

“HOW YOU DOIN’?”: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF RESIDENCE HALL
DIRECTORS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by

DESIREE M. JOHNSON

(Under the Direction of Dallin George Young)

ABSTRACT

This narrative qualitative study aimed to understand how residence hall directors navigated their unanticipated transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory, this study explored the perspectives of residence hall directors within the Southeastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) region as they managed change while balancing their personal and professional lives during the pandemic. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews from ten residence hall directors who served in the role from 2019 to 2021. The findings aligned with Schlossberg’s 4 Ss: situation, self, support, and strategy. Within each “S,” a theme was discovered amongst the participants: (a) situation: we were in the trenches, (b) self: not reslife for life, (c) support: thrown to the wolves & finding personal support, and (d) strategies: started taking time for myself. Each participant discussed how COVID-19 was announced as a global pandemic and how their situation changed as they had additional work to complete to maintain the safety of the campus and their communities. Participants then discussed how their transition made an impact on them, being a negative one. As they adjusted to their new situation, they discussed how support showed up for them. Last, they discussed strategies they

used to cope with their situation. From the findings of this study, implications for practice, policy, and future research were provided.

INDEX WORDS: Residence Hall Director, Residence Life, COVID-19, Pandemic,
Transition, Coping, Narrative

“HOW YOU DOIN’?”: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF RESIDENCE HALL
DIRECTORS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by

DESIREE M. JOHNSON

BIS, Western Kentucky University, 2014

MS, University of Central Arkansas, 2017

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2024

© 2024

Desiree M. Johnson

All Rights Reserved

“HOW YOU DOIN’?”: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF RESIDENCE HALL
DIRECTORS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by

DESIREE M. JOHNSON

Major Professor:	Dallin George Young
Committee:	Laura A. Dean
	Georgianna L. Martin

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2024

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my biggest supporter, my granny, Vivian Johnson. I love and miss you dearly. Additionally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all the residence hall directors. Your work does not go unnoticed!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank God. Without you, none of this would have been possible. I prayed to you a lot during this journey. Thank you for providing me with the strength and motivation to see this through. There were many times I wanted to give up, but with your grace, I was able to see it through.

To my family, friends, and cohort, I cannot thank you all enough for your support. Your willingness to listen to me during the tough times, your kind words of encouragement, and your prayers have been instrumental in helping me navigate this process. I am beyond grateful for you all! Love you!

To my dissertation chair, Dr. Young, thank you for never giving up on me. There were times you could have, but you did not. Thank you for giving me grace and patience and believing in me when I did not believe in myself. To my committee members, Dr. Dean and Dr. Martin, I could not have completed this process without you both. Thank you for all your feedback and support during this process and for helping me make it to the end! To Dr. Bullington, your support and feedback was much appreciated. Thank you for providing support with copyediting for my dissertation.

Last, I would like to thank the ten individuals who were willing to share their experiences openly and vulnerably with me. Your stories made this study possible. I would not have been able to complete it without you. I cannot thank you all enough!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of Study and Research Questions.....	4
Significance of Study	5
Theoretical Framework	6
Definitions of Terms	7
Conclusion	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Job Expectations and Demands	9
Transitions.....	12
Coping Strategies	15
Conclusion	18
METHODOLOGY	20
Research Paradigm.....	20

Subjectivity	22
Research Design.....	23
Research Site.....	24
Data Collection	25
Data Analysis	28
Trustworthiness.....	29
FINDINGS	31
Participants.....	32
Individual Participant Narratives	33
Themes	73
Conclusion	101
DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS.....	102
Discussion of Findings.....	103
Implications for Practice	107
Recommendations for Future Research	110
Limitations	111
Reflexivity.....	112
Conclusion	112
REFERENCES	115
A. IRB Study Approval.....	126

B. Participant Recruitment Flyer	127
C. Participant Recruitment Surveys	128
D. Informed Consent Form	130
E. General Communication.....	132
F. Semi-Structured Interview Guide	136

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Residence Hall Director Demographics	32

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). COVID-19 is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), and produced widespread respiratory illness (John Hopkins Medicine, 2022). As the pandemic was announced, travel bans were put into place, businesses shut down, schools closed, and entertainment events were canceled. The shutdowns and cancellations resulted in many individuals transitioning from in-person work to working remotely, being laid off, or losing their jobs altogether (Carnevale, 2021; Schneider & Harknett, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic is not the only event that has led to unforeseen changes. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and New Orleans, causing severe flooding, affecting 80% of New Orleans (Hawkins, 2020; Jarrell et al., 2008). The hurricane resulted in institutional closures and forced 95,000 faculty, staff, and students to relocate, including 50,000 students who had to leave their home institutions in New Orleans (Gill et al., 2007; Jarrell et al., 2008; Lipka, 2005). In some cases, institutions had to let go of faculty and staff members and cut down on academic and athletic programs (Byrne & Powers, 2020; NBC News, 2005). The K-12 staff members were also affected by Hurricane Katrina. A study by Pane et al. (2006) revealed that principals reported that after Hurricane Katrina, teachers showed higher stress levels, and there was an increase in work fatigue, job frustration, and teacher absenteeism.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 1300 colleges and universities canceled in-person learning or switched to a virtual format that 2020 spring semester (Smalley, 2021). By the fall semester, some institutions decided to continue in a virtual format, while other institutions decided to use a hybrid model or be primarily in-person while social distancing (Smalley, 2021). Institutions closing or switching to a virtual format caused institutions to face financial challenges and a decrease in enrollment (Smalley, 2021).

Institutional employees also faced challenges during this time. Student affairs practitioners at these institutions were required to adjust to new working arrangements, lost income, faced mental health challenges, and dealt with resource constraints (Mutambisi et al., 2021). Residence hall directors, full-time, live-in, entry-level professionals in housing and residence life who oversee residential communities, were some of the many practitioners adjusting to new work arrangements (Belch & Mueller, 2003). As the announcement of school closures and the move to virtual instruction was announced, residence hall directors coordinated and conducted moveouts and continued to support students who were off campus and those who were still on campus who could not go home (Williams, 2020). Residence hall directors also administered the operation of placing students in isolation and quarantine housing (Boettcher, 2020). As residence hall directors had to adjust to new working arrangements due to local, state, and national governments declaring the COVID-19 pandemic a state of emergency, such as overseeing the operation of isolation and quarantine housing for students, this study focuses on the experience of residence hall directors during the COVID-19 pandemic and the unexpected transitions they had to make as a result.

Problem Statement

Current literature involving residence hall directors focuses on their responsibilities as first responders, educators, and managers (Paylo et al., 2017). Many entry-level residence hall directors must manage these responsibilities while living in a residential community with the students they serve. As residence hall directors live where they work, it forces them to integrate their personal and professional lives, causing a lack of work-life balance and leading to burnout (Rankin & Gulley, 2018). More recent literature has been published detailing these experiences of hall directors, who were also being instructed to add on more responsibilities due to COVID-19 being declared as a state of emergency. Since the start of the pandemic, residence hall directors have learned and adapted new processes related to COVID-19, switched from an in-person to a virtual setting, and assisted with isolation and quarantine housing (Boettcher, 2020). As additional duties have been added to the role, research questions guide this study inquiring about how residence hall directors balance their personal and professional lives and their responses to the transition.

Residence hall directors serve as the primary contact for students living in the residence halls, where they supervise paraprofessional staff, provide counseling services, plan programs, advise a community government, and conduct crisis interventions (Schuh & Shipton, 1985; St. Onge et al., 2008). As they address student needs and promote growth and development opportunities, most do this while living within the same community as their students. Living in the community with students forces them to integrate their personal and professional lives, which often impacts their wellness, causing burnout and a lack of balance (McDaniel, 2021; Rankin & Gulley, 2018). With the pandemic, more responsibilities were added to their plate, causing them to have to adapt to new processes related to COVID-19 and manage a heavier workload while

also trying to balance their personal life with little to no guidance (Nyunt, 2021). These new processes included switching from an in-person to a virtual setting, as the role is primarily in person within the residence hall, enforcing safety protocols, and assisting with isolation and quarantine housing (Boettcher, 2020; Nyunt, 2021). Even in instances where residence halls closed, residence hall directors had to continue to live where they worked while offering support virtually to students who moved out of on-campus housing and those who were still on campus (Williams, 2020).

Nyunt (2021) found that residence hall directors felt their work responsibilities during the pandemic jeopardized their health and made them consider not continuing to work in residence life. This raises the question of what mental health support is being self-provided or given to these residence hall directors to feel good mentally and physically in their role and what can be done to retain these professionals. As there is research on hall directors experiencing burnout and a lack of work-life balance, there is limited research on how these staff members are being supported and how they coped with the roles and responsibilities, especially during the pandemic. As residence hall directors navigate the new norm and adjust to the roles and responsibilities brought on by the pandemic, adding to their role of already having to manage the operations of a residence hall and tend to crisis management concerns, residence life departments should consider how it may impact their employees and ways to provide support.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

This qualitative study aimed to understand how residence hall directors navigated their unanticipated transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, this study explored the perspectives of residence hall directors within the Southeastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) region as they managed change while balancing their

personal and professional lives during the pandemic. To hear and represent the narratives about the lived experiences of residence hall directors during the pandemic, the research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do residence hall directors describe how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped their personal and professional experiences?
2. How did residence hall directors cope with the changes to their personal and professional lives due to the pandemic?

Significance of Study

Although there is research on the job demand and lack of work-life balance for residence hall directors, there is limited research on the strategies they use to cope with the responsibilities that come with the role, which often leads to feelings of stress or burnout. Thomas (2018) found that job conditions such as the workload, untraditional hours, and lack of balance negatively impact the wellness of residence hall directors. There is even less research on the residence hall director's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further investigation into the residence hall directors' experience during the pandemic will not only allow a space for them to express their thoughts and feelings, but it will also allow them to speak on how it may have impacted them and what they did to cope with the unexpected change.

This study also benefits residence life departments as they will better understand how residence hall directors responded to the change and how it made them feel. This understanding will allow residence life departments to know what resources they should provide and programs or training they should incorporate to support the residence hall director staff. This study provides coping strategies that residence hall directors can consider when dealing with an

unexpected event or change and programs and initiatives that residence life departments can implement to promote a healthy work-life balance.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this study was Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, which discusses how life is a series of changes and transitions. Additionally, Schlossberg illustrates how change takes place in people's lives, how people react to the change, and how people cope with the change. Schlossberg (1981) stated a transition occurs if an "event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). As change and transition take place in our lives, Schlossberg states that to understand the meaning of the transition, you first must understand the type of transition that has taken place and its context. Once this is discovered, to figure out how to cope with the transition, one must reflect on what factors led to it and how it has impacted them.

Transition theory also highlights how people undergo three types of transitions. These transitions are anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event (Schlossberg, 1984). An anticipated transition is a predictable event that people know will bring change, such as graduation. An unanticipated transition is an event that is not predictable, like an accident. Last, a non-event transition is an event someone expected but did not happen, like not getting accepted to an educational program to which they applied. This study focuses on unanticipated transitions, as the pandemic was an unexpected event, causing people to transition with little to no preparation. Once an event or non-event takes place to enforce change, Goodman et al. (2006) examined how one can locate where they are in the transition process, reflecting on whether they are moving in, through, or out of the transition. As they discover where they are in the transition process,

Goodman et al. (2006) identified four factors influencing one's ability to cope: situation, self, support, and strategies, also referred to as the 4S's. Using Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory will allow me to understand the perceived impact of COVID-19 on residence hall directors as the participants reflect on the unexpected event, discussing how they managed their change, how they felt about it, and how they dealt with it.

Definitions of Terms

The following section defines terms used throughout the study:

Residence life is responsible for "supervising, correlating, and integrating the activities of students who live in campus-operated residence halls" (Schuh & Shipton, 1985, p. 380).

Residence hall directors are "full-time, live-in, entry-level positions in residence life with direct responsibility (programming, supervision, discipline, etc.) for residents within a building or complex of buildings" (Belch & Mueller, 2003, p. 31). Other titles similar to this term include residence director, hall director, and residence life coordinator.

Live-in professionals are staff members who work and live in the same environment (Belch & Mueller, 2003).

Pandemic is a "disease outbreak that spreads across countries or continents" (WebMD, 2022, para. 5).

Coronavirus is a type of disease. A coronavirus identified in 2019 caused a pandemic of respiratory illness called COVID-19 (John Hopkins Medicine, 2022).

Transition occurs if an "event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5).

Work-life balance is “allocation of time and psychological energy in a balanced way in work and nonwork life while deriving much satisfaction from both work and non-work life” (Sirgy & Lee, 2018, p. 230).

Coping is “the overt and covert behaviors individuals use to prevent, alleviate, or respond to stressful situations” (George & Siegler, 1982, p.148).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I highlighted the importance of researching residence hall directors' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study will shed light on what they experienced as they faced an unanticipated transition and examine how to support this community. Chapter 2 will explore existing literature on the job expectations and demands of residence hall directors and explore previous research on staff transitions and their response to change.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review offers an overview of previous research on transitions among housing and residence life staff, including residence hall directors, and the impact of their job responsibilities on their personal and professional lives. The chapter begins with an in-depth analysis of residence hall directors' expectations and job demands before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Following is a review of the various ways transitions have been studied and the unanticipated transitions experienced by staff members in various industries, including residence hall directors, and its impact on them. Last is an overview of the coping strategies staff, including residence hall directors, have successfully utilized to manage their personal and professional lives.

Job Expectations and Demands

As the housing and residence life staff's role includes supervising, advising, responding to crises, and working beyond the standard 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. workday, it is sometimes hard for housing departments to recruit and retain staff. Challenges associated with recruiting and retaining housing staff have been mentioned as early as 1958, especially with entry-level staff (Scheurermann & Ellett, 2007). It is hard to retain staff due to the work and non-work obligations they must manage personally and professionally. Rankin and Gulley (2018) stated that it is difficult for housing professionals to establish boundaries due to the job requirements of the role, pressure from students and staff, overt supervisory expectations, and living where they work. Not being able to create boundaries causes these professionals to struggle with work-life

balance. As stated in the definition of terms, Sirgy and Lee (2018) defined *work-life balance* as the "allocation of time and psychological energy in a balanced way in work and non-work life while deriving much satisfaction from both work and non-work life" (p. 230). Not being able to create boundaries and balance between work and personal life pushes some of these housing and residence life professionals to other opportunities, catering more time to their personal life or a career with fewer demands. Some departments have tried to promote work-life balance by adding flexible work hour initiatives and remodeling healthy work behaviors, such as not answering or sending emails after work, allowing flex time, and offering compressed work weeks (Marshall et al., 2016).

Psychological Impact

When the amount of work given to staff members results in an overload, it can increase stress levels, negative attitudes, job dissatisfaction, and sick leave (Vaughn, 2013). Thomas (2018) found that the day-to-day operations, such as serving on duty and living where one works, posed a substantial challenge to the wellness of residence hall directors as they work excessive hours and have difficulty managing their work-life balance. When there is an impact on the health of residence directors, it also impacts the community. According to Thomas (2018), "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" (p.15). Positive wellness also contributes to retention (Thomas, 2018). As a result, Buchmueller and Valletta (2017) reported that employers have begun incorporating wellness strategies and programs to allow staff to practice good health, which helps residence life professionals manage burnout and stress by incorporating wellness strategies. An increased level of work and stress can cause employees to want to leave their roles. According to research studies, factors

contributing to student affairs professionals leaving the field include stress, burnout, fatigue, extreme work obligations, a lack of work-life balance, low salary, decreased job satisfaction, and ineffective supervision (Burke et al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2016; McDaniel, 2021; Mullen et al., 2018; Rankin & Gulley, 2018; Tull, 2016; Velasco, 2021).

When it comes to housing and residence life in particular, low salary, burnout, extreme work obligations, and a lack of work-life balance are factors resulting in the declining number of residence hall director candidates and staff (Baumann, 2022; Belch & Mueller, 2003). To help recruit and retain staff, housing departments must consider key factors such as salary, professional development opportunities, and supervision support (St. Onge et al., 2008). A significant contributor to helping maintain staff is supervision and support. A lack of a synergistic supervisory relationship can lead to a greater turnover rate (Tull, 2006). Tull (2006) defined synergistic supervision as being more "focused on a holistic approach to supervision" (p. 466). This type of supervisory relationship allows for personal and professional development to prosper. If a staff member does not feel supported or cannot talk to their supervisor, this can create a disconnect in the partnership and lead to distrust. A supervisor showing a staff member that they care can go a long way.

The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted the work-life balance of staff members. As many had to transition to a virtual setting and work from home, employees had to combine their personal and professional lives in different ways. Nippert-Eng's (1996) boundary theory describes how individuals create and manage boundaries between their personal and work lives (Allen et al., 2014). Bhumika (2020), in an attempt to understand the work-life experience of staff members using this theory, found that boundaries are made clear when personal and work roles are separated. People face challenges when boundaries are unclear. For example, staff

members experienced emotional exhaustion from balancing their work and personal lives during the pandemic. Some of this was due to having to tend to different demands of family members and tasks while trying to complete their job tasks. The study further showed that women felt more emotionally exhausted than men, with their personal lives interfering with their work while working at home (Bhumika, 2020).

As the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on job responsibilities and the work-life balance of professionals, it has also made an impact personally (Jaiswal et al., 2022). The following section focuses on how transitions have been studied, and organizational transitions caused by anticipated and unanticipated events, and the results that can stem from them.

Transitions

The word transition derives from the Latin word *transire*, which means “to go across” (Musamali, 2018). Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary (n.d.) defines *transition* as "the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another" (para. 1). Transitions can be exciting and daunting, bringing new opportunities and unknown challenges (Gill, 2021).

Over the years, researchers have closely studied transitions and how individuals respond to them. As a result, several models and theories have been developed to explain the underlying concepts. These models and theories include Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, Nicholson's (1990) transition cycle, and Bridges' (2003) transition model. Each transition researcher had their own unique way of addressing transitions. Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory categorizes transitions into three types: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event. It deals with how adults experience transitions and cope with the changes. Meanwhile, Nicholson's (1990) transition cycle (1990) is outlined by four stages that determine the success of a transition. These stages include preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization. Additionally, Bridges' (2003)

transition model highlights three transition processes: the ending, the neutral zone, and the new beginning. Bridges argues that transitions begin with an ending phase and conclude with a new beginning. Throughout the transition, people go through disengagement, disidentification, disenchantment, and disorientation.

As the study participants experienced an unanticipated transition and had to adapt to changes, Schlossberg's (1984) theory of coping with transitions was chosen as the fundamental framework for this study. The literature in this section focuses on how individuals responded to their unanticipated changes. Beginning with changes within organizations, organizational changes can lead to employees being stressed, losing trust, and looking to find new jobs (American Psychological Association, 2017). This was the case for many employees as the COVID-19 pandemic came along and forced changes in many organizations and how they operate. Due to the pandemic, many organizations adjusted their policies and procedures, increasing safety measures and responding to COVID-19 (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Schneider & Harknett, 2020). This included increased work obligations and shifting to online remote working (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). As a result of shifting to remote work, many employees faced difficulties adapting to the new tasks asked of them, like learning new digital tools such as collaboration and video conferencing platforms that they may not have to use before or used at a minimal level (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021). While conducting research, I found little research on the impact of the changes on residence hall directors during the pandemic. Due to this, this section will focus on additional occupational areas, such as administration, customer services representatives, programmers, educators, health and social care workers, and technology industry workers with similar transitions of an increased workload and remote working.

The shift to remote working forced employees to combine their work life with their daily lives. Al-Habaibeh et al. (2021) found that 47% of people working in fields such as education, industry, health and social care, civil service, and commercial and trading found it difficult when asked to work from home the first week. Weeks later, some were able to adjust, but 31% still found it challenging. As a result of having to shift to remote work, many employees faced challenges including psychological challenges such as loneliness and isolation, disengagement, home interruptions, and a lack of motivation (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021; Kaushik, 2020).

Remote working arrangements, workplace and organizational factors, and employees' traits and skills during the COVID-19 pandemic have been shown to have impacted employees' productivity and well-being (De Vincenzi et al., 2022). When employees switched to teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic, they felt a strain due to negative work-life balance and more work, which decreased their job satisfaction and performance (Camacho & Barrios, 2022). Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt (2021) found that workers developed fatigue problems due to longer work hours while working from home. Rapid changes in telework and increasing workloads due to the pandemic gave little time for people and organizations to prepare mentally and physically. As a result, Nyunt (2021) found that residence life staff experienced a decrease in their social-psychological well-being during the pandemic due to their work responsibilities.

The pandemic also impacted the workforce on the human resources level. Before the pandemic, the human resource department primarily focused on administering benefits and driving sustainable competitiveness (Peiris, 2021). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, human resource teams now have more of a role in crisis management efforts, such as developing the mental and physical well-being of employees, improving the efficiency of remote work, developing employee engagement through effective communication, and providing equal access

to opportunities and resources (Peiris, 2021). As it has been shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted employee's physical and mental well-being, these initiatives are allowing human resource departments to support and prioritize the needs of their employees.

