who discovered that the availability of a staff apartment at no cost was a factor very important factor to residence directors, especially those that identify as
millennial. Participants also shared the importance of receiving counseling at no cost to them to their overall wellness. These findings were consistent to findings that employee assistance programs and counseling programs that directly improved staff retention, and had an overall positive effect for staff ("Occupational Health", 2011).

Job condition was also identified by the participants as an aspect of the day-to-day residence director experience that impacted wellness. Specifically, the overall workload, untraditional hours, and lack of balance achieved in the position negatively contributed to wellness. These findings were consistent with the literature regarding the prevalence of burnout and poor balance to student affairs staff (Berwick, 1992; Herr & Strange, 1985; Keener, 1990, Tack, 1991; Toma & Grady, 2002; Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory, 2005, Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998), as well as specific burnout of residence directors (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Belch, et al., 2009; Herr & Strange, 1985; St. Onge et al., 2008).

Finally, the live-in experience of residence directors as identified as a negative contributor to staff wellness. This finding is particularly interesting, as participants in the study noted the benefit of free on-campus housing as a positive contributor to wellness. This finding highlights that while residence directors appreciate the financial freedom of receiving free housing, at the same time, living on campus, typically in a residence hall, still contributes negatively to wellness. As residence directors noted that the living on-campus component of the position may ultimately lead to their departure from the residence director role, the researcher believes that in most cases, the negative wellness experienced by living on-campus outweighs the positive wellness experienced by staff not having to pay for housing. Participants in the
study reported that separation of work and personal life, as represented by the proximity of their staff apartment to their office, as contributing to wellness. Residence directors desire a living space to which they have a semblance of separation from their work life, and typically this is hard to achieve due to the position being “live-in” and the staff apartment traditionally located in a student residence hall. While some participants appreciated having an apartment in a building separate from their office, others shared that the live-on requirement was not a sustainable condition; they interpreted this aspect as supporting the notion of the residence director position being considered temporary. This finding was consistent with literature that highlighted the challenges of the live-in requirement of the residence director position (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Wilson, 2008).

Participants also reported the ability to have a partner reside with them in their staff apartment as a contributor to residence director wellness. While all participants in the study appreciated the ability to have their partner reside with them, Queer-identified staff identified significant concerns they experienced that negatively contributed to their wellness. Queer-identified residence directors who had same-gender live-in partners shared the burden of disclosing their sexual orientation and relationship status to their employers, co-workers, and students. This experience is not shared by residence directors who have different-gender live-in partners. As there is no literature pertaining to this specific finding, the information gathered from Queer-identified residence directors serves as a new contribution to the literature pertaining to the overall lived experience of residence directors. Additionally, while this finding is situated in the theme of the day-to-day residence director experience, it is also closely linked to the importance of staff from marginalized identities being affirmed and valued within their
department, a subtheme of departmental culture. While there is no specific literature pertaining to this finding, Irwin (2002) articulated the need for queer staff to feel safe within their work environment, and to harbor a work environment that could both prevent and combat experiences of homophobia (p. 77).

Within the live-in experience, residence directors also reflected on how on-call responsibilities negatively contributed to staff wellness. Most residence directors within the study highlighted being on-call as the single factor that most negatively contributes to wellness, and for most, the requirement of being on-call is not a sustainable practice and will likely result in their future departure from the role. Literature pertaining to the on-call responsibilities of residence directors was limited; most literature focused on the overall quality of life experienced by residence directors (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Belch, et al., 2009; St. Onge et al., 2008), however, one could assume that the on-call responsibilities of the residence director role are a major component of quality of life.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this qualitative study was to better understand how residence directors make meaning of wellness within their job function in order to respond to the complex needs of residential students in a diverse college environment. To answer this question, eight diverse residence directors participated in semi-structured interviews, which gave the opportunity for them to critically reflect on how they make meaning of wellness within the context of their job. Each participant shared their own narratives and experiences, some positive and some negative, and helped to construct a collective understanding of residence director wellness. While previous research focused on the job satisfaction of residence directors, this study was the first of
its kind to use a qualitative approach to understand wellness, an increasingly important value within the higher education sector.

The researcher identified three significant findings that impacted how residence directors make meaning of wellness. First, institutional culture plays a significant role in how residence directors make meaning of wellness. The role of institutional culture in the wellness of residence directors was supported by the literature. Specifically, overall organizational fit and staff socialization to an institution's culture positively contribute to staff wellness (Amey; 2002; Barr, 2000; Beeler, 1988; Blix & Lee, 1991; Hirt & Robbins, 2016; Newman & Carpenter, 1993; Katz & Tushman, 1983), and wellness initiatives led by institutions positively contribute to staff wellness (Buchmueller & Valletta, 2017; Burke, Dye, & Hughey, 2016; Haines et al., 2007; Moxler, 1990).

Second, similar to institutional culture, departmental culture also significantly impacts wellness. Departmental culture as a standalone theme does not exist within the literature pertaining to the wellness of residence directors. However, the subthemes within departmental culture are well represented within the literature. Extant literature supports the role of supervision in the wellness of residence directors; high quality supervision that provides proper support of staff positively contribute to wellness (Creamer & Winston, 2002; Newman & Carpenter, 1993; Tull, 2006). Limited literature supports the finding of residence directors successfully navigating departmental culture positively contributing to wellness (Newman & Carpenter, 1993). Literature also supports the importance of the marginalized identities of residence directors being affirmed and supported, to positively contributing to wellness
The last significant finding of this study pertains to the role of the day-to-day experiences of residence directors. Specifically, aspects of the residence director position, such as living on-campus and being on-call for campus emergencies, are inherently unique in comparison to other entry-level student affairs positions, and as a result significantly impact wellness. Within the day-to-day residence director experience, literature supports the finding that employee benefits, such as paying no cost for an on-campus apartment, and free counseling positively contributes to residence director wellness ("Occupational Health", 2011; Totman, 2012). Additionally, significant literature supports the finding that the overall job condition of residence directors, specifically untraditional hours worked, lack of balance, and overall workload, negatively contribute to wellness (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Belch, et al., 2009; Berwick, 1992; Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory, 2005; Herr & Strange, 1985; Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998; Keener, 1990; St. Onge et al., 2008; Tack, 1991; Toma & Grady, 2002). Finally, literature supports the finding that the live-in and on-call requirements of the residence director position negatively contributes to wellness (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Wilson, 2008).

In summary, the majority of the findings were supported by the literature, and this signifies that the wellness of residence directors has been and still remains a concern within student affairs for more than 30 years. Despite this, several participants within the study shared multiple examples of positive experiences in their work environment that positively contributed to wellness. Participants in this study who exhibited a high level of wellness within their job function are employed at institutions that were in alignment with their own needs, whose
missions and values they believed in, exist in departmental cultures that affirmed their identities and receive effective and supportive supervision. While institutional culture and departmental culture represent themes that vary significantly across institutions, the day-to-day residence director experiences exhibit less variance across institutions. While the day-to-day residence director experience will vary across institution (e.g. residence directors in larger residence life departments may serve on-call less than residence directors in smaller residence life departments), it is important to note that aspects of the day-to-day experience such as living on-campus and the requirement to serve on-call for campus emergencies are relatively static; all residence directors are required to do this, regardless of institution.

This study also highlighted the fact that residence director wellness is not simply about what an institution or organization needs to do or provide for its staff, but also the alignment between the actual residence director, and their own individual needs. Residence directors have different needs—while some desire to live in a more urban community, some may desire the experience to work at a large research institution. For some residence directors, working at an institution that serves students who share one’s marginal identity, may prove to be most important, particularly when that institution has made an explicit commitment in mission and practice to supporting that very diversity and inclusiveness. This study has shown that the residence directors who experience positive wellness within their job function are employed at institutions and departments that are most aligned with their own needs, beliefs, and values. Contrarily, residence directors who experienced poor wellness within their job experienced several incongruences between their own needs, and the culture and practices espoused by their institution. In essence, the wellness of residence directors can be considered a “two-way street;”
while colleges and universities need to develop policies and practices to better support wellness, the onus also exists within residence directors to both identify workplaces that will enable them to be their very best self, and to advocate for their needs should they feel their workplace is deficient. This is more complicated in practice than theory, due to the varied individual needs of residence directors, an individual residence director’s comfortability with advocating their needs, especially when they are a candidate for a job, and the complex dynamics of college and university’s organizational and departmental cultures. For some residence directors, the need to be gainfully employed and earn income may outweigh all other aspects.

Findings from the study situate the residence director position as entry-level and non-permanent. Even when residence directors are aligned with the college or university’s institutional and departmental culture, it is the live-in experience and on-call responsibilities that still contribute to poor wellness. In light of the residential needs of college students, it is expected that the residence director position will remain live-in and require on-call responsibilities. Due to this, when residence directors are misaligned to institutional and departmental culture, they are likely to depart from their position prematurely. This study also highlighted the importance for residence directors with same-sex partners. The goal of this study was not to identify a way for residence directors to be retained in their positions for an indefinite amount of time; but for residential life departments and institutions to institute best practices to ensure positive staff wellness to maximize the time residence directors are willing to serve. Institutions and departments that cultivate a work environment and culture that promotes positive wellness will not only benefit from residence directors being retained in their positions, but may encourage staff wishing to transition out of the residence director role to consider
additional roles within the institution and department, such as a supervisory role in residence life, or a different functional area.