Abrupt crises and workplace changes can have an impact on the emotional responses of employees (Lee, 2021). For employees to gain a sense of stability, trust, and safety, support is needed (Lee, 2021). When organizational changes happen, sometimes trust is lost (American Psychological Association, 2017). This can be due to unknown timing and a lack of communication. During a time of crisis where organizational process and procedures must change, it is important that open, clear, and honest communication is present (Eriksson & Petrosian, 2020). This is important because if a crisis happens, employees want to believe the organization can handle the crisis and support its staff (Eriksson & Petrosian, 2020). Failing to do this as an employer will cause employees to question the actions of the organization and how it may feel about its employees. Employees experience a sense of belonging when the organization exhibits care and understands the needs of their employees (Lee, 2021).

Coping Strategies

Research indicates that poor work-life balance and organizational changes can cause stress to employees. As a result, employees must find ways to handle this stress, which can be achieved through coping mechanisms. Coping involves a variety of strategies, behaviors, and mechanisms that can help alleviate distress and enhance psychological well-being. Many researchers have examined coping, including Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Carver et al. (1989). In earlier research, Lazarus et al. (1974) defined coping as the efforts made by individuals to solve problems when they face demands that are highly relevant to their welfare and when these demands tax their adaptive resources. When it comes to coping, there are many

tactics to consider. There is escape coping, which involves avoiding dealing with a problem or situation, and active coping, which involves taking action to decrease or eliminate the stressor (Brown & Nicassio, 1987; Roth & Cohen, 1986). This study focuses on active coping to address stressors that result from transitions.

Active coping can be demonstrated through Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, which is the framework for this study. Schlossberg discussed the "4S" of transition theory, which are factors that influence one's ability to cope and allow people to reflect on how they make meaning of their transition. These four factors are situation, self, support, and strategies. When thinking about the situation, it gives people the time to think about what is happening and what caused the action. Self allows people to reflect on their characteristics and how they may shape their view of the situation. Support involves the community that is available to guide people during the transition. Last is strategies, which is thinking about how to cope with the situation after it happens.

Active coping is associated with higher well-being and a better quality of work life, while negative coping strategies, such as avoidance, result in lower results (McFadden et al., 2021). While examining the relationship between coping strategies, well-being, and quality of working life of health and social care professionals during COVID-19, McFadden et al. (2021) found that strategies such as active coping, help-seeking, humor, work–family segmentation, recreation and relaxation, and exercise were coping strategies used by the professionals to help protect them against low well-being, while avoiding coping added stress on them. Sometimes, individuals may turn to acceptance when they perceive a lack of control over their circumstances (David & Suls, 1999). According to McFadden et al. (2021), individuals who engage in adaptive coping mechanisms, such as acceptance, can come to terms with their situation and learn to live with it.

This helps them adapt and move on, and adaptation plays a crucial role in facilitating successful transitions (Schlossberg, 1981).

Coping Amongst Educators

As residence hall directors are tasked with a heavy workload, it is important to understand how they manage a role's tasks, especially when integrating it with their personal lives and the coping mechanisms they may use to try to relieve stress or the feeling of burnout. Rankin and Gulley (2018) focused on understanding how residence directors make meaning of their personal and professional roles and manage to create boundaries. They found that leaving campus was the coping strategy all participants used to feel they were off work and to create balance from their work (Rankin & Gulley, 2018). Even so, they still felt on call as they live where they work and would answer emails at home and handle situations while trying to have personal time. Residence hall directors were able to recognize that they needed a separation from work, so they went off campus to obtain what felt like a break. To realize this, they had to reflect on themselves and how the role made them feel, resulting in them thinking of strategies to overcome feeling burnt out.

Wilkes (2017) explored how residence hall directors perceive stress and examined the coping behaviors of residence hall directors from environmental, personal, and work aspects of stress. Wilkes (2017) was able to identify responding to student crises, lacking a supervisor, and living where they work as stressors. For these types of stressors, utilizing their coworker, friend, or supervisor as a resource, leaving work on time, and counseling were resources used to cope. Residence hall directors were found to be resorting to outside and campus resources to cope with what comes with the job role.

Not only has coping been studied on the collegiate staff level but also in the K-12 school system. A recent study has emerged about the experience of K-12 teachers working during the pandemic and how they coped with transitions (Ramage et al., 2023). K-12 teachers experienced a similar shift in their requirements and expectations as collegiate educators and moved to remote instructional models. Virtual and distance instructions presented challenges for staff, and the pandemic made them feel increased pressure and uncertainty in their careers. However, Ramage et al. (2023) discovered coping mechanisms that helped the teachers deal with the transitions. These coping mechanisms included receiving external support from the school administration and the Louisiana Agriscience Teachers Association and adopting new technologies that helped them deliver instruction remotely and communicate effectively with their students and parents.

Conclusion

The literature review dives into the challenges residence hall directors faced in managing their workload even before the COVID-19 pandemic. These demands can leave them little time for a healthy work-life balance, leading to stress and burnout. As a result, they resort to developing coping strategies to maintain a positive sense of well-being and balance. Additionally, the literature review explores the impact of life transitions on individuals and the coping mechanisms they use during such a period.

As we know, job demands and expectations placed on residence hall directors can have a negative effect on them, but there is a research gap that needs to be addressed regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic transition and increased job responsibilities on them. The job responsibilities of residence hall directors have been found to cause stress and burnout even

before the pandemic. This raises the question of how they were coping and managing their personal and professional lives.

The study is designed to gather data on the mental and physical well-being of residence hall directors and obtain information on how they managed their personal and professional lives during the pandemic. This research study lets residence hall directors express their experiences and provides valuable data for housing and residence life departments. By gaining insights into how residence hall directors felt during their unanticipated transition, housing and residence life departments will be better equipped to provide support and promote a healthy work-life balance. Chapter Three of this study outlines the methodology employed in gathering this information.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study aimed to understand how residence hall directors navigated their unanticipated transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I explored the experience of residence hall directors by using Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory as it allowed me to gather data on their transitional experiences during the pandemic. The following research questions guided my research study:

1. How do residence hall directors describe how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped their personal and professional experiences?
2. How did residence hall directors cope with the changes to their personal and professional lives due to the pandemic?

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research paradigm that guided this study and my subjectivity statement. It is followed by my research design, detailing how the study was conducted and the research site. The end of the chapter explains how data were collected and analyzed.

Research Paradigm

The paradigm that guided this research study is the constructivist framework, which allows researchers to interpret the meaning of a situation or experience (Mertens, 2021). The data from my study showcased how I made meaning of their experiences during the pandemic. Four philosophical assumptions lie under a constructivist paradigm: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. Ontology focuses on the nature of reality and how

it is socially constructed, meaning multiple realities occur, and an experience can mean different things to different people (Mertens, 2021). As the ontology will display different realities, I made it a point to find the common themes within those realities to capture the lived experience of residence hall directors during the pandemic. To find the common themes, I was strategic in my questioning to gather what was consistent amongst the group and what was not. Epistemology focuses on the nature of knowledge (Mertens, 2021). As participants and I worked to co-construct our understanding of reality, we also worked to co-construct our understanding of knowledge or epistemology. For this to happen, rapport was built by being open and allowing space so new knowledge could be created throughout the processes and so that the participants and I could properly understand their lived experiences during the pandemic.

Axiology focuses on the values and ethics of a study (Jones et al., 2022, Mertens, 2021). Reflexivity was at the center of my research so that I could reflect on my biases, and so it did not interfere with the study results (Thurairajah, 2015). My participants were aware of my experiences and identities that aligned with the study so that they would not think I was hiding anything from them and know I would not interfere with the study. My actions illustrated that a shared sense of meaning could be established in our space. Last, methodology guides how data are collected and analyzed (Jones et al., 2022).

Qualitative inquiry was the most appropriate methodology to use for this study. Jones et al. (2022) define qualitative inquiry as a “set of aligned human-centered justice assumptions about knowledge, reality, and existence, and values used to increase in-depth understanding about a compelling interest in which people’s perceptions and their stories are amplified” (para. 2). Conducting a qualitative study allowed me to gather the stories of

residence hall directors so I could understand how they reacted to the transition and how they were able to balance their personal and professional lives.

Subjectivity

A subjectivity statement allows researchers to provide context on who they are, how it relates to the topic, and how it relates to who is being studied (Preissle, 2008). For context on who I am and how it relates to my study, I previously identified as a live-in residence hall director. I served three years in the role and then transitioned from the position to work in another functional area of student affairs. I decided to leave the job because of the burnout I experienced from the position requirements during the pandemic. Although I do not currently serve as a residence hall director, I understand I bring my experiences to the study. Although my experience resulted in burnout and a lack of work-life balance, this does not mean it was the same for others. I also hold social identities as a Black, cisgender woman that I am aware shape my sense of thinking and how I respond and cope with certain life-changing situations. Participants who do not identify as Black or a woman may make meaning of their transition differently than I do and have a different coping mechanism approach than I partake in when dealing with a crisis or transition.

To engage in reflexivity and understand how my subjectivity showed up throughout my study, I used a reflexivity journal as an accountability tool. A reflexivity journal allows researchers to monitor their subjectivities while holding themselves accountable to be as ethical and unbiased as possible (Thurairajah, 2019). In my journal, I captured the steps used to collect and analyze my data while expressing my thoughts and feelings. Thurairajah (2019) advised researchers to be mindful that their research plans may encounter unexpected obstacles or challenges. Therefore, I put those concerns in my reflexivity journal to reflect on what factors

impacted the plan. This allowed me to gather what I took away from the experience and gave me a way to strategize how to get back on track and develop a new plan. The reflexivity journal provided the best accountability to check my biases and manage my thoughts and feelings throughout the study.

Research Design

The qualitative research design for this study is narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Caine (2008) defined narrative inquiry as “a way of understanding experience.” Conducting narrative research provides an opportunity to gather an in-depth perspective of participant experiences over time and in context (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Clandinin and Caine (2008) noted two starting points for narrative inquiry: listening to individuals tell their stories and living alongside the participants as they tell their stories. The most common way to listen to and obtain participants’ stories is through interviews and conversations, as visual media and participant observation are common ways to experience living alongside the participant (Clandinin & Caine, 2008).

Narrative inquiry was chosen for this study as it was the best option to gather the stories of individuals and their experiences through interviews. Narrative inquiry provided the opportunity to understand and amplify the lived experiences of residence hall directors during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also allowed the participants to narrate their experiences in complete vulnerability and without fear of distortion, as I shared with them that their identities would be confidential. I also reviewed my notes with them before we ended our meeting to allow them to correct or add any information.

Research Site

The Southeastern Association of Housing Officers' region, also known as SEAHO, was the focus research site to gather data for this study. The SEAHO region includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, consisting of over 1,000 institutions and 4.2 million students (Southeastern Association of Housing Officers, 2019). I felt the SEAHO region was best for this study as I have worked as a full-time professional in the region for seven years, three years serving as a residence hall director. I also served on the program committee for the organization, so I was able to build relationships with many people. According to Malley and Hawkins (2012), choosing a research site with which you feel connected or have a direct membership is considered a best practice.

I also selected the SEAHO region as the South is more politically conservative. Marsicano et al. (2020) found that states controlled by a Democratic governor or legislation were significantly likelier to host activities online when returning to the Fall 2020 semester, and states with Republican control had higher percentages of in-person instruction. Nine out of ten of the states in the SEAHO region were under Republican control during the start of the pandemic (Marsicano et al., 2020). With being under Republican control, the schools within the ten states were more likely to be in-person than institutions in other regions. As employees had to return to in-person instruction, they may have had additional tasks assigned alongside their original day-to-day operations.

Data Collection

Eligibility

Participants had to meet a criterion to partake in the study. To be eligible, participants had to be current or former full-time live-in residence hall directors who served between the Fall 2019 and Spring 2021 semesters at an institution within the SEAHO region. Additionally, participants had to have started in the role at the beginning of the Fall 2019 semester or prior. The reasoning for this specific criterion is that with COVID-19 being announced as a global pandemic in March 2020, I wanted to have participants who started their position in the Fall of 2019 or before because they would have worked in the role before the pandemic and could speak on their professional and personal experiences before the pandemic. Including participants who started their positions in the Spring of 2020 would have allowed for only two months of work experience. Thus, participants had to work a minimum of the semester before March 2020 and until the spring 2021 semester.

Recruitment

To begin recruiting participants for my research, I had to undergo the IRB process and obtain approval. After completing the necessary steps, I received permission from the IRB on July 17, 2023, to collect data (See Appendix A). I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is where researchers intentionally select participants who have experienced the concept being explored (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Flyers were posted in Facebook social groups I belong to where I explained the study and provided a survey link to complete if they were interested in participating (see Appendix B). The Facebook groups I am a part of that aligned best with the search study were my SEAHO Regional Entry Level Institute Cohort Group, containing 48 members; the Doctor of Education

(Ed.D.) Network Group, which includes over 7,000 members; the Millennials in Student Affairs and Higher Education Group, which includes over 10,000 members; and the Student Affairs and Higher Education Professionals Group, which consist of over 38,000 members. These social groups are private on Facebook, so only the people in those groups could see it unless someone from the group shared it outside of the group. In each group, members are allowed to post without going through an approval process but must follow the guidelines set by the group administrators. The rules consisted of being kind and courteous, not posting hate speech or bullying, and staying on topic for issues related to higher education. As for Instagram, I shared my flyer on my profile page and in my story for my followers to see. The flyer posted on the story included a hyperlink for people interested in the study to click on and it directed them to my screening survey (See Appendix C). There was also a link to the survey on my profile to direct to the screening survey.

A participant screening survey had to be completed by interested parties to see if they qualified, which contained questions to determine eligibility and collect their demographic information (See Appendix C) (Whitman, 2020). Eighteen prospective participants completed the screening survey. The first ten who met the criteria were selected. Of the remaining eight, two did not qualify & six were waitlisted. Emails were sent to the ten people who met the criteria, informing them they were chosen while restating the study's purpose, expectations, goals, logistics, and how the meetings would occur (See Appendix E). They were asked if they were still interested in participating in the study. If they were still interested, I sent a consent form (See Appendix D) explaining the purpose of my research, their rights, and the protection of their privacy if they agreed to participate. Once I received the consent form, I arranged a meeting time.

Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted to capture the full experience of the participants (see Appendix F). In-depth interviews “allow the interviewer to deeply explore the respondent’s feelings and perspectives on a subject” (Guion et al., 2011, p. 1). Guion et al. (2011) provides various strategies for conducting in-depth interviews. Two approaches were considered: asking open-ended questions and seeking understanding and interpretation. Asking open-ended questions allowed a space to gather deeper insight from participants. Seeking understanding and interpretation enabled space to seek clarity and interpret what was being said. Conducting in-depth interviews assisted in keeping accountability for ensuring the research questions were answered. Since the research questions focused on transitioning and coping, I tailored the questions to focus on their experience before and after COVID and how they dealt with the transition. As participants shared their stories and provided information on where they worked, steps were taken to protect their privacy. Participants chose a pseudonym to protect their identity, and I chose a pseudonym for each institutional site.

The interviews took place virtually as the location range for the study was across multiple states and for safety reasons, as the COVID-19 pandemic is still occurring. The interviews were hosted via Microsoft Teams, as the video platform allows sessions to be recorded, and the platform self-transcribes what is stated in the session. The semi-structured interview provided flexibility and allowed follow-up to pre-established open-ended questions (Jones et al., 2022). The interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes. Before asking the questions, information from the consent form was reviewed again to explain the purpose of the study and confidentiality, answer any questions they had, and build rapport and trust with them so they would feel comfortable in the session and give honest answers.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is "the process of making sense out of data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 202). Making sense of data can be done by reducing, consolidating, and interpreting the experiences detailed by the participants so researchers can make meaning of participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To make sense of the data from my research study, I used coding to gather my participants' experiences and interpret the themes that emerged from the data. This coding process is discussed fully below.

As interviews were conducted virtually through Microsoft Teams, captioning was on to create a live transcript. Once the interviews were completed, I conducted member checks and reviewed each participant's transcript to correct any errors made by the electronic transcript. None of the participants made any corrections. Some did share that they wanted to further clarify certain matters or began to remember another experience, so they shared that information. When new information was provided, I also restated what I gathered to make sure I understood correctly.

I coded the information to see how each participant made sense of their experience. Coding organizes data to identify themes across data and the relationships between themes (Medelyan, 2021). I began with a priori coding, which Bingham and Witkowsky (2022) described as applying predetermined codes to the data. As my theoretical framework focused on the 4Ss within Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, I thought I would look at the data from each perspective of the 4Ss and see if themes were captured this way. After reviewing the notes taken from the interviews and finding out the participants all experienced the 4s of the theory, I went line by line through the transcripts, conducting pattern coding to capture what was being said by each participant fully. Pattern coding allows researchers to find the patterns in the code

they initially discovered and group them into categories by similarities (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016).

While going through each line, I looked for themes in participants' stories, instances of changes, transitions, coping, or support, referring to my research questions and theoretical framework on how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped their experiences and how they coped. As I discovered patterns, I found themes amongst the narratives of each participant on how they felt or responded to each theme, allowing me to gain insight into how my participants described how COVID-19 shaped their experiences.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is crucial in research studies so they can be as honest and ethical as possible (Adler, 2022). There are many practices to consider in qualitative studies to ensure a study is rigorously conducted. To ensure my analysis was as ethical as possible, I participated in reflexivity, did member checks, and had an audit trail. Reflexivity “enables researchers to manage multiple and diverging positionalities while conducting qualitative research in the field” (Thurairajah, 2015, p. 2). Reflexivity allowed me to reflect on my bias(es) and so my personal experiences would not interfere with the study results. To ensure I was not interfering with my research study to the extent possible, I kept a journal that tracked my feelings, experiences, and the evolution of my positionalities.

I also conducted member checks to establish credibility in my study. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) describe member checks as “taking tentative interpretations/findings back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible” (p. 259). Member checks are a way to show trustworthiness: I was able to go back to the participants to explain what I gathered from the experiences they shared and ask them if I had interpreted their experiences correctly. It

is good practice to double-check to make sure I did not misinterpret the shared experiences and a way to continue to check that bias was not interjected in their experience (Adler, 2022).

I also kept an audit trail. An audit trail is a “detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 259). An audit trail provided transparent information on all the decisions I made throughout the study, including how I collected and coded the data, what came from the data, and any problems I encountered. I kept a journal to keep track of this process to illustrate what took place in this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study aimed to understand how residence hall directors navigated their unanticipated transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I conducted semi-structured interviews to capture the narratives of residence hall directors' experiences. The following research questions guided the interview questions:

1. How do residence hall directors describe how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped their personal and professional experiences?
2. How did residence hall directors cope with the changes to their personal and professional lives due to the pandemic?

After analyzing the interview data, four themes were identified, representing how the participants described their experiences as a group. Each theme aligned with an "S" that is presented in Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory: (a) *situation*: "we were in the trenches"; (b) *self*: "not reslife for life"; (c) *support*: "thrown to the wolves & finding personal support"; and (d) *strategies*: "start taking time for myself."

The findings capture how residence hall directors became aware of their situation, managing an unanticipated transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic and reflecting on how it impacted them. This reflection led the residence hall directors to discuss the support they received, and strategies used to navigate their transition. The chapter begins with the participants' demographics, as shown in Table 1. Following, I present the individual stories of each participant, sharing their narratives both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, I end

the presentation of the findings in the chapter by describing the themes that appeared across the group.

Participants

For this study, I interviewed ten individuals to document their experiences as residence hall directors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the ten, seven identified themselves as women, while the other three identified themselves as men, ranging between 25 and 34 years of age. For race and ethnicity, four participants identified themselves as Black or African American, three as White or Caucasian, two as Multiracial or Biracial, and one as Hispanic or Latino. Participants in this study came from five states in the SEAHO region: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Eight participants served as residence hall directors at public institutions, while two served at private institutions. Table 1 provides a visual representation of this data. The individual experiences of each participant follow Table 1.

Table 1

Residence Hall Director Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity	State	Institution Type
Katrina	Woman	25-34	White or Caucasian	South Carolina	Public Research Institution
Mary	Woman	25-34	White or Caucasian	Florida	Public Research Institution
Daisy	Woman	25-34	Hispanic or Latino	North Carolina	Public Research Institution
Ulysses	Man	25-34	Black or African American	Georgia	Public Research Institution
Ashley	Woman	25-34	Multiracial or Biracial	Georgia	Public Research Institution

Ella	Woman	25-34	White or Caucasian	Virginia	Public Research Institution
Tamera	Woman	25-34	Multiracial or Biracial	Georgia	Private Research Institution
Amir	Man	25-34	Black or African American	Georgia	Public Research Institution
James	Man	25-34	Black or African American	North Carolina	Private Research Institution
Charlotte	Woman	25-34	Black or African American	Georgia	Public Research Institution

Individual Participant Narratives

To capture a comprehensive overview of each participant, I analyzed their experiences individually, recounting their personal and professional journeys before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. By breaking down everyone's story, I gathered a better understanding of the group's shared and unique experiences. This allowed me to identify recurring themes that shaped their experiences, providing valuable insights into their pandemic experiences. The following section tells the narrative of each participant.