The next section provides several recommendations for practice, organized by the intended audience.

**Recommendations for Practice**

**Prospective and current residence directors.** One of the findings of this study was the role of institutional mission and values to the wellness of residence directors. Prospective and current residence directors need to take the necessary time to research as much as possible about an institution’s mission and values. While current residence directors can do this in their current role, ideally prospective residence directors could be readily provided with more ample information during the interview process to learn to make an informed decision about overall fit, and to determine which institutions to invest time in pursuing, and which to not consider.

Colleges and universities produce significant sources of information, such as institutional websites, admissions brochures, and multimedia such as video, to help prospective students, families, staff, and faculty, better learn the culture and values of an institution. Additionally, it is recommended that prospective and current residence directors consult with active staff, such as hiring managers, supervisors, and colleagues, as they have the ability to provide information that helps residence directors best understand the mission and values espoused by an institution.

As the researcher serves as a supervisor of residence directors and oversees the hiring of new residence directors, they utilize the interview process to communicate and promote institutional values and mission. Examples such as including specific language in the job description that includes key information pertaining to the mission and values of the institution.
The researcher also recommends themselves and other supervisors to utilize additional aspects of the interview process, such as phone, Skype, and on-campus interview processes to communicate institutional values. Collectively, this will give residence directors an introductory understanding into what is most important to the institution, as well as how the residence director position connects to the overall mission, and will help prospective staff and staff involved in the hiring decision to better assess fit between candidates and the position. Beyond the interview process, the researcher commits to working continuously with residence director staff on improving their understanding and adherence to the institution's mission and values. The utilization of professional staff trainings and connecting residence directors with other departmental and institutional leaders responsible for the development of institutional policies, can aide in helping staff develop a more comprehensive understanding of how they contribute to their institution's overall mission.

An institution’s commitment to diversity and inclusion is also important to the wellness of residence directors. Similar to institutional mission and values, residence directors are encouraged to take a similar approach in developing an understanding of an institution’s commitment to diversity and inclusion. While information provided on an institution’s website may provide information that depicts a commitment to these values, it may not illustrate examples of how diversity and inclusion are actually supported. Prospective and current residence directors are encouraged to identify examples of how diversity and inclusion are valued at the institution. Examples of this could be a review of an institution’s strategic plan to review specific initiatives that supports institutional diversity, prospective staff requesting to meet with existing staff from marginalized identities to discuss the work environment, and staff
connecting to offices dedicated to supporting diversity and inclusion, such as a multi-cultural student center, or information that attempts to measure diversity of students, staff, or faculty at said institution. Additionally, prospective residence directors are encouraged to ask hiring managers about examples of how the institution has shown commitment to diversity and inclusion.

As residence directors within the study highlighted the value of benefits to their wellness, prospective and current residence directors are encouraged to thoroughly research the benefits available to them as employees, with particular attention to the specific offerings provided that address wellness, such as institutional wellness initiatives and counseling. Commonly, this information should be available through the human resources department, and often significant benefits information is available on the institutional website. Should residence directors not find any particular benefits of interest, they are encouraged to directly contact human resources, or share their particular needs or concerns to the hiring manager.

Similar to previous recommendations, the researcher utilizes the interview process to communicate the institutional benefits provided to prospective residence directors. Supervisors are encouraged to work closely with Human Resources to offer opportunities for prospective candidates. As Human Resources has the best understanding of staff benefits, the researcher schedules a benefit meeting, led by Human Resources for all prospective residence directors who visit campus. A dedicated benefits meeting provides an opportunity for prospective staff to learn more about the benefits provided to them, the opportunity to ask any questions they may have, and highlight the benefits that positively contribute to wellness, such as the on-campus apartment and counseling benefits.
Current residence directors will have a better understanding of the opportunities to which they are afforded if they are regularly encouraged to read and review all benefits information. As such, beyond the interview process, the researcher also requires their residence directors to review the institution’s staff handbook and human resources website upon being hired. Collectively, the staff handbook and human resources website provides residence directors with all pertinent information pertaining to institutional benefits offered to staff. The researcher regularly refers staff to the staff handbook and human resources website throughout employment for any questions or concerns that staff may raise.

The live-in requirement and on-call responsibilities are an intangible responsibility of the residence director position. Despite this, the intricacies of the live-in experience, and how on-call is conducted will differ from institution to institution. Prospective and current residence directors are encouraged to best understand what these responsibilities look like at a particular institution. In regards to the live-in requirement, residence directors should request to see an example of a staff apartment, to get a sense of their actual living environment, discover the proximity of the staff apartment to their actual office, and learn what amenities within an apartment are provided (e.g. furniture and appliances). Additionally, residence directors are encouraged to inquire about the policies for having other people, such as partners, live with them, as well as if pets are permitted. Pertaining to on-call responsibilities, residence directors should inquire about the on-call responsibilities within the position. How often a residence director serves on-call, how close they need to be to campus, and data on how often residence directors are contacted while on-call, can serve as important questions to ask.
The researcher, a supervisor of residence directors, serves as a strong advocate for residence directors in the area of the live-in aspect and on-call responsibilities. As the researcher plays a role in the development of policy regarding live-in and on-call responsibilities, they use their positionality to develop and improve the policies to best serve residence directors. The researcher regularly addresses these concerns with their supervisor, a dean within the student affairs division, who has a broader view of student affairs, and may not be regularly aware of these concerns. The researcher regularly advocates for policies that best benefit residence directors, including a flexible guest policy and guest policy, time off for on-call staff, and opportunities for staff to work away from their staff apartment.

**Supervisors and managers.** As explored in this study, supervisors significantly shape departmental culture in the eyes of residence directors, and they serve as important guides for staff learning to navigate the dynamics of the new institution. As such, it is important for supervisors to exhibit a supervisory style that best compliments the needs of residence directors. The utilization of a synergistic supervisory model (Tull, 2006) that focuses on frequent communication, timely positive and constructive feedback, and advocating for further professional opportunities and growth, would best support the needs of residence directors. Additionally, through this model, supervisors are encouraged to communicate frequently with residence directors on learning how to navigate institutional culture, and departmental politics.

Along with utilizing a supportive supervisory style that best meets the needs of residence directors, supervisors are also encouraged to serve as a mentor in the area of wellness. This is particularly important, as residence directors do not possess an innate ability to practice wellness. Serving as a mentor for wellness is two-fold. First, supervisors have to be aware of the unique
demands of the residence director position, such as non-traditional hours worked, live-in aspect, and on-call responsibilities, and provide direct support to address these challenges. Support such as flexibility in hours worked and encouragement of taking time away from work, may prove to be helpful to residence directors. Second, supervisors must also actively practice wellness within their own position; part of residence directors learning about the departmental culture is the observance of their supervisor, and if supervisors actively practice wellness within their own position, residence directors are more likely to do the same.

Supervisors and department leaders have the responsibility to cultivate an office environment supportive of diversity and inclusion that affirms the identities of all staff, including residence directors. According to the Association of College and University Housing Officers – International Standards & Ethical Principles for College and University Housing Professionals (ACUHO-I, 2017) two standards are “Following non-discriminatory personnel policies regarding race, gender, religion, age, nationality, color, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and veteran status have been developed and adhered to at all times” (p. 6) and “Having policies in place to encourage the hiring and promotion of a diverse and multicultural staff” (p. 6). Supervisors and managers are encouraged to work with their human resources department to ensure that all residence director search processes utilize diverse hiring practices. Additionally, departments trainings and retreats and the development of intervention strategies to address potential conflicts related to diversity and inclusion, as well as regular collaboration with other departments focused on diversity and inclusion, may prove helpful in cultivating an inclusive environment for residence directors.
When hiring new residence directors, the researcher utilizes the interview process to communicate an institution and department's commitment to diversity and inclusion. The sharing of institutional and departmental initiatives resources to support staff from marginalized identities. The researcher also promotes the importance of creating a diverse hiring committee, as this provides an introduction to the presence and affirmation of staff and faculty from marginalized identities. If departments do not employ policies or practices in creating diverse hiring committees, consultation with Human Resources is necessary, as Human Resources staff should have expertise in the hiring and retention of diverse staff. Beyond the interview process, the researcher promotes institutional and departmental staff trainings, regular meetings with individual and collective with residence directors, and opportunities for staff to participate and share in aspects of diversity and inclusion. Additionally, as residence directors and other departmental staff collectively possess a multitude of marginalized identities, the researcher creates opportunities for staff to regularly share their perspectives with others in the department, keeping in mind not to create an expectation for those from marginalized populations to feel burdened to share.

As the live-in aspect and on-call responsibilities of the residence director position serve as a threat to staff wellness, supervisors and managers need to develop, assess, and improve these experiences to benefit both the needs of the department and the individual staff member. If the live-in requirement and on-call policies do not support residence director wellness, the result will likely include continued staff burnout and potential premature attrition. ACUHO-I (2017) articulated the following principle pertaining to residence director staff apartment accommodations: “Live-in staff members are provided with acceptable accommodations” (p. 6).
This principle does not articulate the importance of the staff apartment, and thus supervisors are encouraged to provide better than adequate accommodations to support staff. Examples of better than adequate accommodations would include a staff apartment separate from the staff office, an apartment that allows for a sense of privacy (e.g. private apartment entrance, not close to student residences), and the inclusion of a pet policy. As this study identified challenges experienced by Queer-identified staff with a same-gender live-in partner, supervisors and managers are encouraged to enact live-in practices that are both in congruence with institutional policy and allow for the utmost discretion. The utilization of the term “guest” or “roommate”, instead of “partner” will allow residence directors more privacy and flexibility in who has the ability to live with them. This will also allow staff with same-gender partners to not reveal any information pertaining to their sexual orientation or relationship status to co-workers, students, and other staff. In regards to the on-call responsibilities, supervisors should regularly review and assess their policies in respect to staff needs. Examples of considerations to support residence director wellness could include increasing the number of on-call staff, flexibility in residence director responding to situations, and flexible hours to compensate for time spent responding to on-call situations.