Katrina

Before

Katrina's journey as a residence hall director began in 2017 and ended in 2022. During that time, she served in the role at various institutions. Katrina was serving in the role at a public institution in South Carolina before and after the COVID-19 pandemic was announced. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Katrina had a wide range of job duties, which included managing a residential hall building, supervising resident and desk assistants, handling conduct cases,

overseeing programs, addressing issues concerning building facilities, responding to incidents on-call, and helping with emergency closures caused by hurricanes. Katrina said the work-life balance was not there, as it was challenging to set boundaries, stating, “the work life balance was just not there really at all... I felt like I could never catch up with the work. I was staying late almost every night just to get stuff done.”

After

After local, state, and national governments declared the COVID-19 pandemic a state of emergency, the job responsibilities for Katrina changed as new protocols were introduced for the housing department and additional tasks were added for staff to adapt to the new environment COVID-19 presented to try to keep everyone safe. New responsibilities were added for Katrina like overseeing the moveout process for students, conducting manual labor by removing items left behind to get students' rooms checked and cleaned, and being a part of a call center to respond to students who tested positive for COVID or were in close contact with someone who had tested positive. Alongside these tasks, Katrina also helped orchestrate meal deliveries and transportation for students on campus in quarantine and isolation and enforced wearing face masks on campus. With the new responsibilities of the role, the amount of work amounted to 12-to-14-hour workdays.

While the demands of the job were increasing, the institution mandated furloughs, effectively paying Katrina less for more work:

We had to take 10 days that fall semester without pay. They decided as a university to just decrease your paycheck each time so that you could take three days in one week without being affected too bad that paycheck. So, they just said, this is your pay cut, basically, your furlough pay cut, take your 10 days.

With the new responsibilities added to Katrina's plate and being paid less, Katrina described her transition as “terrible.” Katrina explained that this was because of the consistent changes that were taking place. As there was constant change, it was an even greater challenge for Katrina to have work-life balance. Despite not having a strong sense of work-life balance, Katrina managed to receive some support from her assistant director and other individuals in the housing and residence life department. Katrina shared that an assistant director saw how much the residence hall directors were doing and stepped in to help the staff a handful of times.

Around a month and a half after everyone returned to campus, Katrina said it all hit her as she felt like she did not have enough support and did not know how to help the resident assistants or make time for them:

Midway through, probably like a month, month and half into that fall semester when they all came back, it was like I didn't know what to do. I didn't have the support and I felt so bad. My RAs (resident assistants) were told, you still have to do rounds, and you can go into the suites and should be saying hello and talking to them, but also, you're not allowed to plan any in person programs, even if they are outside, but you can. Like we had large study rooms, you can have 10 people in here or 15 people as long as you spread out, but you still can't advertise that you're having a program in here because the university said no, don't do anything in person. So how do we navigate you trying to build relationships?... And I didn't know how to help them (RAs). and I didn't have the time for them (RAs). My RAs noticed. They were like you're doing what. They saw me making the phone calls (intake calls) and saw how tired I was.

Katrina shared she had a small win when she contacted the dining hall and arranged for a food truck to be parked near the residence hall for the residents. This allowed students to use their meal plans to get food and enjoy music outside:

I reached out to the dining hall cause students like food, right, and they had a food truck, which was neat. So, I said, can we get somebody to bring the food truck out for one Friday night for our late-night event and park it near the residence halls and offer food to them and they could use their meal plan. So, we did that one Friday night. It was outside so they could spread out. We had a great turn out.

Katrina went on to leave her institution in July 2021 and went to another institution as a residence hall director with responsibilities similar to what was tasked before the COVID-19 pandemic, and not a lot of the COVID-19 related tasks she had to encounter. As she went on to another institution, she said that she did not have to think about everything that took place as much as she tried to forget it all:

I left right in July of 2021 and came to a school where they didn't do any of that. They had a lot of people doing everything and my coworkers were like, you did what? I was like, you don't have to do that.

From her experience, Katrina shared she learned she was not "ResLife for Life":

All the admin work, it did help me realize I was good at it and that I should start looking for admin roles, because man, trying to deal with all that roommate conflict when they're stuck in with one another, that was not my jam. It reiterated that I was not reslife for life. I don't know how people do it. Like, seeing what some of our ADs and directors deal with. Like, no thank you.

Katrina is now in a role outside of housing and residence life and works at a different institution.

Mary***Before***

Mary served in the role of a residence hall director from 2018-2022 at various institutions within the SEAHO region. During her experience, Mary served as a residence hall director right before and after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a state of emergency at a public institution in Florida. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Mary's role involved attending events organized by her student staff, being present for meetings on campus, meeting with students whenever needed, conducting conduct meetings, and being available on-call. Mary said that she found it difficult to maintain a good work-life balance due to the nature of her work. She often struggled to care for herself mentally and physically, as she had little downtime, leaving her feeling unhappy:

Before March 2020 it was bad. I was always having to worry about what event am I going to go to. Especially because before March 2020, in my previous role, I was serving as the RHA advisor. I was definitely involved in after-hours events that took up a lot of my time and energy. My mental health and my physical health were crap because I was unhappy with my job because I didn't have any downtime and because I didn't have the downtime, I couldn't take care of myself. I couldn't go to the gym and eat healthy and things like that.

After

After COVID-19 was declared a state of emergency, Mary shared that her role changed to becoming a crisis manager 24/7. As her role changed to becoming more of a crisis manager, Mary expressed she had to figure out accommodations for staff member:

The role changed because we initially were having to be crisis management managers 24/7. We were having to, at least in my case, I was having to fire and or figure out other accommodation for my staff, because most of them had left out of my 20ish RAs. So, I only had like two or three.

Alongside feeling as her role became being a crisis manager, Mary shared she began doing very mundane tasks such as serving as a security guard/front desk worker and participating in move-out in the early days of the pandemic so students could gather their things. Move-out consisted of having to go into student's rooms and pack their belongings:

We were having to go into student rooms and if they had forgotten something that was deemed essential, we had to get it from their room and then bring it to The UPS Store, which we understood. But you know, it definitely got out of hand. One of my colleagues was going back and forth with someone about fish. I delivered a printer, like a full-size printer, to The UPS Store. I was getting retainers from rooms, medication. And then honestly, the way that the role changed was I was basically serving as like a security guard or like a front desk worker for a good majority of that summer.

Mary also shared how her department tried to continue the engagement and community for students as they were adjusting to their new norm:

We were trying to keep up with the virtual world and trying to make a housing experience virtual, but that's very challenging. And the students didn't want to engage with educational pieces within a curriculum. That was the last thing on their mind.

As new responsibilities were added, Mary's work schedule shifted from Wednesday to Sunday, making Monday and Tuesday her weekend days. Mary shared she did not have to deliver meals

to students in isolation or quarantine but continued serving in an on-call responsibility receiving COVID-19 cases.

With new responsibilities added, Mary described her transition as “difficult” and “challenging.” Work became overwhelming for Mary, and she felt like she could not do a lot on a personal level. Mary felt she did not have a community around her of her age; she could not see her friends or family, and could not have visits:

In other offices, they have to do all this training for RA training, and those folks got to do that virtually from their homes or from other cities. I had one lady present to us and she's like, oh, I'm working remotely from Colorado today. And that was great that they got that opportunity, but I couldn't even go 4 hours down the state to see my mom for Mother's Day, so work became like a prison. I couldn't leave my home. I couldn't leave my job.

As there were challenges, Mary found strategies for making the transition a bit easier, like creating a Google number to text residents keeping them up to date with different updates or activities taking place. Mary was also able to receive support from her leadership, but expressed they were only able to do so much, stating the residence hall directors would receive things but also get things taken away. Mary expressed leadership was listening as they gave flowers, provided mental health chats, and held a space for conversations when Black Lives Matter events were going on.

As changes happened, Mary felt her mental health was “shit” and coping was hard. Mary shared she sought out resources and reached out to her employee assistance program, where she got involved with therapy to help cope with the changes in responsibilities and expectations. As a result of her experience, Mary decided to leave residence life as she believed she was not getting paid like she felt was worthy of her efforts and value that she brought to the organization. Mary

stated, “I did decide to leave residence life. And honestly, that was not just because of the job, but because I wasn't getting paid what I felt was a desirable or a worthy pay of a master’s level professional.” Although she left residence life, Mary uses many skills from when she had to go digital and became more protective of her time. Mary has been able to practice work-life balance and can now leave work at 5 p.m.:

I used a lot of my skills from when we did have to go digital, I will say that. So those don't go to waste. I'm a lot more protective of my time and my work life balance. Like now, I have the liberty where when it's 5:00 o'clock I can close my laptop and not open it until 8:00 o'clock that next morning. And that's really great for me because then I do have the opportunity to take care of myself, like, go to the gym and eat healthy and hang out with my friends. So, definitely more protective about just how much energy I give to my job as well, because I felt like I gave 115% of myself in residence life, and especially in those last couple of years, you didn't really feel like you got a lot back.

Daisy

Before

Daisy served as a residence hall director from 2018 until 2022 at a public institution in North Carolina. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Daisy managed a residential building of 480 residents, supervised an RA staff, worked with living-learning communities, led conduct meetings, served on committees, oversaw programming, served on-call rotation, and advised a hall council. Despite having an “okay work-life balance,” as she described, she wished for more separation from the position saying, “It was okay. I think it was like an acceptable level of work life balance. I probably would have wanted a little bit more separation from the role when I wasn't working, but we have like a smaller staff.” Additionally, she shared that she did try to take

time off to spend time with family and friends, but still felt obligated to be available for work emergencies. Daisy shared that setting boundaries and practicing self-care, such as visiting her family and friends, helped her create a healthy work-life balance:

I think really pushing myself to take advantage of the time off that I earned. I think a lot of us, at least where I worked before, felt like an obligation not to take as much time off to be there in case of emergency and things like that. So, for me, to really like push myself to take time off, go see family, just go off campus for a little while and go visit friends for the weekend somewhere, that for me was probably a big help in like creating boundaries and a sense of self care personally.

After

After local, state, and national governments declared the COVID-19 pandemic a state of emergency, Daisy's job responsibilities increased in many ways. As most students went home, some were granted permission to stay on campus and were put in a consolidated building that she oversaw. As a result of the pandemic, all resident assistants were let go the 2020-2021 academic year:

The RA role was eliminated for about a year. That was shocking, I think to all of us. We as the hall directors found out at the same time as the RAs did. We didn't really have, like, a buffer. We weren't informed by leadership until it happened. That was a really hard transition. The RAs didn't want to leave. Some of them stayed on campus as residents, they just couldn't help us in their RA capacity.

Daisy expressed that since the resident assistants were let go, the residence hall directors took over their responsibilities, which included conducting duty rounds walking around the building to make sure things were functioning properly, serving on call every other week, and becoming

the front-line contact with students and working the front desk. As residence hall directors were coming the frontline contact for students, Daisy shared that some of contact they made with students seemed as if they were also serving as an academic advisor as they were following up with students around academic matters:

We also did a lot of other duties from other on campus units like advising because the majority of our professional staff are also working from home during that time on campus. So, they would call us and be like, can you try and find the student and see why they aren't tuning in on zoom to their classes and talk a little bit about the grades and that kind of thing. So, we did a lot more academic advising type duties as well. It definitely was different.

Daisy also shared the new responsibilities of the residence hall directors involved helping with housing for students in quarantine and isolation and dropping off meals and handling conduct dealing with enforcing the mask policy. Rooms were also checked, and follow-ups were made with students to see when they could gather their belongings as students were initially told they could leave their items on campus. Programming efforts also shifted to a virtual format, which Daisy expressed was challenging as no one would show up, and she also conducted virtual office hours to allow students a space to come and speak. As the job responsibilities shifted for Daisy, she shared that the transition brought many feelings of being creative, overwhelmed, and isolated. Daisy shared the transition was creative as they were forced to think on their feet:

Creative or creativity because we were kind of forced to really think on our feet and come up with creative solutions and ideas to try and mitigate everything that was going on. And still create a good experience for students, even though it is a very difficult challenge.

When describing the transition as overwhelming and isolating, Daisy stated, “we were like some of the only staff on campus, even our leadership was working from home as well. A lot of the time it felt like everything just fell on our plates. Being able to still live in the building and engage with others allowed some comfort.”

Daisy also noted how there was not a sense of work life balance due to the amount of extra work given and not feeling like she had time off. Daisy shared that she was furloughed for two months, which was the only time she was able to take off. Outside of this time she felt like she could not take off. Daisy expressed there were verbal affirmations from leadership, but not much tangible support outside of that. No one was suggesting time off. Something else Daisy would have liked was a bit more transparency with the decision made from the top down to understand the decisions being made. Daisy stated, “when they laid off the RAs, not having advanced warning about that, that was difficult for us to navigate conversations with the staff when they were like, why is this happening and that kind of thing.” Daisy expressed how it was difficult trying to have this conversation when they did not have the context of the reasoning behind the decision.

As Daisy was going through this experience, she initially was not coping well with the changes. She shared that she did not have a lot of personal time, was not getting enough sleep, was not working out, and was not eating at the right times of day. Daisy took time off to cope and began to realize what she needed to feel good and what boundaries needed to be in place to take care of herself; this includes saying no to things. Daisy described herself as a perfectionist, so at times she pushed to overwork herself and she had to learn how to set boundaries for herself:

I think by the end of that time when things started to shift back to more normal, I knew now going into that new phase, what I could expect of myself that I need to feel good.

Like I need to make sure that I'm setting some boundaries. I need to make sure that I'm taking care of myself. So, I really think it took a long time to get to a place where I was coping well with it. And it was more so, coping for me looks like self-awareness that I didn't have before. And then being able to take steps to address issues that I'm noticing and maybe saying no to some things that I can't take on; my plate is already full. That's something that I learned to do that I really didn't do before.

As it was a troubling time for Daisy, she expressed that a lot of good came out of it. Since Daisy has gone through her experience, she is upfront about what she can and cannot do, becoming more assertive with boundaries:

I just knew that I would approach my work a little bit differently. I would be more upfront about what I can and can't do and making sure to carve out time for myself even if I feel uncomfortable asking for it and things like that.

After reflecting on her experience, Daisy shared she was no longer in housing in residence life:

I found a new job when I moved. I wasn't able to find a job in residence life, so I'm working as an academic advisor now, which I didn't expect. It was just kind of like I applied to so many jobs and I landed here, and I'm actually using a lot of the skills I did learn during that time, from that advising experience that I had.

Although she was no longer working in residence life, she shared that the skills she gained while going through this experience have been applied in her new role.

Ulysses

Before

Ulysses served as a residence hall director at two different institutions between 2016 and 2021. From 2019 to 2021, Ulysses worked as a residence hall director at a public institution in

Georgia. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Ulysses' core responsibility was to manage day-to-day operations in his resident community. This included identifying the needs of students; advising a hall government; overseeing staff members such as desk staff, resident assistants, and graduate students; collaborating with other campus partners; and assisting a first-generation college program within his residence hall. Ulysses mentioned that having worked in the student affairs field for a few years, he had established a healthy work-life balance. He no longer experienced the "building separation anxiety" that some may feel while serving in the role. Ulysses took care of himself by planning events for himself and going on trips to recharge:

We often talk about that building separation anxiety. I was past that. I was like, look, someone was on call. And so, if I can spend some time recharging on the weekend, I'm going to do it. And so, I was very good at taking care of myself prior to that day.

After

As the pandemic prompted change, Ulysses compared it to having a plan mapped out on a dry erase board and someone taking it off. Ulysses' role changed a lot as he went from overseeing a residence hall to working in a call center two days out of a week, providing medical advice with little to no training:

I remember feeling a lot of stress on the front end when it happened and even when our position changed. We went from supervising and advising and all this collaboration and working with conduct, to now, working in a call center 2 days out of the week.

While doing this, Ulysses also had to move furniture following move-out as students had the option to gather items or leave them, host digital programming and virtual office hours for over 1000 students in his building and provide support to student staff that checked out. Ulysses was one of the first people who had to check someone into an isolation space and was scared as

COVID was new and he wanted to protect himself. Ulysses expressed the role went from being an educator to a pseudo-medical professional. He shared that a lot of fatigue came from the experience as it felt he was doing two to three jobs at a time and having to be creative when taking care of himself. Ulysses also expressed how he felt like educators went unnoticed:

We were really in the trenches as live-in professionals, as resident directors. We were out there. Like, it was so weird at the time because I remember making a comment about it at one point. Like you had people applauding healthcare workers, when they're going to work and you know, all of these people are getting recognition and kudos. But as educators, I feel like people were noticeably silent and I'm just like it, it baffles me. It's like I get it. You know when you think about a pandemic, when you think about a significant health crisis, you look to health professionals to be the ones that they can support, but there're so many more people that had to contribute to where we are as a society. And I feel like as educator, we went unnoticed.

As Ulysses understood the reasoning behind why healthcare workers were getting recognition, Ulysses felt there were also others on the front lines, such as educators, and wished they also received recognition as they were also putting themselves at risk.

The transition was extremely difficult for Ulysses. A sense of fear and frustration grew. The question arose if having a place to live was worth it when it came to the live-in residence hall director role. As the transition occurred, work-life balance was nonexistent for Ulysses. Someone pulled him to the side and said to take care of himself:

Work life balance for a good long time was nonexistent cause going back to that original piece, prior to March 2020, we had to be creative with our time anyway because, you know you're going to programs at night, you're going to events at night, so how do you

maintain decent business hours, but then also make sure you're not running yourself into the ground? And when COVID happened, I felt all of that kind of just like, you need to be at work. You need to be figuring this out. I remember someone had to kind of like pull me to the side and just be like, take care of yourself.

Ulysses shared there was a particular time the summer after the COVID-19 pandemic was announced that he started getting back in some type of order and he sent an email saying he was he was going to take some time off and take care of himself. Ulysses said having a strong supportive network and being more open and honest about his journey helped with work-life balance. Ulysses shared that he was able to see a correlation between his personal life, work performance, and managing stress when he realized he was not happy personally with what was going on:

I realized that when I wasn't happy personally about what was going on, it definitely impacted my work because I didn't want to go. I didn't want to have to do certain things or quite honestly be around certain people. This negativity, where do I put this energy that I'm getting from feeling overwhelmed, being overworked. Like how do I manage that? So, until I started getting back to some type of normalcy, far as work-life balance, it showed a lot.

During his experience, Ulysses felt he had some support as he still had a job, but also felt a lot more could have been done as there were certain points where he felt residence hall directors were “thrown to the wolves” when some people sat in offices. Ulysses would have liked to see more involvement in helping from people as there appeared to be expectations for residence hall directors but not when it came to leadership.

During this experience, Ulysses shared he felt unsuccessful with coping with the changes, describing it as feeling defeated. This was during the isolation period and when conducting things over Zoom. He felt it was hard to measure what success was and felt down. As he had these feelings, Ulysses was happy to make it through the school year and still thrive in the environment he was in:

I think where I felt successful was when we were able to make it through a school year and see people thrive as best as possible in the environment that they were in. It's funny, like looking back at old pictures of events and things like that. I have a picture of some friends. We had gone out to lunch and we're all wearing masks in the picture. I feel good that students and professionals, everyone in the community was able to have a year at all because I felt like COVID robbed people of so much, so being able to come in that next academic year and make it through, and I say make it through because it was not easy. Additionally, as Ulysses was trying to find balance and a healthy space after the pandemic, he shared that he continued therapy, as he was already attending sessions before the pandemic, and he also went out to lunch with friends with masks on. After going through this experience, Ulysses shared this has helped him recognize himself as an empathizer:

It definitely helped me recognize myself as an empathizer or like just someone that is able to look beyond. Because it's really easy to kind of fall into, I'm looking out for me, myself, and I, but with COVID, it was so much more of a team effort because if you weren't doing your part, you were creating the space, you know, toxic and volatile and things like that. And so, I think COVID really gave us an opportunity to do some reflection on how do we help others, how do we be decent humans, how do we protect people that necessarily cannot be fully protected. Makes you think a lot.

After this experience, Ulysses not only revealed what he had learned about himself but also his next step. He disclosed that he had left the role as a residence hall director and continued in another student affairs position.

Ashley

Before

Ashley served as a residence hall director between 2019 and 2022 at a public institution in Georgia. Before the pandemic, her job primarily involved supervising resident assistants, advising a hall council, responding to crises on call and within the residential community, assisting with facility management, overseeing programming, administering conduct meetings, and helping with online courses for staff in training. While conducting these tasks, Ashley found it challenging to maintain a work-life balance due to the job's demands. She often worked outside traditional business hours, which made her feel like she was constantly working. Finding balance required a lot of effort:

To be honest with you, I feel like I didn't really have a great grasp on it. Being in the profession of a hall director, there's a lot that's required outside of traditional business hours. So, you know, 8 to 5, 9 to 5 or what have you. Doing the conduct meetings, the office work. And then after-hours attending programs, being on call, and those types of things. I just felt myself always working always.

She found balance by making time for herself through activities like going out to eat, attending concerts, and exploring new places.