As the researcher has served as a residence director in their career, their lived experience creates a sense of credibility amongst their staff. The researcher attempts to regularly model healthy wellness practices for their residence director staff by encouraging staff to leave work at reasonable times throughout the day, spending time away from campus, and sharing examples of how the researcher practiced wellness when they served in a residence director role.
Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the conclusions and recommendations for practice, several opportunities for future research can be delineated. First, it was discovered that both residence directors of color and Queer-identified residence directors indicated significant challenges they experienced that impacted their wellness. Given that limited literature exists on the experience of student affairs staff of color and Queer-identified staff, little information is known about residence directors who possess these identities. More research is needed to better understand the lived experiences of residence directors of color and Queer-identified staff. By focusing solely on the experience of individuals with marginalized identities, more specific interventions and strategies can be utilized to best support these staff.

Another recommendation focuses on the role of the supervisor in the management of residence directors. From the perspective of the residence director, we learn about the importance of the supervisor in the support of wellness. Little is known, however, about the experience of supervisors working with residence directors, and if supervisors observe similar or different experiences faced by their supervisees. As such, research focused on the lived experience of the supervisors of residence directors would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the residence director position, and enhanced methods to support staff wellness.

Some residence directors within this study highlighted the role that managers, department leaders, and staff above the level of the immediate supervisor, plays to wellness. While this did not emerge as a direct finding within the study, these leaders play significant roles in developing policy and shaping both institutional and departmental culture, which impacts residence director wellness. Additionally, while supervisors are charged to support the immediate needs of
residence directors, staff above the level of the immediate supervisor are charged with thinking broadly about institutional needs and student success. It is unknown how these leaders think about the role and significance of the residence director, especially pertaining to their individual needs and overall wellness concerns. Due to this, more research is needed pertaining to the relationship between leadership above the supervisor and the role of residence directors. One example of this could be a study that utilizes a case study approach to observe the relationships between the residence director and multiple layers of management leading to the Chief Executive Officer or President role.

Within the study, half of the participants previously served in a residence director position at a different institution of employment. For most of them, they had negative experiences at their first institution, much attuned to poor wellness, and sought out a residence director position at an institution and department they deemed a better fit. The experience of professionals in their second residence director position is different than residence directors who were at their first institution of employment. Due to the experiences residence directors gained at their first institution, they are uniquely informed to identify institutions that are a better fit for them in regards to their own wellness. What is not captured within this study are the residence directors, who, due to poor wellness, transition out of residential life or the field of student affairs. More research is needed on how residence directors transition out of a job due to poor wellness, and how these experiences informed their future professional opportunities, whether they be in the role of residence director, a non-residence director role within residence life or student affairs, or outside of higher education.
The majority of residence directors in the study earned a master’s degree in higher education administration or student affairs administration. One of the findings of this study was that residence directors lacked the knowledge, preparation, and experience to navigate institutional culture, departmental culture, and management of the day-to-day experiences, which collectively negatively contributed to wellness. Graduate programs play a role in preparing prospective students to successfully enter the field of student affairs. As the residence director position is one of the most prominent entry-level positions available for graduate students, graduate programs would benefit from providing instruction on how to navigate potential barriers to wellness. Faculty within graduate programs are encouraged to provide theoretical and practice-based instruction to students that highlight on the barriers to wellness of residence directors, which include understanding institutional culture, departmental culture, and unique job requirements (e.g. living on-campus) that could negatively contribute to wellness. If prospective residence directors were provided instruction in these areas, they would be better equipped to assess residence director positions to determine best fit.

While this research has helped to create or expand awareness on the needs of entry-level residence life staff in regards to their wellness, it has underscored the need for additional action, particularly in regards to the needs of entry-level student affairs staff. As this study focused on the lived experience of residence directors, it is unknown whether or not some of the findings could apply broadly to other entry-level student affairs staff. While the finding of the day-to-day residence director experiences solely applies to the residence director role, it is unknown if the additional findings of the role of institutional culture and departmental culture impact entry-level student affairs staff wellness. A more in-depth understanding of how entry-level student affairs
staff make meaning of wellness, may provide a greater level of staff support from the student affairs division.
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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

Northeastern

Notification of IRB Action

Date: September 8, 2017  IRB #: CPS17-06-14

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                       College of Professional Studies

Address:               20 Belvidere
                       Northeastern University

Title of Project:      The 24/7 Student Affairs Professional: A Study of How
                       Residence Directors Make Meaning of Wellness

Participating Sites:   MACUHO permission forthcoming

Informed Consent:      One (1) unsigned consent for online survey
                       One (1) signed consent for face-to-face interviews

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Monitoring Interval:   12 months

Approval Expiration Date: SEPTEMBER 7, 2018

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. 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

IRB Unsigned Consent Document for Web-based Online Surveys

UNSIGNED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR WEB-BASED ONLINE SURVEYS
Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator: Joseph McNabb, Ph.D.; Student Researcher: Isaiah Thomas, M.A.

Title of Project: The 24/7 Student Affairs Professional: A Study of How Residence Directors Make Meaning of Wellness

Request to Participate in Research
We would like to invite you to participate in a web-based online survey. The survey is part of a research study whose purpose is to explore how entry-level residence life staff (referred to as residence directors in this study) make meaning of wellness. This survey should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

We are asking you to participate in this study because you are a residence director who has served in the position for at least one academic year. Additionally, you work at an institution of higher education in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, and West Virginia), and are either a member of the Mid-Atlantic Association of College and University Housing Officers (MACUHO) or affiliated with someone that is a member of MACUHO. You must be at least 18 years old to take this survey.

The decision to participate in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the web-based online survey, you can stop at any time.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, your responses to the interview questions may help us learn more about how residence directors make meaning of wellness.

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being affiliated with this project.

If you have any questions regarding electronic privacy, please feel free to contact Mark Nardone, NU’s Director of Information Security via phone at 617-373-7901, or via email at privacy@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Isaiah Thomas (email: thomas.j@husky.neu.edu), the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Joseph McNabb (email: j.mcnabb@neu.edu), the Principal Investigator.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please 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.

By clicking on the “Accept” button below you are indicating that you consent to participate in this study. Please print out a copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you for your time.

Isaiah J. Thomas

IRB# CPS17-06-14
Approved: 9/8/17
Expiration Date: 9/7/18
Appendix C

IRB Signed Form Consent and Health Information Use and Disclosure Authorization

Format for Signed Informed Consent and Health Information Use and Disclosure Authorization

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator: Joseph McNabb, Ph.D.; Student Researcher: Isaiah Thomas, M.A.
Title of Project: The 24/7 Student Affairs Professional: A Study of How Residence Directors Make Meaning of Wellness

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 this person 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?
We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a residence director who has served in the position for at least one academic year. Additionally, you work at an institution of higher education in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, and West Virginia), and are either a member of the Mid-Atlantic Association of College and University Housing Officers (MACUHO) or affiliated with someone that is a member of MACUHO. You must be at least 18 years old to take this survey.

Why is this research study being done and for what purpose will my health information be used and disclosed?
The purpose of this research is to explore how entry-level residence life staff members (residence directors) make meaning of wellness.

Who will be using and disclosing information about me?
State the persons or classes of persons, which will use and disclose health information.
Ex: Department of Physical Therapy faculty, staff, and students will use and disclose your health information pursuant to this authorization.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, you will take part in an interview that will last about 60 minutes. During this time, there will be several questions asked about your lived experience as a residence director. If time runs short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. After the interview, Isaiah Thomas or a confidential transcriptionist (Scribee.com) will transcribe each interview and Isaiah Thomas will provide you with a copy of the interview transcript to proofread for accuracy. You will be also offered an opportunity for a second interview.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed in a time and place that is convenient to you. The interview will be “virtual”, and held using the Skype teleconference program. The interview will last about 60 minutes.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
Due to the nature of the topic, you may experience some emotional discomfort resulting from

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participation in this study. It is expected that this discomfort will be minimal. Should you experience any discomfort during or after the interview, consult with your human resources department on any mental health benefits you may be entitled to as an employee of your institution.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**
There are no direct benefits for participating in this research study. However, your responses to the interview questions will assist in better understanding how residence directors make meaning of wellness.

**What health information will be used and disclosed?**
All of the health information shared in the interview will be used in the course of the study.

**Who will see the information about me?**
You will be assigned a gender-ambiguous pseudonym. That pseudonym only will be used in transcribing interviews. A digital list of participants’ names and assigned pseudonyms will be kept private by the student researcher, and be located in a password-protected digital file using Google Drive. This information will be kept only for the duration of the study and then destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to this information.