After

After the COVID-19 pandemic was declared as a state of emergency, Ashley's role changed in many ways. Express check outs were conducted for the students to be able to gather their things and leave the residence halls:

We were also kind of forced into perfecting our express checkout process. And that eliminated the need for us to go into a space while the student was still there to inspect their room. Instead, they turn in their keys. And I worked really closely with the department to develop that process, but also to outline steps for the students to make it very simple.

As students vacated the campus, some students remained housed during this time due to certain circumstances. Ashley shared some students could not leave as they did not have anywhere to go, and some students' family or home situation was not ideal.

Following the departure of some students, positive COVID-19 cases then began on campus and prompted the creation of quarantine housing on campus. Ashley had to work with maintenance to get rooms cleaned and was working with the COVID team when she was on-call. She also had to work with dining to drop off meals. As this was taking place, she was conducting check-in calls with residents. Then programming efforts changed. She tried outdoor and virtual programming and then went door to door knocking and dropping off food for residents.

As new tasks were added, Ashley expressed that her transition was hectic at times, but she learned a lot about herself. She had to be flexible as things were not in her control:

I learned a lot about myself. It made me really reflect on what's important in life. It was hectic at times not knowing what to expect the next day, but also knowing that I had to be flexible. It just kind of forced you to realize that things aren't in our control.

Continuing with her transition, Ashley shared that on-call affected her personally and professionally. This was because she felt she was putting her health at risk, and this caused her to grow some frustration as she was also pregnant while this was taking place. Ashley shared this changed her attitude towards working:

I became much more serious and protective of myself. I feel like that changed my attitude towards work a little bit. Like the student going to do, whether it's a pandemic or not, they're going to do. They always going to get locked out. They're going to forget something. They're going to get sick. They're going to make choices. And as a professional, that's still a part of the job, but I think it really stressed me out having to respond to those things because I'm like, this is no longer about you. Like I'm putting my health at risk to help you or to respond to your irresponsibilities. I think that's something that really impacted me. To being on call and being pregnant as well.

Ashley stated that it “made [her] much more afraid to do [her] job.” Although she was physically limited to do things, she tried to find a good balance and not push herself:

When I had to drop off meals or be on call and to respond to duty situations. Not only you have a big virus, but physically I was limited on some days where I just wasn't able to keep up or to walk a distance. It was definitely a big transition for me, not only professionally, but also personally. And I was still trying to just find a good balance, but communicate with my supervisors, and let them know what I was comfortable with and what I was capable of, while not trying to push myself too hard.

Ashley spoke to her supervisor, and they were able to relieve some pressure for her. Ashley shared that in the middle of the pandemic, her direct supervisor changed, and her new supervisor was also supportive. She was encouraged to do work when she could and take some tasks

virtually. She shared that her supervisor trusted her to get work done and understood her threshold of what she could and could not do. Ashley shared that working from home and checking in on others helped with the transition. Working from home also helped Ashley with balance:

I think the idea of working from home made things easy because we all realize that we could still be productive and not be in the same setting as we were. So, I think that kind of gave a new perspective to work life and what that means. And I do appreciate that. I felt like that really helped me both personally and professionally going through the pandemic, and still proving that I'm capable of doing my work even if I'm not physically present.

Continuing with balance, during the height of the COVID pandemic, she personally did things at home but when restrictions began to loosen up, she would get out and drive, do pick up orders, and try new restaurants to go to or via delivery. She also focused on doing work during work hours so she could prioritize family life after hours. The main thing that was different was before COVID, students and staff would come to the office, but after COVID they would knock on the apartment door:

I've had instances where students and staff would knock on my apartment door, which is where I live, so that I would say is a barrier to balance because it's like, I'm not working or, you know, this is just where I live. It's kind of off limits. But I've had situations where people have knocked on my door. It's not a big deal, but I think it mentally makes you feel like you don't have privacy.

As the COVID pandemic went on, Ashley shared she could see a correlation between her personal life, work performance, and managing stress. Ashley realized she did not have a lot of

control of things and was starting to become more transparent with students and staff members informing them if she did not know the response or reason for decisions.

While going through this experience, Ashley expressed there were both unsuccessful and successful times at coping. She felt it took her some time to calm down as she was angry students were making bad choices and she had to respond to certain situations during COVID. At a point she took it personally as she was putting her time and health at risk:

I would be afraid to put my health at risk to unlock somebody's door at three in the morning if the master key didn't work. And I would become a little bit more frustrated at students being irresponsible because I'm going out here to put my health at risk, my child at risk and my family.

In terms of feeling successful at coping, she relied a lot on her spouse, peers, and coworkers. Additionally, Ashley participated in therapy, crafting, cooking, and attending video calls with her family to help cope with what was happening.

As Ashley went through this experience, she shared that as connectedness and empathy are her strongest strengths, these strengths really showed during the pandemic. She also expressed that life is too short:

I learned that connectedness and empathy are my top two strengths, and it really showed during the pandemic because I realized that we're all in some way going through a similar situation or we all have something in common in that sense, like we're working. We're all living through this unpredictable situation. Empathy, it really made me just feel more. It's like, yeah, you didn't turn it in the biweekly report or whatever, or you didn't turn in this resident conversation, but let's talk more about you being anxious or you being stressed out about your family or class.

As Ashley reflected on her experience, she shared that she no longer works in housing and residence life as a residence hall director. While she did not specify why she left her role, it was clear her experience led to her departure. As she is no longer in housing and residence life, she decided to continue her work in the field of student affairs in a different specialty area.

Ella

Before

Ella worked as a residence hall director between 2017 and 2022 at a public institution in Virginia. Before the pandemic, her job primarily involved overseeing student staff members and holding one-on-one meetings with them. She also handled roommate conflicts, resolved building crises, and served on-call responsibilities. During the discussion, the topic of maintaining a work-life balance came up, and Ella noted that it was not something that residence life had actively encouraged. However, she had established healthy boundaries with her team and would often hang out with friends and spend time with her family, partner, and cat whenever possible.

After

As the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a state of emergency, Ella's role changed in many ways. Ella shared that residence hall directors were essential responders. Part of her building was converted to quarantine housing, crisis responses changed as it was now more health-related crises, and conduct shifted as it now included violations related to COVID protocols and procedures. As this took place, Ella was there to support her resident assistants and their emotions towards what was taking place. Programming also shifted and she tried to conduct virtual programs, but they were not very effective, so she conducted grab and go programs for the residents.

For Ella, the transition was complicated for her as there was consistent change. Ella shared there was not a lot of clear communication from leadership, and that sparked some anger. The leadership team also was not on campus, but the residence hall directors were. Ella also shared there were also a lot of protests on campus where buses and other objects were being set on fire and windows being broken, and they had to respond to this:

The protests were very prevalent in the city I was in. We were all asked to be on call 24/7 in our buildings. The reason for that was they didn't want us leaving because the institution is situated within the city. And so, they didn't want us leaving our buildings to respond to crisis, but then what? That turned into us all on call 24/7 for about a week. As all of this was taking place, the hall directors came together, relying on each other, going through these times.

Ella's experience with work-life balance had its difficulties. On the positive side, she enjoyed the flexibility of a hybrid schedule, which allowed her to work from various locations, including her apartment. However, there were some challenges that made it difficult for her to maintain a sense of balance. For instance, there were conflicting expectations between herself and others, including different messages from leadership on what was expected. Additionally, Ella found it challenging to manage the demands of students, who were often very demanding. She was also asked to go into quarantine housing without proper personal protective equipment, which added to her stress. Further, Ella had to limit her movements and avoid some people to avoid risking their health, which took a toll on her mental well-being:

Another barrier was just not being able to go anywhere. Not being able to necessarily do the things in the community that I would normally be doing. Having elderly relatives that

I didn't want to necessarily be around because I was around people, around students, so much. So, I think just that isolation was very difficult as well.

During her experience, Ella expressed that not much came to mind regarding support. She believed having those on the ground, such as leadership, would have been helpful when it came to decision-making, and hoped that leadership would have given them a chance to voice their opinions and consider the solutions they offered. Additionally, Ella wished that leadership would have been more involved in the day-to-day work. She also mentioned that the team was understaffed, and some time off would have been appreciated. There was also a time during which hazard pay was brought up. Ella stated, “we tried to advocate for hazard pay. We brought to our leadership team that if we were, you know, putting ourselves at risk, we should be receiving hazard pay. It was something that was not accepted or approved.”

Ella discussed her experiences of both successful and unsuccessful coping with the changes. Regarding unsuccessful coping, Ella recounted an incident when she was asked to perform a lockdown for a student who had tested positive for COVID-19 and was not wearing a mask:

So, quarantine housing was in my area. So, there was an instance on call where I was asked to do a lockdown for a student who not only was COVID positive but didn't have a mask on. Like there was no kind of PPE situation there. And so, I had suggested to the person who I was getting the call from, which is one of the logistics coordinators for COVID, leaving the key in a central location, secure central location, to have the student come and pick it up. The person on the line was a newer staff member and they got pretty upset and said, you know, that's not protocol, and you know we're just kind of trying to

stick to the book in that situation. And I was just extremely uncomfortable performing the task.

Ella felt this action was putting her health at risk. Ella said that being on-call became a bit more emotional and personal. Ella sought therapy and found ways to connect with others, such as through Zoom, to deal with all that was taking place. She also became more focused on her health and fitness.

Ella highlighted that she acquired valuable skills from her previous experience that helped her advocate for herself and communicate her needs effectively. She mentioned that she has become more assertive and is no longer intimidated by challenging situations. Her stress levels have also reduced significantly. Despite great respect for the learnings from that experience, Ella confirmed that she did not return to the role. Nonetheless, she acknowledged that the skills she acquired played a crucial role in shaping her career growth.

Tamera

Before

Tamera worked as a residence hall director at a private institution in Georgia from 2019 to 2023. Before the pandemic, Tamera had many responsibilities as a residence hall director. She oversaw the residence hall, supervised resident assistants, catered to the needs of residents and staff, was available on-call, managed programming, and conducted conduct meetings. Besides this, she also assisted with staff training and organized off-campus excursions for students. Tamera was trying to balance work and life, but she found it challenging as this was her first full-time job. Work was always on her mind, and she felt she was constantly thinking about it. Even though there was not much to do in her area, she found ways to take a break by hanging out with her colleagues, going to the gym, and eating together.

After

Tamera's responsibilities and tasks underwent a significant shift following the pandemic. Her job profile during the summer included packing up the rooms of students who had gone home during spring break, managing more conduct cases, and organizing virtual programming. Moreover, Tamera was able to delegate on-call responsibilities to a different site location. Students who tested positive for COVID were assigned to housing spaces by case managers, and one of her buildings was reserved for quarantine. She also supported the resident assistants, helping them navigate difficult situations as they tried to organize programs and get to know their students.

Tamera found it challenging to adapt to the changes. She had to deal with uncertainty and try new things that often did not showcase the expected results:

There was a lot of uncertainty, obviously, but I think where it was difficult was trying new things that often didn't work and really almost overprescribing what we were doing. With the community compact, it was so hard to get students to comply. It almost felt like, why bother? So, it almost felt futile.

The resident assistants also faced difficulties in programming and building relationships with students. Despite their efforts, there was a constant sense of stress for them. As there were challenges that arose, Tamera found relief in working from home and working on projects. When speaking on her work-life balance, she shared it became more demanding for her, causing her to experience constant work-related anxiety and feeling confined to her apartment:

I definitely think it got more intense, where I felt like I was always worried about work. I think before, you know it was part of my life, and it was something I was thinking of, but I think it switched from thinking about it, to worry and stress where I was, you know,

actually, I don't know. I felt like I was kind of trapped in my apartment. My family actually lives about 40 minutes away from [city], so I was able to kind of go home on the weekends and that sort of thing during the pandemic, but it kind of felt even more so like this is, you know, where I'm stuck. This is what I'm doing. And again, the working from home part, while I think while it was easy for me, I think that also takes its own toll on your mental health in general when you're, you know, sitting at home bored.

As a result, this has had a negative impact on her mental well-being. Tamera described herself as a Type A personality, which made it difficult for her to cope with unexpected situations, such as students not adhering to the community guidelines. To relieve stress, she would occasionally leave campus to spend time with her family and partner.

Throughout her experience, Tamera mentioned receiving advocacy from the leadership team. For instance, she provided the example of the on-call duty being removed from their responsibilities:

The advocacy that I really appreciated was getting our on-call kind of taken off of us for that first summer, or you know as I mentioned kind of making sure those little moments where they don't have to call us to get the keys to the quarantine spaces because they already have them or they're unlocked. I think in those moments that was really helpful.

Additionally, her supervisor suggested refreshing her knowledge of student development theory, after expressing to them that she did not feel comfortable with her knowledge of the theory.

Tamera felt supported by the leadership team, who encouraged her to care for herself during these challenging times. She also mentioned that most decisions were made collaboratively, with leadership asking residence hall directors for their opinions.

Despite having supportive leadership, Tamera admitted that she faced both successes and failures when coping with her job. At times, she would feel unmotivated and question her purpose. However, despite these challenges, Tamera was pleased that everyone could work together and achieve the end goal. She even wrote a speech about the student staff and started a business making masks, which she felt was a significant contribution. Additionally, she was able to reconnect with old friends and make new ones, which was a positive outcome for her.

Tamera mentioned that her experience has led her to alter her approach towards work. According to her, there was a lot of misplaced trust between staff and student staff, and due to the pandemic, it was challenging to connect with them. Therefore, she has decided to prioritize building strong student-staff relationships. Tamera further shared that she has left her role as a residence hall director and accepted a role in another student affairs area.

Amir

Before

Amir worked as a residence hall director at a public institution in Georgia from 2016 to 2022. Amir shared that before the pandemic, he supervised resident assistants, conducted one-on-ones with staff, held staff meetings, advised a residence hall council, managed programming within his residential community, served on-call responsibilities, led conduct meetings, served on committees, and addressed facility concerns. When asked about his work-life balance before the pandemic, Amir mentioned that it was “okay,” but sometimes it was a struggle, and he had to adjust accordingly. He felt he was at work 24/7, and the position made it challenging to balance work and life as it was difficult working where he lived, especially when he also had a family. Amir acknowledged that he had to learn to shut off:

I feel like sometimes you're at work 24/7 because there are certain things that would happen later in the night where you do have somebody on duty, but it's somebody that really trusts you, and that might be me not having, setting those boundaries because I would at times be like, hey, this RA have a really important question that they have for me that I can answer real quickly. And so, I had to learn to set off or have a time that, I don't respond to anymore messages. And I made sure to make that known, but originally, I was like doing a lot and responding too much to the request of my staff after hours, as in after 5:00 o'clock or 6:00 o'clock, where I was still assisting staff with any situations that may have been going on in their community to make sure they have what they needed to be successful.

After

After the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a state of emergency, Amir shared their department lost many residence hall directors. They went down to nine when there are typically 18-20 of them. Since the team was cut in half, each residence hall director had to oversee two residential areas, meaning they now had to supervise two different staffs, advise two hall councils, and have more on-call weeks. As tasks were added, there were other adjustments that had to be made such as wearing facial masks and programming changing to a hybrid model involving outdoor programming. Processes were also created in responding to COVID-19. Students who tested positive for COVID were put in hotels, and duty calls were received to coordinate transportation to take students to their isolation or quarantine space. Amir shared there was someone on duty specifically to coordinate with the students who tested positive or needed to quarantine and there was a task force that also helped with this task. As this was

happening, Amir shared residence hall directors took students meals while they were staying in their quarantine space. Amir shared he felt unsafe trying to protect himself.

Amir found the transition during the COVID-19 pandemic quite challenging and exhausting. He said there were many challenges, such as figuring out how to adapt to the new normal, being an essential worker, and having to work harder and produce innovative ideas – especially when it came to virtual programming. Additionally, there was the constant fear of exposure to the virus:

The barriers, one trying to figure out how to live in a pandemic and how that looks like while you're working on a job when you are considered an essential worker where you not able to really be at home as much, even though you know we work from home, but you have to be out and interacting with the students and responding to emergency situations. So, it was difficult to feel comfortable during those situations, even if you had a mask, even if you had gloves and covered up, it was just difficult to kind of be in those situations. It added more work on us. We had to be creative and innovative with the programming because, like I said, we could no longer do the in person as much. So, we had to figure out how can we get students to come to a program online and what are innovative ways we can do that.

Although Amir faced barriers, Amir shared he was grateful for the flexibility to work from home, which brought him some comfort.

Not only was the transition challenging for Amir, but he also faced barriers when it came to work-life balance. Amir shared as it was a difficult time, students were going through a lot mentally, and he had to be there. As this was taking place, Amir was facing his own challenges, so he was managing trying to take care of others while also trying to care for himself:

It was a struggle because of like, some mental health, as in like a lot of students were going through a lot. And so, I had to be there for my students. A lot of students and staff members were having family members that, you know, passed away or was getting really sick. I had to be there to support, and then I had to go through my own situations with family members...my wife at one point in time had to go to the hospital and they wouldn't allow anybody to be there, so that was really difficult during those times, definitely. And that made it hard to balance my life effectively. And then at the same time, having a kid, while you know your wife is in the hospital, that was difficult. So, work-life balance was extremely difficult.

To gather a sense of work-life balance, Amir took time for himself, exercised, and spent time with his significant others, family, friends, and coworkers. Amir also shared that he received support from his first supervisor while going through this transition because a new supervisor was (hired/came on) the next summer. Amir shared his first supervisor understood some of the things he was going through and was flexible with him. Amir shared he heard some other employees did not get that same support. As Amir got his second supervisor, he shared he did not feel as supported because he was assigned to work the summer session, which was a larger commitment than his fellow residence hall directors. Amir felt he did not receive a break like the others who did not work during the summer did.

Amir shared when it came to coping with the transition, he felt tired and burnt out, especially since he was going into his fifth year as a residence hall director.

I felt like I got to the point where I wasn't meeting expectations as I could have, as I was doing beforehand and I had shown and proven, because I think it was just a big burnout and I was just tired. And I felt at times not as supportive as I could have been and so it

was difficult for me to want to continue on in the position that I didn't feel as supported and I just felt overworked and not compensated for the overwork in any kind of way, or not appreciated. They'll say we thank you for your work, but I guess it was almost like it was an empty thank you. And like, okay, now go back to doing your work and do your job. So, it was difficult for me and that's why I started pursuing other opportunities, which it was time anyway.

Before pursuing other opportunities, Amir shared that to help cope with the transition. He helped create presentations for residence hall directors and resident assistants on how to do programs in a hybrid setting, helped create approaches to streamline processes, and had an opportunity to work with the conduct office, experiences that he valued:

I created a presentation for my fellow hall directors and RAs to create ways to do programming in a hybrid model and in person or, just virtually completely. And so, we played around with that for a semester or so, and we perfect to a way that we understood, like ways of doing hybrid models a little bit better, and then effective ways of doing it in person, like having programs in person and suggestions of ways that we can start meeting with students remotely...Before I left, I got a chance to do a lot around conduct, which got me really interested in conduct. Providing some successful practices of getting people on the same page with that and we started doing that more virtually. So, I think that went well with how I started providing opportunities around conduct and providing best practices for that.

Since going through this experience, Amir shared that he has changed the way he approached his work. Amir shared that he has become more intentional with taking breaks as needed and adding workouts and meditation to take care of his mental health. Amir also stated he

is still being effective at his job, but he is not stressing self out too much, because he is doing things to relieve stress more.

James

Before

James worked as a residence hall director at a private institution in North Carolina from 2019-2022. James spoke on his role as a residence hall director, stating that before the pandemic, he supervised resident assistants, managed programming, promoted community building, provided resources to students, served on call, conducted conduct meetings, and served on committees. He found it challenging to maintain a work-life balance while holding multiple responsibilities, describing it as bad. James admitted that he tended to overwork as he was new to the role. To break away from his busy routine, he would volunteer and help whenever someone on the team needed help. This allowed him to feel more productive and useful.

After

James shared that after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a state of emergency, his role had changed in many ways. James expressed that he encouraged virtual programming and *come and go* programming and enforcing students to wear masks and to follow a visitation guest limit. Alongside these tasks, James shared as students were told to not come back and get their belongings, the institution offered a pack, store, ship process and they paid for their items to be packed and shipped. With this, residence hall directors would move students' items that were not going to be shipped to common areas to be donated. James also shared residence hall directors were offered the opportunity to live off campus for the whole academic year. If they chose this option, they would have to respond to students in quarantine or isolation who were in off-campus housing if they needed something:

[Institution Name] offered residence coordinators the opportunity to live in an apartment, off campus completely built. The caveat with that was, yeah, it was brand new. We had leased these brand-new apartments, so of course I opted into it. Most of, roughly 60-70% of the RC's took that opportunity. But there were also the other apartment buildings that were near us, same complex, brand new, for isolation. So, if a student that tested positive was locked out, we had to be the ones to unlock the doors and everything. So, you know, of course, being safe and, you know, wearing your shield and things that nature. But yeah, so it was just those things kind of like it was, a caveat to the to the blessing, I guess.

James stated hotels were also rented out, and he oversaw the athletes who were also put into hotels. James shared there was a team that help with the quarantine and isolation process as they put transportation together to take students to the space and had food outdoors for students to grab.

James found his transition tough as he was assigned new tasks. Additionally, there were other events taking place at the same time, such as protests, which made things more challenging. Despite the difficulties, James was grateful for the chance to work with everyone and appreciated that nobody was an expert regarding the new challenges they were facing:

I appreciated the fact that this was new to every single person, so this was no longer, oh well, at [institution name] we typically do things this way. No, this required everyone to get on the same page and work together. And sometimes you can say, we can be a little bit more reactive than proactive, but this, you know made us be intentional and making sure that, okay, hey, no one's done this before and there's no experts. Let's get on the same page across the board.

He was also happy to be still employed, as the institution had not shut down, giving him additional opportunities. One such opportunity was to take on a task for extra tax-free pay. This involved walking around outside for three hours to ensure that students were following policies and wearing masks. James took on this task:

[Institution] had shifts of 3-hour shifts, so 9am to 12pm, 12pm to 3pm, but from 5:00pm to 8:00pm, 9pm to 12pm, they offered to pay people a certain amount of money added to their check tax free. So, I want to say, from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm if you volunteered to work a shift, you got \$50.00 added to your check. From 9:00pm to 1:00 am walking outside, telling students to make sure that they're wearing their mask, you got \$100 added to your check. So, that was a huge incentive that made people want to volunteer. Positive reinforcement, things of that nature. I definitely took advantage of that.

James discussed some challenges and strategies regarding work-life balance. He mentioned some obstacles to achieving balance, such as feeling unable to get away and lacking clear boundaries between work and personal time. Additionally, he noted that the university police were not always reliable, putting more pressure on the residence hall directors. However, James also pointed out that he could progress towards a better work-life balance by setting boundaries and finding time for personal activities like going to the gym or watching shows. He also found that building relationships with campus partners and helping students was fulfilling by working with the compliance team. Through this experience, James realized the importance of managing stress and finding ways to recharge outside of work. Although he is skilled at crisis management, he acknowledged that it is not healthy to deal with it constantly and that it is sometimes necessary to take a break and delegate tasks to colleagues:

I noticed that I'm really good at crisis management, even though it could be a lot. I enjoy trying to solve problems and you know trying to assist others and whatnot, but just because I'm good at it, doesn't necessarily mean that it's healthy to always deal with it. So, I think that's the one thing that I learned in terms of the work life piece. That correlated like, yeah, great at problem solving, but sometimes you know you do need a break, and sometimes that situation can wait. Sometimes someone's emergency doesn't require your immediate response, or you could always pass the baton to those that's on call.

James talked about his experience of receiving support and his coping mechanisms amidst changes. He mentioned feeling uncomfortable during Halloween and the election, as they were required to be on campus and monitor the situation. James found this stressful and frustrating since there were already systems to ensure safety, like on-call:

I think during Halloween and during the election, we were required to be on campus, walk around, inside, and outside of all the residents' apartments during Halloween to make sure no one was doing anything crazy. And then two, I think during election, just to monitor how people you know were feeling and whatnot. And then also enforce the COVID piece. I didn't necessarily feel like that was something that we need to do, which you have like a RA on call that does rounds regularly and the RC on call and then you have C-Team already doing walks outside. What do we need to be doing the same thing for?

However, getting tested for COVID-19 whenever he wanted helped ease his mind, as this was not something everybody had access to at the time. James also talked about a time where he was able to receive support during his experience during the COVID-19 pandemic:

I was on call, and there was a student who was locked out, and they couldn't get into their building. That was an isolation space, and they called us cause, granted, none of the undergraduate community has the RC [residence coordinator] on-call number. However, those that were in isolation, if they needed anything, received the RC on-call number. It was 32 degrees outside, and they were locked out. The student told me that they called PD [police department], and PD said that they won't come out. So, I'm sitting here like, this doesn't make sense. So, when I called PD to ask them, "Hey, there's a student that's locked out, and they're saying that you won't allow them in. Is there any truth to this?" And PD stated, "Yeah, we can't confirm that's a student, and none of our officers feel safe to do that, that's your job." So, I had a moment where I'm like, I have a personal reaction to this, and it was a constant battle of, again, what will PD show up to. So, I had called my supervisor, and he had showed up with me. We assisted the student, and you know, he showed up, and he advocated for me in terms of, he shouldn't have had to come out to campus when this is something that you all (PD) are responsible for doing. I appreciate the fact that he not only acknowledged it, but he didn't have to show up because I was going. So, just making sure that you know I'm never going to ask you to do something that I wouldn't do.

James' experience made him reflect on how it transformed his approach toward work. Although he was intentional and genuine in his approach before, he realized that he became even more dedicated and sincere after going through this experience. He also mentioned that he developed the ability to adapt and be more innovative. James was able to gather valuable insights from his experience but ended up deciding to leave his position as a residence hall director. While the exact reason for his departure was not disclosed, he decided to move on from the role.

Charlotte

Before

Before the pandemic, Charlotte served as a residence hall director at various institutions. During the years of 2019-2021, Charlotte served in the role at a public institution in Georgia. Charlotte mentioned that she managed a residential community, overseeing resident assistants and graduate students. She also oversaw operational tasks, managed keys within the building, and served in an on-call duty rotation. Regarding work-life balance, Charlotte said she had a good grasp on it and could leave work at the standard end of the business day. She also mentioned that she had an active lifestyle and lived in the city, allowing her to explore, attend social gatherings, and travel. Living in a large city and being associated with a large institution gave her many advantages. Charlotte stated that she had the freedom to disconnect from work whenever necessary:

I was able to be in the office between 8-8:30 am and wrap up my day around 5:30 pm if I wasn't serving on call. I think that work life balance really was present for me in my life as it pertained to like, active health, going out to like social settings, and gatherings. I really benefited a lot from living in the city, working at a large institution, and being able to find things that just disconnected me from work.

After

Charlotte shared that after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a state of emergency, she still had some of the initial responsibilities tasked of a residence hall director along with some newly added expectations. Charlotte stated some of the new expectations included going from in person to a virtual setting and assisting with COVID response tasks. Charlotte shared as students were placed in quarantine housing, the on-call residence hall director notified students

telling them they had been in contact with someone who had COVID or tested positive. Charlotte noted residence hall directors were the first point of contact for parents and students when it came to COVID. Although they helped notify students, they did not have to partake in delivering meals to the students as dining handled meal delivery to the students.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Charlotte faced several challenges while transitioning to the new normal. She found it difficult to cope with the lack of direction and information and the absence of her supervisor. Charlotte was also apprehensive about the potential impact of COVID-19 on her health and expressed her willingness to get vaccinated once a vaccine became available. It was a tough call for Charlotte to decide whether to stay or leave during this period of uncertainty. Although Charlotte appreciated the flexibility of remote work, she found it increasingly challenging as it involved long hours of working on the computer and phone.

During this time, Charlotte balanced her work and personal life despite some challenging days. She expressed that she was able to find harmony despite the back-to-back meetings and an increase in parent meetings that made it harder to complete projects during the day. However, she was still able to engage in more in-house activities and even cook more. When asked about how her personal life, work performance, and ability to manage stress were correlated, she explained that it was hard to separate. She performed her duties well, but she realized her community and relationships involved mostly housing and other student affairs professionals. If she could not go to a friend's or sorority sister's house, she knew she could go to another residence hall director, but she felt that her relationships outside of housing were affected:

I think my personal relationships outside of student affairs and campus housing were affected because I just had some people that just did not understand. I still personally in some ways still have to go to the office. I still have to show up for work. I still have to be

very cautious and careful because I'm around students who aren't abiding by the COVID-19 policies nationwide and in the residence hall. And so, I think that for me, I became almost isolated in a way.

During her experience, Charlotte mentioned a lack of connection with her supervisor and leadership:

I had a supervisor who was not present. Like, they lived off campus, so there was a time where I physically did not see my supervisor for months. And you know, in a way, it was just kind of like, it had taken me back a little bit knowing that, you know, as a first responder residence hall director, there were times that I needed to show up to the office. There were times that I was masked up. Gloves on responding to on-call calls, really boots on the ground and being front facing. My supervisor, there was just no support. This caused Charlotte to feel resentful towards her supervisor and senior leadership. She felt unsupported and wished her leadership team could have displayed servant leadership, especially since she felt she was going through it alone. Charlotte's one-on-one meetings were often canceled, and she felt like she was dealing with everything on her own without enough support. She also expressed a lack of information, honesty, and trust and would have appreciated more frequent updates from the leadership team:

I think the ways in which I would have liked to be supported is knowing that I wasn't in it alone. I think that there were many times where things would come through via email or via phone, and things just weren't clear. I think there was a lack of honesty. There was a lack of trust that developed just due to the lack of information. And I think the timeliness of the information that came.

Charlotte expressed her experiences of coping with the transition, both successful and unsuccessful. She admitted feeling unsuccessful at times, given that her work in student affairs and housing dominated much of her life. Being surrounded by work all the time, with colleagues and neighbors living and working nearby, made her realize the unhealthiness of her coping mechanism. To overcome this feeling, Charlotte shared she began cooking work, writing, working out, and dedicating more time to her personal projects.

Charlotte mentioned that her experience has transformed the way she approaches her work, leading her to prioritize intention, care, and empathy towards others. She also emphasized the importance of considering the things behind the scenes and approaching them with intention and care, while also treating oneself with more grace and care. Charlotte also shared that she changed her job and profession after going through this experience.

Themes

While collecting the personal stories of each participant who served as a residence hall director during the COVID-19 pandemic, I discovered patterns among them. As they all had worked in a similar role before and after the pandemic, the COVID-19 pandemic required everyone to undergo a personal and professional transition, leading them to seek coping strategies. Their transition experiences align with Schlossberg's (1984) theory, which highlights four key factors that impact an individual's ability to deal with a transition: *situation, self, support, and strategies*. Considering the unexpected circumstances, each participant had to find ways to cope with the changes, and their experiences are categorized into these factors as themes discussed in the following section.

As I was able to analyze the data, I saw the participants had shared experiences. When I saw these common experiences, I discovered quotes from participants that described the overall

experience of the participants. Regarding the situation, each participant disclosed how tasks were added and how they had to adapt to a new situation. When revealing his experience, Ulysses said a quote that captured all participants' feelings, saying they "were in the trenches." This meant he and other hall directors were on the frontline and doing a lot of work. When it comes to self, participants shared how they gained a new perspective, and the result of their experience on them caused them to feel dissatisfied. A quote that captured this was from Katrina, stating the feeling of "not being reslife for life." When it comes to support, there was a time when participants felt they were in their situation alone and did not have support. Ulysses shared a quote capturing this as he felt like residence hall directors were "thrown to the wolves." As this was the participants' feeling, they leaned on others for support. Last, with strategies, participants shared moments when they felt unsuccessful at coping but found time to start taking time for themselves and focus on their well-being, which Amir was able to capture, saying, "I started taking time for myself." In the next section, you will see the participants' shared experiences and how the themes were captured.

Situation: We Were in the Trenches

The situation factor of Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory helps researchers focus on the circumstances surrounding the transition, such as the timing, triggers, role changes, and past experiences. Within this study, the COVID-19 pandemic presented an unexpected and sudden transition for residence hall directors, prompting them to adapt to new ways of functioning. The residence hall directors were required to adjust to new policies and procedures and assist in maintaining the campus community's safety. This included new tasks such as managing quarantine and isolation housing and coordinating logistics to ensure that the students had access to food and transportation while also responding to COVID-19-related concerns. The increased

responsibilities added to the stress levels of the residence hall directors, resulting in a negative transition for them. Additionally, it impacted their work-life balance, which they felt worsened during this time as they struggled to balance their personal and professional responsibilities.

Daisy shared a common feeling that was amongst the participants about the situation stating, “the transition was overwhelming because it was just kind of a sudden transition, to changing job roles and duties, and things.” The residence hall directors talked about the aspect of the situation that they had to manage in terms of (a) providing moving assistance, (a) managing quarantine housing, (c) conducting virtual programming (d) balancing work-life, and (e) adapting to the new situation.

Moving Assistance

When the COVID-19 outbreak was declared a global pandemic, housing and residence life departments had to quickly produce a plan to ensure the safety of their students. Since the announcement came in the middle of the spring semester, around the spring break period, housing and residence life departments had to figure out how to manage the check-out and delivery of students' belongings, and how to manage the return of the students in the fall semester. Ulysses remembers the time he got the call about producing a departmental plan:

I remember the day that it started to impact the work that we did because I had, for some odd reason, taken that day off because we were in the middle of spring break... I was chilling at home, not really paying attention to what was going on in the world outside of me, but knowing that there was something kind of looming, so to speak. I got a call from my supervisor, maybe about 3:30/4 o'clock that day, and they say, hey, I know you're off of work, but we have this meeting in your building, and everybody's going to be there because we have to figure out what this plan is... I don't think I got home till 11 or 12

that night. That prompted a period where we were just trying to figure out things bit by bit, moment by moment.

With COVID being new to everyone, the participants mentioned not really knowing what to do or how to handle the situation. Katrina recalled on the time where her department was trying to teach them about facial masks and trying to find tasks for them to do:

It was a lot of change—things changed by the day. I remember learning about KN 95 masks the first week, and we're sitting there going, what are we doing exactly, and this was like real early. They were trying to figure out stuff for us to do, to keep us around, justify us being employed, and then after a while it was like, ok, well, we got to have somebody go get stuff out of the student's rooms and check for trash and bugs and clean out their kitchens, but then also we got to be safe about it. So, it's very kind of isolating of go do it yourself.

As some students could come back and receive their items, some housing departments offered services for student's items to be shipped who could not return. With this, sometimes it would have to be the hall director packing the items or the packing company that was hired.

Daisy recalled an instance when she had to contact students about retrieving items:

We would pair up and we would go from room to room. We would be calling students, saying, what items are you planning to come pick up? When would you like to schedule to come pick them up? There wasn't really like this designated, like, oh, here's a move-out check-out day and time. It was students just coming back from home at random times. We did end up having to ship stuff and discarded things that students left behind. That process took a couple of months because it wasn't very organized. We had to do it all pretty much on our own.

Tamera had the experience of packing the belongings of students as well. Tamera expressed how packing these items consumed a lot of time and energy as this was a new type of situation for her:

The other big change for the next month or so was packing student's rooms who had gone home for spring break and then just didn't come back for whatever reason; that took up a lot of our time and energy, just trying to figure out what to do with all of the stuff that students left behind.

James also explained how his department managed to get a company to handle the packing and shipping of items for students. Although a company was hired, residence hall directors still went into the room to show the students the items being packed. If a student had perishable items, they were informed that the item was not shipping and was being donated:

Our strategy was we had a pack store ship process where the institution paid for all the students' belongings to be shipped to them, to the actual student, and they had to just provide where they wanted us to ship all those things. But us as residence coordinators, we had to go in. The institution hired two moving companies, one for East Campus, which is predominantly first-year students, and West Campus, which is our upperclassmen students. We came in, did like a video recording with the students to show them, hey, this is what we're packing. Do you want this? The only thing that we didn't send the students were perishable items, so we can donate those things. But other than that, they were able to see what was being packed.

While the students benefited from the packing and moving assistance the residence hall directors provided, the directors faced an unfamiliar situation that demanded more of their time and energy. Consequently, these added tasks placed an additional burden on them.

Quarantine Housing

Managing isolation and quarantine housing for students who tested positive on campus became a new expectation, creating a change in the situation during the transition. This prompted new tasks for some participants, such as delivering meals, helping with transportation, and responding to the on-call needs of students in the housing spaces. In addition, some participants had to oversee these students staying in their halls as some buildings were converted to quarantine housing. Tamera and Ella both had halls that transitioned into quarantine housing. Tamera shared that the rooms reserved in her building were located on the ground floor. For Ella, having quarantine housing in her hall meant that sometimes she had to perform lockouts for students who were meant to be in quarantine but decided to leave their rooms.

Some campuses outsourced and reserved spaces in nearby hotels or apartments for students to stay in when having to isolate or quarantine. Katrina recalled the time when students returned to campus after COVID was announced as a global pandemic, stating, “When everybody else got back, it just went nuts. We had so many cases on campus and not anywhere to put them, so we had to end up contracting out an apartment complex nearby.” Ashley was able to recall the time isolation and quarantine housing started on campus, but then the housing and residence life department outsourced due to space:

With quarantine housing, our department really tried to work and figure that out. It started on campus, working real closely with our custodial staff to get rooms clean. Of course, they're scared. Everybody's scared. Nobody wants to put themselves in harm's way. But we worked closely with our custodial staff to get rooms clean. We also rented out hotel spaces because we just needed that additional housing. Then it came to a point

where if people didn't share bedrooms, they would be able to self-quarantine in their apartment as we learned more about the virus and everything.

As institutions had to outsource to off-campus locations, housing and residence life departments had to figure out the logistics of getting them to their quarantine space, dropping off meals, and responding to the on-call needs. To get to their designated quarantine and isolation space, housing departments put some procedures in place for residence hall directors to respond to these needs. Ulysses shared that his department created a space, like a call center, to respond to COVID-19 cases, where he worked in the center two to three days a week and coordinating room assignments and student transportation. Daisy recalled the time a team of hall directors who were not in an open building managing a COVID on-call phone to assist students who needed to go to isolation and quarantine spaces and how the residence hall directors in open buildings assisted them:

We had a team that was made up of a couple of hall directors who weren't in the buildings that were open. They were in charge of running, like what we had, like a COVID on-call phone, and that's what we used for the students who were being moved to isolation or quarantine housing, and they would transport them. They would call us to help them get the stuff they needed from their room if it was in our building and head over there, and they would contact us to bring food at certain times.

Amir shared how his department was able to orchestrate transportation for their students going to quarantine and isolation spaces:

We had to figure out processes like escorting students to an on-campus or off-campus facility. We bought a hotel and stationed our students that tested positive in their hotel that's close to campus, almost walking distance, but we provided transportation. We'll

have more calls during duty because we will have to not only deal with emergencies but also deal with a student that tests positive and having to coordinate transportation for them to those particular destinations.

As students checked into their spaces, the next thought was how they would eat in their space if they could not leave their room and had to be there for some time. Ashley recalled a time having to deliver meals, stating “it was a very stressful time.” Amir was also able to recall the time he delivered meals to students in quarantine housing and how he felt unsafe doing this action:

We started having to also do things that we weren't used to doing, such as if a student got sick, we had to bring food to them. And you know, we at the same time felt unsafe during that time period, needing to wear masks, and trying to protect yourself, protect your family. And me having a family made it difficult at times. It was difficult, but also it was concerning, to put yourself in danger's way because you're helping, you're doing something for your job that's helping others, but also putting yourself in harm's way.

If hall directors did not deliver meals to students in quarantine, more likely a team was hired to complete the task and other logistics such as communication and transportation. This was true for Ella. Ella shared how her department created an additional position where they hired someone to assist with logistics and help with the delivery of meals:

We did hire an additional position to manage the logistics; they were on call but not on site. That was an interesting way to kind of respond to that. They would come in during the day and manage coordinating the meal drop-offs and things like that during business hours. We coordinated all of that after hours, so the hall directors were the central responders to COVID situations.

Providing quarantine and isolation housing was crucial to ensuring the health and safety of students. However, transporting students to their designated rooms, delivering their meals, and catering to their needs during quarantine and isolation became daunting for the residence hall directors. This new situation led to their concern and fear, as they felt their health and safety were at risk.

Virtual Programming

Because of the spread of COVID-19, safety guidelines required individuals to maintain a six-foot distance from others. As a result, many activities were moved to virtual platforms, such as community programming hosted by participants and their student staff. This was a new type of situation for the participants. Charlotte, Mary, and Tamera all shared similar experiences with virtual programming. For Charlotte, it was a new adjustment that she found noticeably different. Mary and her staff made the switch but faced challenges with low student engagement. Similarly, Tamera also noted a significant decrease in student engagement. To try to get engagement up, participants tried to engage in other programmatic efforts, like Ella trying grab-and-go programs:

We tried virtual programming. It was not very effective, so we switched mostly to grab and go programming for the most part doing like a craft and letting them come and pick it up at a location and take it back to their rooms.

James and his team also tried to grab-and-go programs but felt it was not as intentional as programming they had done in person, stating it felt very robotic. Participants like Daisy and Ulysses even tried virtual office hours. Ulysses shared his experience with low engagement from the students:

The amount of involvement that we had digitally just really wasn't a thing, and suddenly, that was our only thing. I remember being told you need to schedule office hours to sit on a Zoom and wait for people to come in and do what they got to do. I had 1000 residents in my building, and I sent emails every week, no one ever came.

Residence hall directors were responsible for maintaining students' involvement and providing them with a virtual housing experience to foster a sense of community. This was a new situation for the residence hall directors, who were accustomed to organizing in-person events that attracted many students. The transition to a virtual platform was challenging for the residence hall directors, as they had to work harder to engage the residents, demanding them to come up with creative ideas to attract engagement.

Work-life Balance

The added tasks and adjustments for the participants allowed them to reflect on their work-life balance as this period became more challenging for them to take care of themselves. Amir expressed that with the residence hall director position, it was already hard to have work-life balance, but it was even more difficult once COVID was introduced as a global pandemic and the job required a bit more. Daisy expressed similar thoughts about work-life balance during COVID:

I feel like there really was not a sense of work-life balance at that point with the level of hours we were working. We were there during normal business hours in our office; after hours, we were working the front desk until close, and then we were on duty for our buildings doing our RA rounds and things like that.