The principal investigator, Dr. Joseph McNabb and the researcher will be the only people to and have access to the data gathered, including anonymized interview transcripts. At the conclusion of the study all identifying data will be destroyed. The consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years in a locked container at the researcher’s home.

Direct quotes will be used rarely. If you will be quoted, a pseudonym will be used and different gender pronouns will be used. If quoted, you will not be personally identified.

In rare cases, an authorized person or people from the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board may request to see the data to ensure the research is being done properly. If so, I will communicate this to you.

**Note:** Some persons or organizations that receive your health information pursuant to this authorization may not be covered by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act or other privacy laws.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**
N/A

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
If you suffer any harm as a result of this research no special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment.

**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. Please send a written request for withdrawal to the Principal Investigator responsible for the study. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have [as a student, employee, etc.]. However, the researcher can continue to use the health information collected about you prior to your withdrawing your authorization.

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Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Isaiah Thomas by telephone at (617) 263-7940, or by email: thomas.i@husky.neu.edu. He is the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Joseph McNabb by email: j.mcnabb@neu.edu.

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.

Can I access the health information collected about me and request corrections where necessary?
N/A

Will I be paid for my participation?
You will not be paid for your participation. However, you will be given an electronic $10 Amazon.com gift card at the interview meeting.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There is no monetary cost to participate in this research study.

Is there anything else I need to know?
You must be at least 18 years old to participate, and at any time you can opt out of the study.

If the study if HIPAA-covered, when will this authorization end?
N/A

I agree to take part in this research and authorize the use and disclosure of my health information consistent with provisions above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of person [parent] agreeing to take part</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed name of person above</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed name of person above</td>
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Expiration Date: 9/7/18
Appendix D

Dissertation Study Recruitment Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in my proposed study. My name is Isaiah Thomas, and I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University. I also am an active member of MACUHO and currently work in a mid-level manager role in Residence Life at a college in the Mid-Atlantic Region. My research interest is about the lived experience of entry-level residence directors and how they make meaning of wellness. The title of my dissertation is: "The 24/7 Student Affairs Professional: A Study of How Residence Directors Make Meaning of Wellness".

The interview research will have two phases. This questionnaire is the first phase and will help me learn a bit about you, and the second phase will involve interviews with people who indicate their interest in continuing to participate in the study.

Confidentiality:
All survey and interview responses will be kept confidential. Each participant will be referred to with a gender-neutral pseudonym in the interview transcripts and in the final dissertation. Quotes will be used minimally, and when used, attribute by pseudonym only. The name of your institution and department will not be reported within the study.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in this survey and the follow-up interview is voluntary. You may end the survey or interview at any time.

Interviews:
Volunteers who agree to be interviewed will be contacted by me via email to setup a date and time to have a video interview via Skype. So I can best capture your words, I will ask to be able to audio record the conversation. The interview should take no more than 60 minutes. The audio recording will then be transcribed by transcribers at Scribe.com and you will be identified on that recording and in the transcript by your pseudonym only. After it is transcribed, you will be given the chance to review the transcript, make any changes, clarify any language, or add and delete any portion. Additionally, you will be offered the opportunity to have a second interview if there is anything else you would like to share. If you wish you have a second interview, I will contact you with a date and time to hold the interview. Similar to the first interview, I will ask to be able to audio record the conversation, and transcribers at Scribe.com will transcribe the recording, and you will be provided the opportunity to review, make changes, or clarify any aspects of the second transcription.

Participant Criteria:
Volunteers for this study should meet the following criteria:
• Individuals who currently serve in the role of an entry-level residence life staff member (e.g. residence director) at an institution of higher education
• Individuals who work at an institution of higher education located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, and West Virginia)
• Individuals who also served as a residence director for at least one academic year
• Individuals who have earned at least a bachelor’s degree (while the majority of residence directors are required to hold a master’s degree, this study wishes to be inclusive of those who may hold a bachelor’s degree)
• Men, women, transgender, agender, and gender non-binary people
• People age over 18 years old

Spreading the Word:
If you know of someone who you think about be interested in participating in the study, and qualifies as a participant, please feel free to share the survey link with them. I thank you for your assistance.

Thank You:

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Thank you VERY MUCH for your time in responding to this survey. I know that your time is incredibly valuable. My hope is that this survey will take you less than 10 minutes to complete. If you have any questions about this survey or the follow-up interview, please feel free to contact me via email at: thomas.i@husky.neu.edu.