Ella and Mary also shared that it could have been better, as Tamera shared it got more intense constantly worrying about work. Katrina shared that before COVID, her work-life balance was

not great for her, but during the time of COVID, it got worse. As for Ashley, she did not want to take anything home. She shared, “I was kind of forced to focus on getting my work done during work hours, so whenever I do come home, I could focus on my family life.” Participants also shared how they had to be creative in balancing their time. This was true for Ulysses:

We had to be very creative in how we took care of ourselves because I remember there being days when supervising a desk, I had to make sure I was at work at a certain point of time to make sure students were in place. Then, I also had to be in the call center, and then I had to do my regular job. And if the call center was at night, I had to do that, and if someone didn't show up for work in the middle of the night, I had to go. There were a lot of expectations, and it was one of those things where it seemed like because of COVID, our plates were cleared. But it also felt like I was doing 2-3 jobs at the same time.

COVID-19 brought about new responsibilities for the residence hall directors, leaving them feeling overwhelmed and unable to maintain a healthy work-life balance. This was particularly challenging for them as they already struggled to balance well before the pandemic. They expressed that their situation only made juggling personal and professional responsibilities more difficult.

Adapting to New Situation

The participants faced difficulty adapting to their new situation as their responsibilities and expectations changed alongside the need to balance their personal and professional lives. They expressed negative sentiments while describing their transition, stating that adjusting to a new norm was challenging. Ashley used the term "hectic", Ella called it "complicated", Katrina described it as "terrible", while Ulysses and Tamera referred to it as "difficult". When interviewed Daisy expressed her transition was overwhelming because it was a sudden change to

changing job roles and duties. James had a similar feeling stating his transition was tough as he only had one traditional semester before COVID became a global pandemic and then everything shifted. In Charlotte and Amir's experience, they described their transition as challenging. Charlotte expressed the transition was challenging as there was little to no direction as Amir shared how everything was new:

I would say challenging. I say that because of the nuance of everything. It was a lot that we had to deal with that I mentioned as far as the lack of staff members. So, we had to do more trying to figure out new practices because we had never been in a pandemic like this before, at least not in our lifetimes. And so, it was definitely challenging and exhausting if I had to use two words.

The residence hall directors faced considerable personal and professional challenges when adapting to their new situation. They had to change their job tasks and switch to virtual work, which caused them frustration and exhaustion. They had to adapt to a new norm with little information and uncertainty about what to do.

Conclusion

In this section, the participants acknowledged the occurrence of a situational change, which led to them having to manage additional tasks, balance their work and personal lives, and adapt to the new circumstances. Their situational change involved conducting tasks such as moving furniture, working with quarantine housing, and conducting virtual programs, which were all new to them. As a result of these additional responsibilities, they became aware of the impact on their work-life balance. As the added tasks had a negative effect on their work-life balance, they developed a negative outlook on how they adapted to their situation.

Self: Not ResLife for Life

Within Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, self is described as "the person's inner strength for coping with the situation" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160). Personal factors that can influence how one copes include personal and demographic characteristics, age, gender, outlook, commitment and values, state of health, and more (Goodman et al., 2006). In this section, participants shared expressions of how changes impacted them personally and shaped their outlook. When interviewing participants, I discovered from their experience that it impacted them negatively, causing them to leave their roles as hall directors. As they left their roles, the residence hall directors talked about the aspect of self in terms of (a) gaining new perspectives, (b) experiencing dissatisfaction, and (c) discovering takeaways from the situation.

New Perspectives

After reflecting on their experiences, the participants expressed that their experience had a personal impact on them and changed their perspective in various ways. As a result of this experience, they made the decision that working in residence life may not be the best fit for them anymore. Katrina expressed that her experience made her realize that she did not want to work in residence life forever. Similarly, Ella had initially thought that working in residence life was her ultimate career goal but later on realized otherwise:

I think I've gotten to a place where I know I would never go back to a res life role, and that was just never going to be me. Like, when I first started out of grad school, I was like this is it. I want to move up within the residence life system, as this is something I'm really passionate about. I think that if COVID took anything, it was just that passion for res life and what you can accomplish as a res life professional.

The experiences of the participants had also changed how participants looked at the role. Mary shared how being at work started to feel like a prison:

Work became like a prison. I couldn't leave my home. I couldn't leave my job, and you know, I lived in a residence hall, so it's not like I even had a community really around me of people my age.

Ulysses said that he was going through a similar experience where he felt unhappy and overwhelmed with everything that was going on. He mentioned that this affected his work, as he did not feel motivated to attend certain events or be around certain individuals. He also pointed out how residence hall directors did not get equitable recognition, making their work a little harder.

Dissatisfaction

Several participants decided to leave their roles due to negative experiences. In interviews with Ashley, Ella, and James, they revealed they left their positions as resident hall directors and are currently employed in non-residence life roles. Daisy also shared that she resigned from the residence hall director position at her institution but tried to find another residence life job at another institution, but unfortunately, she could not find any, so she is now employed outside of residence life. Similarly, Katrina left her position as a residence hall director at the institution where she worked and after served as one for a brief time at another institution before switching to a non-residence life role.

Reasons for participants leaving the role range from burnout, lack of support, not getting paid what they feel like the work they were putting in deserved, and more. When interviewed, Amir shared the sense of burnout beginning to be the signal to depart:

I started to feel some burnout. I was going into my fifth year, and we were still down a lot of hall directors. It's at this point we've been overworking doing two position jobs for over a year and a half, right before the pandemic, during the pandemic, and coming closer

to the ending of the pandemic, so it was a lot. I felt like I got to the point where I wasn't meeting as much expectations as I could have, as I was doing beforehand, and I had shown and proven because I think it was just a big burnout and I was just tired. I felt at times not as supported as I could have been, so it was difficult for me to want to continue in the position that I didn't feel as supported. I just felt overworked and not compensated for the overwork in any kind of way or not appreciated.

Charlotte shared a similar experience to Amir stating, “Ultimately, this COVID experience actually was a push start for me to transition out of the field when we talk about lack of support, lack of resources. The financial piece was very big for me.” Mary also shared her views about the financial piece sharing a reason while she decided to leave residence life was because she felt she was not getting a desirable pay of a master’s level professional. Mary further shared that the job started feeling like a “ball and chain,” and she did not want that feeling anymore as she did not want to feel like her job was the reason she could not go on a vacation or could not see her parents if an emergency happened.

Takeaway

As participants shared that they left their role as residence hall directors, they also shared what they took away from the situation and how they have changed how they approach their work. Mary, Daisy, and Amir all expressed similar thoughts about taking better care of themselves. Mary shared how she was more protective of her energy due to the amount of work she put in, Daisy shared that she wanted to be more vocal about her capabilities, while Amir mentioned being more intentional in taking breaks, showing how they all recognized the importance of self-care. When interviewed, Mary shared how she was putting in 115% of work but feeling like she was getting nothing back.

Participants, including James and Charlotte, realized the significance of being more intentional as they approached their work. For Charlotte, it is important to understand that we may not always know what is happening behind the scenes.

Leading with intentionality and being able to lead from a place of care is a way that I've been approaching my work and my work practices. It's like assuming best intent but also trying to understand, empathizing with an individual. I still work in a realm where I'm in constant contact with people and students, and it's like how to just intentionally lead by example and then just also coming from a place of care. I think taking the time to understand that there are things behind the scenes that I may not be privy to, but how do I approach it with that lens? I think COVID really opened my eyes up to know that not everybody can deal with this high amount of isolation or change very rapidly, very quickly.

As for James, he thought he was someone that was already intentional, but COVID made him reflect on it even more:

I thought I was intentional and authentic, and very resourceful before COVID. And it's one thing to say, oh, I'm adaptable when you got to be, when you don't want to be. So, just now, being able to really adapt in any situation. I tell students now and then even with myself, you know, it's not what, who you know, it's how can you adapt.

Going through this experience also helped participants recognize their strengths. As for Ashley, she was able to discover her top two strengths, connectedness, and empathy. Ashley was able to notice these strengths through her interactions with her student staff:

I learned that connectedness and empathy are my top two strengths, and it really showed during the pandemic because I realized that we're all in some way going through a similar

situation or we all have something in common in that sense we're all living through this unpredictable situation. Empathy, it really made me just feel more. It's like, yeah, you didn't turn in a biweekly report or turn in this resident conversation, but let's talk more about you being anxious or you being stressed out about your family or class.

Ulysses was also able to reflect on his strengths. Ulysses his experienced allowed him to recognize himself as an empathizer:

It definitely helped me recognize myself as an empathizer or just someone that is able to look beyond because it's really easy to kind of fall into; I'm looking out for me, myself, and I. But with COVID, it was so much more of a team effort because if you weren't doing your part, you were creating the space, you know, toxic and volatile and things like that. And so, I think COVID really gave us an opportunity to do some reflecting on how do we help others, how do we be decent humans, how do we protect people that necessarily cannot be fully protected.

As for Ella, she expressed that after going through this experience, nothing scares her anymore:

Nothing really scares me anymore if that makes sense. I feel like my stress level is lower because I think that nothing is going to stress me out as much as that situation necessarily did at this time in my life. So, I think I'm better suited at approaching situations.

Despite the challenges brought on by COVID-19, the participants were able to take away positive things from the experience. After their experience, they could recognize their strengths and ways to prioritize self-care. This experience showed them that although challenging situations occur, they could become stronger and more resilient than before.

Conclusion

The transitional experience the participants went through allowed them to engage in self-reflection. The participants shared how this change had a negative effect on them, leading them to resign as residence hall directors. However, as they resigned from the role, they were still able to reflect on the skills they acquired during this experience and how they could utilize them in the future. Additionally, the experience taught them the importance of self-care, enabling them to focus on their well-being and strive towards self-improvement.

Support: Thrown to the Wolves & Finding Personal Support

While going through a transitional period, receiving support can be crucial to one's well-being and adjustment to their situation (Schlossberg, 2011). The participants in this study were able to share the different ways they were able to receive support or if they lacked it. When not receiving support, participants shared how they would have liked to receive it while going through their transition. After speaking with each participant, I discovered that most participants did not receive support from their supervisor or housing department. Although most did not receive support from their employer, many shared that they received support from other groups, coworkers, family, and friends. The residence hall directors talked about the aspect of support in terms of (a) employers, (b) coworkers, and (c) friends and family.

Employer

When asked about receiving support from their employer during their experience, I gather that participants received little to no support. Participants shared that this was hard as a lot of work was put on them, and they did not see their leadership having the same amount of work or acknowledging the work they put in. Participants expressed how they would have liked their leadership to be on the front line with them. When interviewed, Ulysses expressed his feelings on how he would have wanted to be supported by leadership in his department:

I felt like there were certain points where we were kind of just like thrown to the wolves while people sat in their offices. I would like to have seen more involvement from everyone. During that process, I felt like since we were live-in staff and RDs, it was like an expectation for us, but not for others.

Ella shared views comparable to Ulysses, but she took it further, expressing that if the leadership had been more involved and helped, her level of respect and relationship with them would have been better:

Having more help and more of the leadership team being willing to get their hands dirty a little bit and get on the ground with us and do some of this work would have gone a really long way. I think I would have had more kind of respect and had a better relationship with a lot of people had they been willing to go outside of their job descriptions and jump in and help.

In addition, it was mentioned that despite receiving some support from their leadership, it still felt like a challenge for them. Mary expressed how even when they did receive support, it was followed by a feeling of having something taken away:

My leadership was really in tune with the fact that it sucked, and they tried their best. But you know, there was only so many limitations or things that they could do.

Unfortunately, though, because of that, we also got things taken away. So that's kind of like why it's hard with support because it's like will it be got this, but we lost this.

As participants felt they were taking on a lot of work, they expressed that no one suggested taking time for themselves or taking a vacation. When interviewed, Ella shared, "I think time off would have been really nice. I think not only having time off but encouraging people to completely disconnect from the job at certain times would have been great as well".

Daisy expressed similar thoughts: "No one was saying, you have been working so much like you have these vacation days, just take a couple of days off and just rest, you know. I didn't receive that kind of level of support that I was maybe looking for". Having time to separate and relax would have allowed them to promote self-care and rejuvenate themselves.

Participants also expressed how more communication and transparency would have been helpful to them. From Ella's experience, she expressed, "Communication from leadership was something that was a really big challenge. The leadership team was not on campus at all, so it just kind of built this barrier between the live-in staff and the live-off staff that I had not experienced previously." Charlotte also expressed communication being a barrier:

There were many times where things would come through via email or via phone, and things just weren't clear. I think there was a lack of honesty. There was a lack of trust that developed just due to the lack of information, and the timeliness of the information that came.

Participants also wanted to be included in the decisions being made or have context as to why decisions were made. Daisy experienced this:

I think it would have also been helpful for us in our roles to receive a bit more transparency with some of the top-down decisions that were being made. You know, like for instance, when they laid off the RAs. Not having advanced warning about that, that was difficult for us to navigate conversations with the staff when they were like, why is this happening and that kind of thing? I would have liked a little bit more tangible support in that way."

Ella felt being able to be a part of decisions would have been extremely helpful for her as she felt residence hall directors were the primary people responding to matters in person:

Having people who are on the ground, like responding in person, at the table when decisions were being made would have gone a long way. And that's not to say, you know, we should have been making every decision. I think you know; I recognize things are out of your control sometimes when you're at that level. But I think that at least having us at the table and giving our perspective of what we were seeing from students would have gone a long way. And I think listening to the concerns that we had.

Participants also shared how they would have liked more support from their direct supervisors. Charlotte shared how she was faced with a lot and received little to no support from her supervisor; also sharing sometimes she felt like she was supervising herself. When interviewed, Amir disclosed as he had a personal matter that took place, he wished he had received more support from his supervisor as he was going through a situation that was known to them:

I ended up getting another supervisor, and that supervisor basically told me I had to be over a summer section, a summer program, which is a large commitment compared to most hall directors. I know we were short-staffed, so that may have been one of the biggest reasons, but we did have another person that could have done this particular job, which I don't know what they were going through. They may have been going through some as well and didn't have to do any kind of summer commitments, but it was well-known some of the things that I was going through at the time, and I felt like I didn't get the support I needed where I needed a breakaway. Like something smaller than having to be committed for the entire summer and then go straight into fall without any breaks.

As the participants talked about their experiences, they expressed their dissatisfaction with their employers for not being more communicative and supportive. Coping with the

situation was difficult for them, and they wished their employers had provided better support and guidance. They felt let down by their leadership.

Co-workers

The stories shared by participants highlighted the importance of receiving support from fellow residence hall directors. Not only were they physically present, but they were also going through a similar transition, which made their support especially helpful for the participants. Amir shared receiving support from friends who were residence hall directors was helpful as "they understood exactly what we were going through". When interviewed, Charlotte shared how she was able to rely on coworkers when needing to process stating, "If I couldn't go to a Soror's house or a family member's house of mine, I knew that I could go to another residence hall director's apartment, and we could process about the day or process on call."

Receiving support from coworkers was a way of coping for residence hall directors. Ashley expressed how residence hall directors in department were able to show up for each other:

Relying on my peer hall directors, I think we all kind of helped each other cope, and that showed up by us supporting one another and checking in. Even though I had family, some other people didn't have family. They couldn't visit them. So, it was nice to be there for other hall directors. We took walks outside. We were comfortable with each other because we knew it was like our circle of who was around.

Having the support of coworkers was beneficial for participants, as it allowed them to have a listening ear to discuss their feelings and thoughts while navigating their experiences during their new norm.

Family & Friends

As participants shared their stories, family and friends were discussed as an essential support for participants in navigating their transition. Family and friends were like counselors for some people, like Amir:

I didn't personally get any counselors or anything like that. I talked to close friends when I needed to. They were like my, I guess you would say, counselors, that doesn't have an actual degree to really help me through those situations. They supported me a lot.

Ulysses also reflected on support from family and friends, alongside coworkers, sharing how lucky he was to have them around to help him be able to navigate work-life balance and take care of himself:

Luckily, I was surrounded by friends, coworkers, and family members that could easily empathize with what was happening, so they showed support as best as possible. And I had some friends and family that showed some radical support to be like; we're doing this on such and such day; make yourself available. I'm like, alright.

Some friends and family could show support in person, while others had to send support virtually like Ashley, Ella, and Tamera. Ashley stated, "I wasn't able to visit, but having video conference calls with all my family members really helped me". Tamera reflected on spending a lot of time alone in her apartment, so she leaned into having more virtual interactions. So, she used the time to connect with friends, stating it was "nice." To connect with people who were not face to face, Ella discussed how she explored ways to be in touch with her family and friends:

I tried to find ways to connect with people that were not face to face, and so we would do things like Zoom happy hours, which you know seems silly now, but that was like the way that we connected, and kind of talked about something other than work with each other. Being able to connect with people virtually was really helpful for me.

As for in-person support, participants reflected on how their partners were supportive during their experience, as they could confide in them and not feel alone. Ashley and Amir received support from their spouses, emotionally and physically. Their partners acted as confidants and provided a safe space for them to share their emotions. Amir shared, "My wife was helpful as well to kind of just talk through things. I appreciated that". Ashley also highlighted their appreciation of having their spouse's support:

My husband was really helpful because I wasn't alone. I know some people were alone.

But having somebody at home to vent to and just be there. Also, take care of me. I did catch COVID, so to take care of me and help me, that was definitely a strong support.

Participants found that the support they received from family and friends was vital to navigating their experience, whether virtually or in person.

Conclusion

Participants were able to reflect on the support they received after experiencing their transition. The findings revealed that the employer, which includes the participants' supervisors and department leadership, was not the primary source of support for these individuals. Instead, they relied on friends, family, and colleagues to help them navigate through their circumstances. Having support from individuals was great for participants as they felt like they could be vulnerable and share their feelings about what they were going through.

Strategies: Started Taking Time for Myself

Pearlin and Schooler (1978) define coping as "the things that people do to avoid being harmed by life strains" (p. 2). When it comes to transitions, Schlossberg (2011) discusses coping responses, also referred to as strategies, individuals utilize to manage their transitions, further noting individuals who implement multiple coping strategies are more likely to cope with their

situation. During the study, the participants shared instances when they struggled to cope with adjustments to their job responsibilities and expectations. However, they were able to adapt and handle the changes by implementing effective strategies. Upon analyzing their experiences, the residence hall directors talked about the aspect of strategies they utilized in terms of (a) therapy, (b), health and fitness activities, and (c) hobbies and activities.

Therapy

During the transition period, some participants found it challenging to cope with the changes and felt the need to seek professional help to address their thoughts and emotions. Seeking therapy proved to be beneficial for their mental well-being and helped them better manage their mental health. Ella mentioned that she started therapy during the pandemic, which helped her in advocating for her mental health. Ulysses shared as he was in therapy prior to the pandemic, it became even more beneficial after:

Luckily, I had been in therapy prior to COVID. But you know when COVID started happening, it was like how do I interact with a license professional or therapist or anything like that. And so, I think talking through a lot of that fear and kind of just sense of overwhelming moment. I felt like that was super beneficial in that process.

In addition, seeking counseling provided participants with an opportunity to not only discuss personal issues but also talk about work-related concerns. Ashley shared that while she sought counseling for personal reasons, it also helped her to talk about work-related matters. Mary had a similar experience, and shared she utilized her institution's employee assistance program to express her thoughts and emotions:

There were lots of days where, like, I would cry at lunch, and I was just failing at coping.

I do remember explicitly; I did get involved with my EAP with therapy during that time because that was really challenging.

Therapy showed a positive way for the participants to cope with their transition. This allowed them to be vulnerable and disclose how they were feeling about everything going on around them.

Health & Fitness

Participants engaged in health and fitness activities as strategies to cope with the transition's impact. This was beneficial for them as it helped improve their mental well-being. For instance, Ella shared how learning about nutrition and healthy eating while also engaging in fitness activities was good for her mental health:

I also did get kind of very serious about health and fitness during that time. So, I got really into learning about nutrition and healthy eating. I started running. And I started having more of a fitness routine, so that was really big for my mental health as well. I think I needed a way to get outside that was, you know, sustainable and a routine because I think that staying inside 24/7 just wasn't good for me. And so, I would go on walks or runs throughout the day.

Continuing with fitness activities, James shared that he frequently hit the gym, while Amir took advantage of the workout facility near his residence hall:

I started exercising more. We had a mini workout facility next to my residence hall, so I started going there more because exercising out used to be really helpful for me when it comes to relieving stress. I had stopped doing it for a while because I just felt too busy to do it. So, I started taking time for myself to do that.

Before COVID, Charlotte used to work with a personal trainer as a part of her routine. However, as COVID-19 prompted activities to shift virtually, Charlotte adjusted her routine to maintain her physical activity level and cope with the situation.

I was working with a personal trainer before COVID. She switched to strictly virtual sessions. That was very challenging for me, so I quit my sessions with my personal trainer, but I began to do a lot of fitness activities with walking and running, and outside activities on my own.

Participating in health and fitness activities was a helpful coping mechanism for the participants as it aided their mental well-being and provided a break from thinking about their current situation.

Hobbies & Activities

During this time, participants engaged in many activities in coping whether it was engaging in a hobby, creating things, or visiting places. When interviewed, Ashley shared how personal hobbies such as creating personalized gift items helped her cope and be able to focus on other things. This was also true for Tamera as she shared, she created a mask business, feeling she was contributing something significant to the community. Additionally, Amir shared how he felt successful in coping when creating a presentation for his department around programming:

I created a presentation for my fellow hall directors and RAs to create ways to do programming in a hybrid model, in-person, or just virtually completely. So, we played around with that for, you know, a semester, and we perfected it to a way that we understood. Like ways of doing hybrid models a little bit better and then effective ways of doing it in person, like having programs in-person and suggestions of ways that we can

start meeting with students remotely. So, I think we started finding this balance of how we can work from home a little bit more and still be effective in the things that we do.

Katrina had a similar feeling of success when she was able to put on a program for her students:

I reached out to the dining hall cause students like food, right? And I didn't have a budget. Hardly. And they had a food truck, which was neat. So, I said, can we get somebody to bring the food truck out for one Friday night for our late-night event and park it near the residence halls and offer food to them, and they could use their meal plan. So, we did that one Friday night. It was outside so they could spread out. They got free food, and we could chat with them. And we brought out some music.

Some participants utilized their time to engage in activities they loved and focus on themselves. For instance, Charlotte enhanced her existing hobbies of cooking and writing and shared how she was working on a cookbook and personal writing projects. James, who loved movies, was upset by the closure of theaters but utilized the opportunity to binge-watch shows at home. Ulysses emphasized the importance of self-care by taking time away and ensuring going to bed at an appropriate time, while Daisy shared her story of setting boundaries to prioritize self-care.

The participants expressed that their transition was challenging, and they faced some difficulties in coping at times. However, they squeezed in some time to engage in some strategies such as therapy, health and fitness activities, and hobbies to manage how they were feeling in their situation. According to them, these strategies proved effective in helping them cope with their situation.

Conclusion

These narratives taught me that the participants experienced a change of situation prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This change caused a transition for them as they not only had to do their assigned task, but they also had to gather more tasks they were not used to. This affected them negatively, causing dissatisfaction, as it was hard for them to have a work-life balance. From this situation, participants left their role as residence hall directors and went into other roles in student affairs or left the field. Although they left, they could express what they took away from the situation and how they could cope. In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings and show how they relate to research conducted. I will also suggest implications for practice and provide future recommendations for continuing the research of residence life staff.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative narrative research study was to understand how residence hall directors navigated their unanticipated transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study explored the perspectives of residence hall directors within the Southeastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) region as they managed change while balancing their personal and professional lives during the pandemic. For this study, ten people who served as residence hall directors between 2019-2021, at public and private institutions, were interviewed to explain their lived experiences navigating their unanticipated transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The insights gathered from this research can be valuable for housing and residence life departments as they can leverage this knowledge to create and execute programs and initiatives that can impact residence hall directors' job satisfaction and well-being.

This chapter outlines the study's findings and discusses the ways the findings answer the research questions. This study explored the following research questions:

1. How do residence hall directors describe how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped their personal and professional experiences?
2. How did residence hall directors cope with the changes to their personal and professional lives due to the pandemic?

The discussion further explores how the findings connect with Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory and the literature referenced in the literature review. From the findings, I offer recommendations for practices for housing and residence life departments to consider and future

research to continue the conversation, looking into the lived experience of residence hall directors and their experience working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discussion of Findings

The research questions that guided this research focused on the transition of residence hall directors and how they coped with their transition. As I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants, I found themes across their lived experiences. When organizing the data from the participant's experiences, I discovered that their experience aligned with Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory. Within the transition theory, 4 Ss are discussed: *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategy*. Each participant discussed how COVID-19 was announced as a global pandemic and their experience transitioning as their job roles changed and they had additional work to complete to maintain the safety of the campus and their communities, then how their transition made an impact on them, how support showed up for them during this transition, and what strategies they used to cope. Within these Ss, themes emerged. The following section discusses the connection between the themes, Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, and literature.

Theme 1 – Situation: We Were in the Trenches

As participants shared their stories, I discovered that they experienced similar situations. Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory highlights circumstances surrounding the transition of a situation, such as the timing, triggers, role changes, duration, and past experiences. It was found that in this study, participants experienced changes in their roles. Traditionally, residence hall directors are tasked with overseeing a residence hall, supervising staff, programming, and responding to crisis calls. Participants continued to do these tasks, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, their role expanded for them to respond to the pandemic and assist their students.

Across participants, I discovered added tasks included assisting with move-out packing and shipping furniture, helping with quarantine and isolation housing, and conducting virtual programs.

According to Schlossberg (1984), “Any role change, whether primarily positive or negative in effect, involves some degree of stress” (p.74). This was true for the participants. With the added tasks out on them, this increased stress levels for them and negatively impacted their transition. Findings show that each participant described their transition as a negative one. The coming of their situation of experiencing a transition and gaining more tasks also impacted their work-life balance. Research shows that before the pandemic, residence hall directors found it difficult to maintain a work-life balance (Rankin & Gulley, 2018). Adding tasks and changes for the participants resulted in participants having an even poorer work-life balance as it was hard for them to have clear boundaries. When boundaries are unclear, challenges arise (Bhumika, 2020).

Theme 2 – Self: Not ResLife for Life

While conducting interviews, participants were able to disclose how they felt this experience impacted them mentally and physically and how it allowed them to gather a new perspective. In Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, she discloses how one's personal characteristics or psychological resources can shape how one responds to one's transition. I found that the transition the participants experienced had a negative impact on them, causing dissatisfaction and causing them to leave the role. As they left the role, they reflected on the takeaways they gathered, including what they had learned about themselves, and how they would like to approach their work in the future.

Research shows that residence hall directors' day-to-day operations impact their wellness, as it requires them to work long hours and have trouble managing their work-life balance (Thomas, 2018). This was true for the participants as they discussed that their jobs required a lot from them before the pandemic and brought some challenges. After the pandemic, their wellness appeared to decrease more as they felt it was hard to get a break from the amount of work being given to them, which goes along with research that shows that an overload amount of work increases stress levels and job dissatisfaction (Vaughn, 2013; Nyunt, 2021).

After experiencing this transition, I found that all the participants left their roles as residence hall directors. Two participants left in 2021, seven left in 2022, and one left in 2023. Reasons ranged from burnout and the lack of work-life balance, a problem when retaining housing staff (Scheurermann & Ellett, 2007). After participants left their roles, they were now focusing on how to take care of themselves and their work-life balance, by saying no more and taking breaks, putting themselves first.

Theme 3 – Support: Thrown to the Wolves & Finding Personal Support

According to Schlossberg (1984), “the importance of social support is often said to be the key to handling stress” (p. 99). This was true for the participants. As they disclosed that their experience was stressful, they each expressed how having support from others helped them navigate their transition and gave them some ease. In Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory, social support includes intimate relationships, family units, friends, and institutions or communities they are a part of. For the participants, coworkers, family, and friends were their primary support.

As participants were able to receive support from coworkers, family, and friends, many did not receive the same support from their employer, which impacted them. According to

research, supervision and support contribute to helping maintain staff, and a lack of a supervisory relationship and support leads to turnover (Tull, 2006). Participants shared how they wished they had received more support from their direct supervisor and other leaders in their department. The participants wished they received more support from their supervisor and leadership by them showing up and being alongside them as they had to be on the front line with the students, as leadership did not. Participants also wish they had upfront communication and support in suggesting they took a break and took care of themselves. There was a wish for reassurance from supervisors and leadership that everything was going to be okay and that they had their back.

Theme 4 – Strategy: Started Taking Time for Myself

In Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, coping resources are categorized as functions and strategies. To develop her coping strategy for the theory, Schlossberg combined two models of coping from Pearlin and Schooler (1978) and Lazarus and Launier (1978). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) found that to navigate transitions, individuals try to control the situation, the meaning of the situation, and the stress, whereas Lazarus and Launier (1978) expressed that to cope, individuals change the situation or relax themselves. As participants shared experiences where coping was difficult, they found strategies to help them manage their stress and care for themselves.

From the interviews, I learned that participants coped with their transition by attending therapy, engaging in health and fitness activities, and pursuing hobbies. Participants expressed that utilizing these strategies was good for them as they helped them take their minds off work and care for themselves mentally and physically. These findings align with what McFadden et al. (2021) found, as they discovered strategies such as help-seeking, recreation and relaxation, and exercise help improve a person's well-being. Engaging in these strategies helped participants

have some separation from work and express how they felt as they were experiencing their transition.

Conclusion

The research questions that guided this study were, how do residence hall directors describe how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped their personal and professional experiences, and how did residence hall directors cope with the changes to their personal and professional lives due to the pandemic? After gathering the participants' narratives, I saw my themes shaping into my questions. When it came to how residence hall directors describe how COVID-19 shaped their experiences, they disclosed that they had a negative experience as they already had a role that required a lot from them, and then gaining more work negatively impacted them, causing them not to have a great sense of work-life balance. Not being able to have a sense of work-life balance prompted them to leave as they wanted to focus on having a better understanding of self-care. As they left, it allowed them to reflect on their situation, discuss skills they acquired or expanded, and reflect on how they approach their work differently.

Regarding how residence hall directors coped with the changes, they sometimes felt unsuccessful coping, yet they used various strategies to manage the situation, including therapy, health and fitness, and hobbies. Gathering this information helped me learn that residence hall directors were a group of employees negatively impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, with adjustments to the role and a lack of work-life balance. Due to this, they relied on strategies to maintain their mental and physical health before deciding to leave the role.

Implications for Practice

Based on the analysis of this study's findings, there are a few implications that I would suggest to housing and residence life departments when working with residence hall directors,

particularly those who are departmental directors. These implications may be especially relevant in the event of another pandemic. To ensure that the housing department is aware of the cost implications associated with different categories, I categorized them into those that involve little to no cost and those that may involve higher costs. This will help identify which implications will not cost the department anything and which may require a significant investment.

Lower Cost

The findings show participants described their transition negatively and expressed that they felt they did not have a great sense of work-life balance, so I suggest creating wellness programs for residence hall directors, which can be little to no cost, as wellness strategies and programs promote well-being (Buchmueller & Valletta, 2017). Most universities have a benefits package that includes employee resources, such as therapy. However, something should also be provided within the department or a level of promotion to utilize the campus resources. If employees see their supervisor practicing self-care, they are most likely to follow suit and do the same.

I suggest having a virtual gathering to have lunch with others or to provide a space to gather and talk about what is going on or how they feel. This allows for a check-in and showing support. Following the virtual aspect, having a bi-weekly self-care day for the staff could be helpful. It could be set up where the department blocks off a day where activities can occur, whether a virtual workout session, a cooking one, or a game night. It shows you allow your staff time to take a break from everything and relax.

As the lack of support from direct supervisors and leadership team members was discussed, I suggest having check-ins with staff outside of the one-on-one meeting. A lot may be discussed within that meeting, but after that meeting, their next one may not be until another

week or two, and a lot can happen between then. I stress being more intentional and reaching out to say hey, I want to check-in. Do you need anything? Alternatively, even say I see what you are doing, and acknowledge their work and effort. Small gestures can go a long way. Participants shared how there was a lack of support from supervisors and leadership, and as there was a lack of support, they asked for more communication and presence. Their outlook on their experience may have been different if they received more support from their employer.

Higher Cost

When it comes to implications that may cost you a little more, something of I would suggest implementing are flextime hours or compressed work weeks. This is where a staff member can either come in late one day because they work over an 8-hour shift for a day that week or they have four 10-hour days instead of five 8-hour days. Participants shared how they had to work long days, sometimes 14 hours in one day, and felt overwhelmed. Allowing flextime or compressed will enable employees to balance their work and personal lives and increase job satisfaction (Marshall et al., 2016).

Following flextime and compressed work weeks, I suggest hiring new staff to take on the additional roles the residence hall directors were told to take on. In the case if there was another pandemic, I suggest hiring a team to help with quarantine and isolation housing and have residence hall directors focus on the virtual engagement and support of the students. By hiring a team, this allows residence hall directors to not feel burnt out and allows them to concentrate on the task of maintaining their residential community.

Last, I suggest hazard pay for residence hall directors, in the event if there was another pandemic. Some participants shared how they asked for or mentioned hazardous pay, and the conversation was shut down. Participants shared this was important as they were among the

many essential front-line employees, putting themselves at risk interacting with many students within their residential community and students who tested positive living within quarantine and isolation housing. Providing hazard pay not only pays them for the extra work they are doing but shows support and provides an incentive for them as they are putting their health and safety in jeopardy.

Recommendations for Future Research

After gathering this study's findings, I have a few recommendations for future research. The first one is furthering the research of this study and conducting it in a quantitative way instead of a qualitative format. There was a lot of interest from people wanting to participate in the study, but I cut off the screening survey as I met the number of participants desired for the study early. It would be great to further this study and gather the experience of a large number of residence hall directors who worked during COVID-19 to ask them how they felt their transition went and whether they felt like they coped by using a Likert scale of feeling successful or unsuccessful and also, following up on if they felt supported or not. The study can also be continued by running correlation tests to test different hypotheses such as, seeing if a lack of support from an employer has correlation to employees leaving their role or not.

I also recommend further research on how many residence hall directors left their role or the field of Student Affairs due to their experience working during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, we were able to find out that participants left their roles due to the feeling of being overworked and the lack of work-life balance within the SEAHO region, so I would suggest looking to see what was the experience of other residence hall directors in other regions and if they left their roles.

As a lack of support from employers came up in conversation, I recommend further

research on middle-level and senior-level housing professionals and their experience during COVID-19. As this study provided some insight into the lived experience of residence hall directors, it would be great to gather how middle-level and senior-level housing professionals respond to changes. This can be done by further exploring how COVID-19 impacted them, what support they received, and how they coped. Since middle-level and senior-level housing professionals are more involved in decision-making conversations, understanding how they responded to the changes brought about by COVID-19, especially as they may have been involved in the decision-making process, would give us valuable insights into how they managed the situation and supported their team. Additionally, this would enable us to identify any pressures they may have faced and how they coped with them.

Last, I gathered data from participants who worked at public and private institutions and were in different states within the SEAHO region. As my study gathered little information on the difference between institution types and states, I suggest seeing if residence hall directors in public institutions go through a different experience than those who served in the role at private institutions. I also recommend seeing if states do things differently. Some institutions are under a state system, whereas others may not be. Seeing how a school under a state system versus one that is not was affected could provide rich material to see if that influences the institution's experience, as information could be shared differently.

Limitations

As I was able to collect data, there were two limitations I came across. The first limitation I found was that amongst the participants, everyone left their role as a residence hall director. As everyone left their role, readers of the study must consider that the participants may have been eager to share their stories since they left, contributing to the results I received. When it comes to

the second limitation, the SEAHO region consists of ten states in the southeastern part of the United States, however, my study only represented five states. Therefore, my research did not capture the region's complete experience of residence hall directors during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also worth noting that half of the study participants served as residence hall directors in Georgia, which shows the results are heavily influenced by one state.

Reflexivity

Based on the narratives shared in this study, it was evident that the participants had a negative experience due to the additional tasks added to their responsibilities, which led to an even greater lack of work-life balance. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I served as a residence hall director and can relate to their experience during this period. Upon analyzing the gathered data, I realized that my experience was like theirs. I was also assigned new tasks like moving furniture, managing quarantine housing, and organizing virtual programming. As a residence hall director, I also struggled to balance my work and personal life. I had to find ways to cope with the situation, such as attending Zoom calls with my loved ones, binge-watching TV shows and movies, and indulging in painting. Thankfully, I had the support during this process, but I still quit the role to achieve a better work-life balance as I felt exhausted and overworked. Through this study and my personal experience, I have come to understand that the responsibility and workload of being a residence hall director can be quite demanding and require an evaluation of the role, as residence hall directors often have to work long days and have after-hour tasks, leaving limited room for work-life balance.

Conclusion

When looking at the research questions of how residence hall directors describe how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped their personal and professional experiences and how residence hall

directors cope with the changes to their personal and professional lives due to the pandemic, I gathered insights into both aspects. As participants shared their experiences of how the pandemic impacted them personally and professionally, it became evident that many faced a negative transition that led them to leave their role as residence hall directors. Balancing an increased workload with a sense of a troubled work-life balance posed a significant challenge for these individuals, prompting a reassessment of their approach to continue in the role. Regarding coping mechanisms, participants described turning to therapy as a space to express vulnerability and process their emotions, alongside engaging in fitness and hobbies. These proactive steps were self-initiated to regain a sense of control over their circumstances.

Reflecting on this data offered a deeper understanding of the experiences of residence hall directors. The study affirmed that residence hall directors were already responsible for being assigned a substantial amount of responsibilities before the pandemic, which only increased afterward, revealing the necessity for them to devise coping strategies. While they did find ways to manage, the heightened stress and perceived lack of support from their employers led many residence hall directors to exit their roles. While we hope to avoid future pandemics, this study paints a vivid picture of the challenges faced by residence hall directors, offering insights into how to support this group better.

This study not only displays the challenges faced by residence hall directors, both pre- and post-pandemic, but also highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive review of their roles and responsibilities to ensure they receive the necessary support and resources for success. Having worked in this role before, I can confirm the need for the study's recommendations, such as implementing virtual bonding opportunities and hiring additional staff to ease the workload.

We must recognize that residence hall directors have a lot on their plate, and we must prioritize their well-being, because if not, people will continue to exit the residence hall director role.

References

- Adler, R. H. (2022). Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 38(4), 598–602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08903344221116620>
- Al-Habaibeh, A., Watkins, M., Waried, K., & Javareshk, M. B. (2021). Challenges and opportunities of remotely working from home during Covid-19 pandemic. *Global Transitions*, 3, 99–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glt.2021.11.001>
- Allen, T. D., Cho, E., & Meier, L. L. (2014). “Work–family boundary dynamics.” *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1(1), 99-121.
- American Psychological Association. (2017). *Change at work linked to employee stress, distrust and intent to quit, New Survey finds*. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/05/employee-stress>
- Baumann, J. (2022). *Conversations: Staff shortages*. ACUHO-I Talking Stick. https://ts.acuho-i.org/march_2022/staff_shortages.html
- Belch, H. A., & Mueller, J. A. (2003). Candidate pools or puddles: Challenges and trends in the recruitment and hiring of resident directors. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(1), 29-46.
- Bhumika. (2020). Challenges for work–life balance during COVID-19 induced nationwide lockdown: Exploring gender difference in emotional exhaustion in the Indian setting. *Gender in Management*, 35 (7/8), 705-718. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-06-2020-0163>
- Bingham, A.J., & Witkowsky, P. (2022). Deductive and inductive approaches to qualitative data analysis. In C. Vanover, P. Mihas, & J. Saldaña (Eds.), *Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data: After the interview* (pp. 133-146). SAGE Publications.

Boettcher, M. (2020). *When Home Is Where Work Is*. Inside Higher Ed.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/08/11/residence-hall-staff-are-experiencing-more-work-and-stress-colleges-reopen-opinion>

Bridges, W. (2003). *Managing transitions: Making the most of change* (2nd ed). Perseus Books.

Brown, G. K., & Nicassio, P. M. (1987). Development of a questionnaire for the assessment of active and passive coping strategies in chronic pain patients. *Pain®*, 31(1), 53–64.

Buchmueller, T. C., & Valletta, R. G. (2017). Work, health, and insurance: A shifting landscape for employers and workers alike. *Health Affairs*, 36(2), 214–221.

<http://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.1200>

Burke, M. G., Dye, L., & Hughey, A. W. (2016). Teaching mindfulness for the self-care and well-being of student affairs professionals. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 34(3), 93-107.

Byrne, C., & Powers, C. (2020). *Covid-19 and Hurricane Katrina: Higher education parallels and lessons learned*. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/covid-19-hurricane-katrina-higher-education-parallels-byrne>

Camacho, S., & Barrios, A. (2022). Teleworking and technostress: Early consequences of a COVID-19 lockdown. *Cognition Technology Work*, 24(3), 441–457.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10111-022-00693-4>

Carnevale, A. P. (2021). *One year of the covid economy*. Medium.