**Questionnaire**

1. **Full Name**

2. **Email Address (please list address you use regularly)**

3. **Contact Number (please list contact number you use regularly)**

4. **Please check all preferred methods of communication:**
   *Check all that apply.*
   - [ ] Email
   - [ ] Phone Call
   - [ ] Other: ________________________________

5. **Do you meet all participant criteria listed above?**
   *Mark only one oval.*
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

6. **How long have you served as a residence director (please include the time you serve at your current institution, and at other institutions you may have worked at. Please do not include any graduate-level experience)**

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Approved: 9/8/17
Expiration Date: 9/7/18
5/2/2018

MACUHO Approval to Conduct Dissertation Research

Olan Bryant Garrett <obg5@psu.edu>  Fri, Sep 29, 2017 at 3:59 AM
To: "Isaiah Thomas (NEU)" <thomas.i@husky.neu.edu>

Dear Isaiah,

I am pleased to share with you that the MACUHO Executive Board has approved your request to support your dissertation by sending your request for participants out to the MACUHO listserv. We are excited to be able to support your dissertation and believe your topic is fascinating and highly relevant to the housing and residence life field.

Per MACUHO protocols, we will schedule your dissertation request to go out under the MACUHO banner at specific intervals determined by mutual interest between you and the association. We will need to touch base to coordinate your announcement as well as the messaging you would like to go out to the listserv. Please let me know your availability to be able to discuss and confirm these details.

All we ask is that, in exchange for our assistance and upon the completion and publishing of your dissertation, you share the knowledge and information you gained with the association through a structured opportunity, whether it be a conference program, webinar, or article in the MACUHO Magazine. We can discuss the best way to share your information and confirm arrangements regarding this endeavor.

Again, MACUHO is excited to be able to support your dissertation research and road to your doctoral degree. I look forward to us being in touch to confirm details. In the meantime, should you have any further questions or need more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (814) 863-1710, or obg5@psu.edu.

Sincerely,

Olan Garrett
Senior Associate Director for Residence Life, Penn State University
MACUHO President 2016-2017
Appendix F

Interview Schedule

Institution: Private Western University (Pseudonym)

Interviewee: [Pseudonym, Generic Role]

Interviewer: Isaiah Thomas

Research Question: How do residence directors make meaning of wellness within the context of their job function?

The interview protocol will likely vary depending on the participant and what information is discovered through document review. A starting protocol is outlined below:

Part I: Introductory Protocol

This interview will start out formal, because I have to include standardized language, but then I hope we can engage in conversation. Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio record our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [if yes, thank the participant, let them know you may ask the question again as you start recording, and then turn on the recording equipment]. I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The audio recording will be labeled with a pseudonym and will be sent directly to a transcription service called Scribie.com. The audio file will be destroyed after it is transcribed. This transcript will be used to inform my dissertation and will potentially be used as research for an article that I hope
to publish from the dissertation work. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used?

You have been selected to speak with me today because you are someone who might be able to help me understand the lived experiences of residence directors. My research project is a study that focuses on how residence directors make meaning of wellness within their job function. Through this study, I hope to better understand the ways in which residence directors exhibit wellness, both positive and poor. My hope is that these first-person lived experiences contribute to a greater study that can inform directors of residence life, deans of students, associate and assistant directors, as well as current and future residence directors.

This interview should last about 60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to ask you. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. If you have questions during the interview, please feel free to ask them. Do you have any questions at this time?

**Part II: Interview Questions**

1. I would love to get to know you a little bit better. Could you tell me a bit about yourself; how did you end up interested in the field of student affairs, and how did it bring you to your current position?

2. Please tell me about how your office/department, how it is both structured and organized. How does your office or department promote wellness?

3. Please describe the core responsibilities of your position? Which aspects of your responsibilities promote positive wellness? Which responsibilities promote poor wellness?
4. When you think about the word wellness in relation to your current position, how does it make you feel?

5. Please consider the physical aspects of your job, such as your office space, tools you use to complete your job, and the environment in which you are to perform your job. How do the physical aspects of your job contribute to positive or poor wellness?

6. Please describe your institutional and office culture. Examples of this include the attitudes, values, beliefs and practices that are demonstrated on a daily basis in both your office, student affairs division, and greater institution. What aspects of the culture do you believe promote poor or positive wellness?

7. Please describe your supervisor. What ways do you believe your supervisor promote poor or positive wellness?

8. Please describe any programs or initiatives are provided by your institution that you believe promote positive or poor wellness?

9. Please describe any programs or initiatives your office, department, or institution engage with the greater community, such as the town or city you live in, that address wellness.

10. What programs and activities do you engage in outside of the work environment that promote wellness?

11. At the conclusion of this interview, is there anything else you would like to share? Is there anything important to you that I've missed, or that you would like to discuss further?

**Part III: Closing**
Thank you for speaking with me today. I will be back in touch with you when I have the transcripts of our conversation. I will email them to you for your review and to see if there is anything more you would like to add. At that time, I will also invite you for a second interview should you wish to speak further about this topic. Thank you again for your time, this has been very helpful to me.