<https://medium.com/georgetown-cew/one-year-of-the-covid-economy-6f2d35d4c027>

Carnevale, J. B., & Hatak, I. (2020). Employee adjustment and well-being in the era of COVID-19: Implications for human resource management. *Journal of business research*, 116,

183–187. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.037>

- Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., & Weintraub, J. K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(2), 267–283. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.56.2.267>
- Clandinin, D., & Caine, V. (2008). Narrative inquiry. In Lisa M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. (pp. 542-545). SAGE Publications, Inc. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n275>
- Clandinin, D., & Caine, V. (2012). Narrative inquiry. In A. A. Trainor, & E. Graue (Eds.), *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences: A guide for researchers and reviewers* (pp. 166-179). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. India: SAGE Publications.
- David, J. P., & Suls, J. (1999). Coping efforts in daily life: Role of Big Five traits and problem appraisals. *Journal of Personality*, 67(2), 265–294. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6494.00056>
- De Vincenzi, C., Pansini, M., Ferrara, B., Buonomo, I., & Benevene, P. (2022). Consequences of COVID-19 on employees in remote working: Challenges, risks and opportunities. An evidence-based literature review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(18), 11672. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191811672>
- Eriksson, E., & Petrosian, A. (2020). *Remote work - Transitioning to remote work in times of crisis* [Dissertation, Umeå University]. DiVA Portal. <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-172779>
- George, L. K., & Siegler, I. C. (1982). *Stress and coping in later life*. Educational Horizons, 60(4), 147–196. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42924502>

- Gill, D., Ladd, A., & Marszalek, J. (2007). College students' experiences with hurricane katrina: A comparison between students from mississippi state university and three New Orleans universities. *Journal of the Mississippi Academy of Sciences*, 52(4), 262-280.
- Gill, S. (2021). *The impact of transitions and how to cope with them*. Cruse Bereavement Care. <https://www.crusescotland.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/the-impact-of-transitions-and-how-to-cope-with-them/>
- Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N. K., & Anderson, M. L. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (3rd ed.). Springer Publishing Company.
- Guion, L., Diehl, D., & McDonald, D. (2011). *Conducting an in-depth interview*, University of Florida. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy393>
- Hawkins, B. (2020). 15 years after Hurricane Katrina, how 5 New Orleans educators are tapping lessons from the storm to confront COVID-19. <https://www.laschoolreport.com/on-hurricane-katrinass-15th-anniversary-5-new-orleans-educators-tap-lessons-from-the-storm-to-confront-covid-19/>
- Jaiswal, A., Gupta, S., & Prasanna, S. (2022). Theorizing employee stress, well-being, resilience and boundary management in the context of forced work from home during COVID-19. *South Asian Journal of Business and Management Cases*, 11(2), 86–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/22779779221100281>
- Jarrell C., Dennis R., Jackson M., & Kenney C. A. (2008). Academic and student affairs issues: Post Hurricane Katrina. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 32, 235-250.
- Johns Hopkins Medicine. (2022). *What is coronavirus?* Johns Hopkins Medicine. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus>

- Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2022). Situating the research: First steps. In S. R. Jones, V. Torres, & J. Arminio, *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues* (2nd ed., pp. 1-37). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2022). Understanding sampling and Challenges in collecting data. In S. R. Jones, V. Torres, & J. Arminio, *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues* (2nd ed., pp. 132-208). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Kaushik, M. (2020). The impact of pandemic COVID-19 in workplace. *European Journal of Business Management and Research*, 12. doi: 10.10.7176/EJBM/12-15-02.
- Lazarus, R. S., Averill, J. R., and Opton, E. M., Jr. (1974). The psychology of coping: Issues of research and assessment. In G. V. Coelho, D. A. Hamburg, & J. E. Adams (Eds) *Coping and Adaptation* (pp. 249-315), Basic Books.
- Lazarus, R.S., Launier, R. (1978). Stress-Related Transactions between Person and Environment. In: Pervin, L.A., Lewis, M. (eds) *Perspectives in Interactional Psychology*. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-3997-7_12
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer publishing company.
- Lee, H. (2021). Changes in workplace practices during the Covid-19 pandemic: The roles of emotion, psychological safety and organisation support. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 8(1), 97–128. <https://doi.org/10.1108/joepp-06-2020-0104>

- Lipka, S. (2005). *After Katrina, colleges nationwide take a fresh look at disaster plans*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/after-katrina-colleges-nationwide-take-a-fresh-look-at-disaster-plans>
- Malley, S., & Hawkins, A. (2012). *Engaging communities: Writing ethnographic research*. Lulu Enterprises, Inc. <http://www.engagingcommunities.org/introduction/>
- Marshall, S. M., Gardner, M. M., Hughes, C., & Lowery, U. (2016). Attrition from student affairs: Perspectives from those who exited the profession. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 53(2), 146-159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2016.1147359>
- Marsicano, C. R., Barnshaw, J., & Letukas, L. (2020). Crisis and change: How COVID-19 exacerbated institutional inequality and how institutions are responding. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2020(187-188), 7–30. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.20344>
- McDaniel, B. (2021). *The RD is (not) well: A multi-site case study exploring residence life live-in staff well-being* (Publication No. 2572537651) [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Georgia]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- McFadden, P., Ross, J., Moriarty, J., Mallett, J., Schroder, H., Ravalier, J., Manthorpe, J., Currie, D., Harron, J., & Gillen, P. (2021). The role of coping in the wellbeing and work-related quality of life of UK health and social care workers during COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(2), 815. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020815>
- Medelyan, A. (2021). *Coding qualitative data: How to code qualitative research*. Thematic. <https://getthematic.com/insights/coding-qualitative-data/>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

- Mertens, D. M. (2021). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Mullen, P. R., Malone, A., Denney, A., & Dietz, S. S. (2018). Job stress, burnout, job satisfaction, and turnover intention among student affairs professionals. *College Student Affairs Journal* 36(1), 94-108. doi:10.1353/csj.2018.0006.
- Musamali, K. (2018). An examination of transition models and processes: Introduction of an integrated approach. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 5(6) 245-260.
- Mutambisi, S., Murasi, D. D. & Mazodze, C. (2021). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on student affairs practitioners: A reflective case study from Bindura University of Science Education in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 9(1), 183-195.
<https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v9i1.1437>
- NBC News. (2005). *After Katrina, Tulane slashes budget, faculty*. NBCNews.com.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna10385926>
- Nicholson, N. (1990). The transition cycle: Causes, outcomes, processes and forms. *On the move: The Psychology of Change and Transition*, 83-108.
- Nippert-Eng, C. (1996). *Home and work: Negotiating boundaries through everyday Life*. The University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226581477.001.0001>
- Nyunt, G. (2021). Working in residence life during a pandemic: Impact of COVID-19 on residence life staff members' mental well-being and intention to continue working in residence life. *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 48(1), 11–29.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Frels, R., & Hwang, E. (2016). Mapping Saldaña's coding methods onto the literature review process. *Journal of Educational. Issues*, 2(1).
<https://doi.org/10.5296/jei.v2i1.8931>

Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary. (n.d.). Transition.

https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/transition_1

Pane, J., McCaffrey, D., Tharp-Taylor, S., Asmus, G., & Stokes, B. (2006). Student displacement in Louisiana after the hurricanes of 2005: Experiences of public schools and their students. RAND Education.

Paylo, M. J., Protivnak, J. J., Choi, K. M., & Walker, M. (2017). Preparing mental health first responders: College counselors supporting residence life professionals. *The Practitioner Scholar: Journal of Counseling & Professional Psychology*, 6, 63-78.

Pearlin, L. I., & Schooler, C. (1978). The structure of coping. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 19, 2-21.

Peiris, J. M. P. M. (2021). HR department's compelling new role in workplace transition in response to the Coronavirus. *Kelaniya Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(1), 58-76. doi: <http://doi.org/10.4038/kjhrm.v16i1.87>

Preissle, J. (2008). Subjectivity statement. In *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (vol. 1, pp. 845-846). SAGE Publications, Inc.,
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n439>

Ramage, R., Pigg, J., Roberts, R., & Stair, K. S. (2023). Coping with transitions during the COVID-19 global pandemic: A case study of early career teachers' experiences in secondary agricultural education. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 64(2), 42-55.
<https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.v64i2.108>

Rankin, P., & Gulley, N. (2018). Boundary integration and work/life balance when you live where you work: A study of residence life professionals. *Journal of College & University Student Housing*. 44(2), 64-81.

- Roth, S., & Cohen, L. J. (1986). Approach, avoidance, and coping with stress. *American Psychologist*, 41(7), 813–819. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.7.813>
- Scheuermann, T., & Ellet, T. (2007). A 3-D view of recruitment and retention of entry-level housing staff: Déjà vu, deliberation, decisive action. *Journal of College and University Housing Officers*, 34(2), 12–19.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 9(2), 2–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001100008100900202>
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1984). *Counseling adults in transition: linking practice with theory*. Springer Pub. Co.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (2011). The challenge of change: The transition model and its applications. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 48(4), 159–162. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2011.tb01102.x>
- Schneider, D., & Harknett, K. (2020). *Essential and unprotected: Covid-19-related health and safety procedures for service-sector workers*. The Shift Project.
<https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/essential-and-unprotected-covid-19-related-health-and-safety-procedures-for-service-sector-workers/>
- Schuh, J. H., & Shipton, W. C. (1985). The residence hall resource team: Collaboration in counseling activities. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 63(6), 380–381.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1985.tb02726.x>
- Southeastern Associations of Housing Officers. (2019). *Strategic plan 2020-2025*. SEAHO.
https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.seaho.org/resource/resmgr/strategic_plan/strategicplan2020.pdf

- Sirgy, M., & Lee, D. (2018). Work-life balance: An integrative review. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 13(1), 229-254.
- Smalley, A. (2021). *Higher education responses to coronavirus (COVID-19)*. National Conference of State Legislatures. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/education/higher-education-responses-to-coronavirus-covid-19.aspx>
- St. Onge, S., Ellett, T., & Nestor, E. (2008). Factors affecting recruitment and retention of entry-level housing and residential life staff: Perceptions of chief housing officers. *Journal of College & University Student Housing*, 35(2), 10-23.
- Thurairajah, K. (2015). Practicing reflexivity: Balancing multiple positionalities during fieldwork. In *SAGE Research Methods Cases* (pp. 1–13). SAGE Publications.
- Thurairajah, K. (2019). Practicing reflexivity: Balancing multiple positionalities during fieldwork. In *SAGE Research Methods Cases*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526483850>
- Thomas, I. J. (2018). *The 24/7 student affairs professional: A study of how residence directors make meaning of wellness* (Publication No. 10823561) [Doctoral Dissertation, Northeastern University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Toniolo-Barrios, M., & Pitt, L. (2021). Mindfulness and the challenges of working from home in times of crisis. *Business Horizons*, 64(2), 189–197.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.09.004>
- Tull, A. (2006). Synergistic supervision, job satisfaction, and intention to turn over of new professionals in student affairs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(4), 465–480.
[doi:10.1353/csd.2006.0053](https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0053)

Vaughn, E. (2013). *Assessing altruistic behavior, burnout and wellness outcomes of entry level live-in and live on residence life professionals* (Publication No. 1866) (Doctoral Dissertation, Louisiana State University). LSU Scholarly Repository.

Velasco, E. (2021). "Fostering sustainable wellness practices through programming for residential education staff at the university of san diego". *M.A. in higher education leadership: Action research projects*. 80. <https://digital.sandiego.edu/soles-mahel-action/80>.

WebMD Editorial Contributors. (2022). *Pandemics: Definition, prevention, and preparation*. WebMD. <https://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/what-are-epidemics-pandemics-outbreaks>

Whitman, H. (2022). *Recruitment for qualitative research*. The Blue Papers. https://econometricainc.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Recruitment-for-Qualitative-Research_March2020.pdf

Wilkes, B. (2017). *Coping behaviors of residence hall directors* (Publication No. 1973230363). [Doctoral Dissertation, Edgewood College]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/coping-behaviors-residence-hall-directors/docview/1973230363/se-2>

Williams, C. (2020). Residence halls and residence life after covid-19. HigherEdJobs <https://www.higheredjobs.com/Articles/articleDisplay.cfm?ID=2265>

World Health Organization. (2020). *Who director-general's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - March 11 2020*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

Appendix A

IRB Study Approval

Study Approved

IRB@uga.edu <IRB@uga.edu>

Mon 7/17/2023 8:57 AM

To: Desiree' Johnson <DESIREE.JOHNSON@uga.edu>; Dallin George Young <dallin@uga.edu>

Notification of Approval

To: Desiree Johnson

Link: [PROJECT00006977](#)

P.I.: Dallin Young

Title: HOW YOU DOIN': EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF RESIDENCE HALL DIRECTORS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This submission has been approved. You can access the correspondence letter using the following

ACTIONS TO

TAKE: link: [Correspondence for PROJECT00006977.pdf\(0.01\)](#)

To review additional details, click the link above to access the project workspace. For Non-Exempt research and if required, date-stamped consent documents can be found in the Documents section under "Final" in PDF form.

Please take our survey on your submission experience. Your feedback is very important.

https://ugeorgia.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3C0bBIC1UVQxiyF

Appendix B

Participant Recruitment Flyer



The flyer has a blue background with a white dotted pattern at the top. The title 'RESLIFE DURING COVID' is in large white letters. Below it, 'CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS' is in white letters, flanked by two megaphone icons. The text 'Eligible Participants:' is in orange, followed by 'Current or Former Full-Time, Live-in Residence Hall Director' in white. Below this, in orange, is 'Employed continuously as a residence hall director during the period from Fall 2019 to Spring 2021 (employment could have started before or extended after this timeframe)'. Then, in white, is 'At an institution within the SEAHO region'. A white box contains the URL 'https://bit.ly/RHDCovidTransition'. Below this, in white, is 'Questions? Contact Desiree Johnson at desiree.johnson@uga.edu'. On the left, in white, is 'This study has been approved by the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board'. On the right, in white, is 'This study is supervised by Dr. Dallin Young, dallin@uga.edu'.

RESLIFE DURING COVID

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Eligible Participants:
Current or Former Full-Time, Live-in Residence Hall Director

Employed continuously as a residence hall director during the period from Fall 2019 to Spring 2021 (employment could have started before or extended after this timeframe)

At an institution within the SEAHO region

To learn more information and participate in an eligibility survey, visit

<https://bit.ly/RHDCovidTransition>

Questions?
Contact Desiree Johnson at
desiree.johnson@uga.edu

This study has been approved by the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board

This study is supervised by Dr. Dallin Young,
dallin@uga.edu

Appendix C

Participant Recruitment Surveys

A.1 Participant Screening Survey

Thank you very much for your interest in being a part of my dissertation study. This narrative study aims to understand how residence hall directors within the Southeastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) region navigated their unanticipated transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Examining the experience of residence hall directors during the COVID-19 pandemic will provide a better understanding of how residence hall directors managed change while balancing their personal and professional lives during the pandemic. If qualified, interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams and will last 45-60 minutes. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at desiree.johnson@uga.edu.

1. First and Last Name

2. Email Address (please list your primary email address)

3. Phone Number (please list your primary contact number)

4. Preferred Method of Communication (email, phone, other)

5. Please indicate what year(s) you served as a residence hall director.

6. Please indicate the institution where you served as a residence hall director.

A.2 Participant Demographic Survey

Please fill out the demographic survey below.

1. Gender

☐ Man ☐ Woman ☐ Non-binary/third gender ☐ Prefer not to say

2. Age

☐ 18-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55 or older

3. Ethnicity

☐ White or Caucasian ☐ Black or African American

☐ Hispanic or Latino ☐ Native American or Alaskan Native

☐ Asian or Pacific Islander ☐ Multiracial or Biracial

☐ Other race or ethnicity (please specify) _____

Appendix D

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA INFORMED CONSENT FORM

HOW YOU DOIN': EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF RESIDENCE HALL DIRECTORS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Researcher: Desiree Johnson
Department of Counseling and Human Development Services

This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Dallin Young, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services.

Purpose:

This narrative study aims to understand how residence hall directors within the Southeastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) region navigated their unanticipated transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Examining the experience of residence hall directors during the COVID-19 pandemic will provide a better understanding of how residence hall directors managed change while balancing their personal and professional lives during the pandemic. You are invited to participate because you are a current or former residence hall director that served in the role before and after COVID-19 was announced as a global pandemic.

Procedure:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will participate in a virtual interview that will take around 45-60 minutes. You will be asked semi-structured interview questions about your experience as a residence hall director during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Benefits and Risk

There are no direct benefits to participating in this research study. This research study's findings aim to educate readers about the experience of residence hall directors during the COVID-19 pandemic and produce information that may lead to better-informed practices for student affairs professionals working with residence hall directors.

There are no known risks associated with this study. If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, you can skip the question if you do not wish to answer it.

Microsoft Teams Recording

Each interview will be recorded via Microsoft Teams so the discussion can be transcribed afterward. Video recordings will be kept in a locked file on the researcher's computer. Following the completion of the study, video recordings will be deleted. By agreeing to continue being present in the Microsoft Teams meeting room once the researcher starts the recording button, you indicate that you agree to have the session recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

Steps will be taken to protect your privacy in this research study. Participants will choose a pseudonym to protect their identity. The researcher will choose the pseudonym for each institutional site. All people and institutions will be replaced by pseudonyms in the final written report of the study. Direct quotes may be used in the final written report of the study using the pseudonym chosen by the participant. Otherwise, researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than the individuals working on the research project without your written consent unless required by law.

Participation

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from you or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

Contact Information

Desiree Johnson is the doctoral candidate conducting the research study. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Dallin Young, a professor at the University of Georgia. Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact Desiree Johnson at desiree.johnson@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

_____ Name of Researcher	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Name of Participant	_____ Signature	_____ Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

Appendix E

General Communication

A.1 Email to Qualified Candidates

Dear <NAME>,

Thank you for taking the time to complete my research screening survey. Based on your response, you are a great fit for this research study!

As a reminder, this narrative study aims to understand how residence hall directors within the Southeastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) region navigated their unanticipated transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams, lasting 45-60 minutes.

If you are still interested in participating, please complete the demographic survey below, and print and sign the consent form.

<https://bit.ly/RHDDemographicSurvey>

Once these items are collected, I will provide a meeting scheduling link to confirm a meeting time.

If you have any questions about the study, don't hesitate to contact me!

Best,

Desiree

A.2 Email to Eligible Candidates

Dear <NAME>,

Thank you for your interest in my research study and for taking the time to complete the screening survey. Unfortunately, based on your response, you do not meet the criteria to participate in this study.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you again for your interest and your time.

Best,

Desiree

A.3 Email to Alternative Candidates

Dear <Name>,

Thank you for your interest in my research study and for taking the time to complete the screening survey.

I am writing to inform you that I have reached the maximum number of participants for this study, and unfortunately, I am unable to include you at this time. However, I will definitely keep you in mind should an opportunity to participate arise in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you again for your interest and your time.

Best,

Desiree

A.4 Scheduling Email to Participants

Dear <NAME>,

Thank you for completing the consent form and demographic survey. Below is a scheduling link to select a virtual meeting time. Please let me know if you need a different time and date! Once you choose a date and time, I will send you a calendar invite and a virtual meeting link.

<https://desjohnson.youcanbook.me/>

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best,

Desiree

Appendix F

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Pre-Introduction

Hello! How are you doing today? Thank you again for taking time out to me with me and interview with me. This study means a lot as I have also served as a residence hall director and want to provide spaces for those who served or are currently in the role to speak on their experiences. I have a formal script I would like to go through with you, and then we will get into the questions. Before we begin, I want to ask, is it okay to start recording?

Part I: Introduction

We have started the recording! Hello! My name is Desiree Johnson, a doctoral candidate in the Student Affairs Leadership program at the University of Georgia. Thank you again for participating in my research study. Today's interview aims to gather details about your experience working as a residence hall director during the COVID-19 pandemic. By gaining this information, I am hoping to learn how residence hall directors felt while working during the pandemic and how they responded to the changes prompted by the pandemic.

Before we start the interview, I want to reiterate that, as stated in the consent form, steps will be taken to protect your privacy in this research study. I will not use your name or any other identifying information for anyone to figure out who you are. A pseudonym will be used. The video recording and transcript of our interview meeting will also be destroyed upon completion of this study.

Our interview will take an hour at maximum. If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, please let me know, and we will continue to the next question. Also, if there is a time that you would like to ask a question during the interview, please feel free to ask. Before we complete our meeting, I will restate the information I received from you to ensure I capture and interpret your story correctly. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

Awesome! Let us begin our interview!

Part II: Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about yourself and how long you served as a residence hall director?
2. Can you describe to me what your role as a residence hall director looked like before March 2020?
3. In what ways did your role change after the pandemic began?
 - a. Are there other ways in which your role changed?
4. As the pandemic was an unanticipated event, how would you describe your transition?
 - a. What came easy to you?
 - b. What were the barriers?
5. Can you tell me what work-life balance looked like for you before March 2020?
6. Can you tell me what work-life balance looked like for you after the pandemic began?
 - a. What helped you navigate work-life balance?
 - b. What were the barriers when trying to navigate work-life balance?
 - c. Have you noticed any correlation between your personal life and your work performance or ability to manage stress?
7. Can you recall an instance when you received support from your employer during the pandemic?

- a. If so, how did your employer support you during the pandemic?
 - b. If not, how would you have liked to be supported?
- 8. Can you tell me about a time when you felt unsuccessful at coping with the changes to your job responsibilities and/or expectations?
- 9. Can you tell me about a time when you felt successful in coping with the changes to your job responsibilities and/or expectations?
- 10. After going through this experience, in what ways have you changed the way you approach your work?
- 11. We are now at the end of the interview. Is there anything I missed that you would like to discuss further?

Part III: Wrap-up

Thank you for meeting with me and sharing your experiences with me today. To ensure I captured your experience, I would like to repeat what I have noted to you. Would you say what I have noted captured your experience? Awesome! Thank you again for meeting with me today. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email at desiree.johnson@uga.edu.