

EXPLORING HOW RESIDENT DIRECTORS PERCEIVE THEIR ROLE AND MAKE  
RESPONSE CHOICES DURING A CRISIS SITUATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Nick J. Wagner

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

Department of Educational Leadership

Central Michigan University  
Mount Pleasant, Michigan  
September 2013

This is dedicated to my late father  
Bernie Wagner, who taught  
me to be a lifelong learner.

Copyright by  
Nicholas Joseph Wagner  
2013

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In reflection, I am humbled thinking about the number of people who have believed in me more than they should have at times. The majority of them shared a love for education, learning, and good conversation. There have been valuable lessons taught to me about leadership, humility, and the importance of making the right decisions, all of which has led me to become a better person and professional. For this, I am lucky.

My family has always been a source of inspiration for me to draw upon. The extension of kind words and support I received from my parents, grandparents, relatives (from near and far), cousins, in-laws, and siblings often brought a sense of renewed focus and attention that was needed to finish this project. To my sister Kelly, you have no idea how thankful I am to have you by my side during this time. I can only hope to be half the scholar, writer, editor, professional, and person you are.

Many thanks to all of my colleagues in higher education that always seem interested in my research, especially those Resident Directors who participated in this study and have one of the toughest jobs on-campus. This also includes those faculty and staff within the Department of Educational Leadership at CMU, who gave me tremendous opportunities as a graduate student. Your passion for educating, developing, and serving our students will always have a lasting impact on me. Thank you for you for being there and supporting me while I achieved my goal.

To members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Anne Hornak, Dr. Dan Kaczynski, and Dr. Josh Ode. Your thoughtful guidance and persistent questions were invaluable and a simple thank you does not seem enough. This project is just as much yours as it is mine. You have all

left an imprint on my scholarly development. Anne, I can only hope we continue our long morning runs when we are attending conferences as colleagues now, as this is where my interest in research took shape.

Lastly, I want to thank my wife, who has been my number one fan and best friend. I started this acknowledgements page stating how lucky I find myself at the conclusion of this project and having her by my side is a testament to that. She has always set the best example for me in terms of what it means to work hard, think different, be compassionate, patient, and never give up. I love you Kim and look forward to the many weekends we get to spend together as a family without me having to write for hours on end. Thank you for everything.

## ABSTRACT

### EXPLORING HOW RESIDENT DIRECTORS PERCEIVE THEIR ROLE AND MAKE RESPONSE CHOICES DURING A CRISIS SITUATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by Nick J. Wagner

Utilizing qualitative research methods, grounded in a social constructivist theoretical orientation, this study explores how Resident Directors perceive their role and make response choices when experiencing a crisis situation. The focus of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships decision-making and a perception of one's professional role had with crisis events. Relevant research related to higher education crisis management and crisis decision-making theory was presented in relation to how Resident Directors make meaning and construct understanding of experiences they identified as crises within their residential on-campus facilities. The crisis in context theory (CCT) was used as the investigative framework in this study and it originated from an ecological model developed by Deiter and Pearlmén (1998), in which they state that crises do not happen in a vacuum but rather are shaped and influenced by the cultural and social contexts in which they occur.

This study was unique as it examined crisis through the context and perceived role of Resident Directors on college and university campuses. Resident Directors from the Midwest participated in the study were interviewed in small groups and asked a series of standardized semi-structured open-ended interview questions. Results manifested into three major themes related to a Resident Directors' experience and role when engaging in a crisis, those being: Pre-crisis mitigation, active-crisis participation, and post-crisis reflection. Through intense stories of reflection, perceptions related to how Resident Directors constructed their identity began to emerge. Additionally, data supported a more profound need for continued training and support

for those less experienced Resident Directors. Through deeper levels of analysis, a notion of participants having a marginalized voice through the stages of response during a crisis was prevalent.

Broader implications were examined at the conclusion of this study as efforts still must be made to help entry-level, student affairs administrators understand that their role and response choices can have direct and indirect consequences on outcomes related to crises in which they are involved. Overall, this research will lead to additional inquiry used to formulate more efficient crisis response and mitigation models for Resident Directors. Exploring and assessing participants' experiences and decision-making will provide higher education administrators, higher education scholars, and crisis response teams a wealth of information to assist in the enhancement of understanding additional needs within training exercises and educational curriculum.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	x
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Purpose and Focus of the Study.....	3
Research Questions .....	4
Theoretical Framework .....	4
Significance of the Study .....	6
Position of the Researcher .....	7
Definition of Terms.....	8
Delimitations .....	9
Limitations.....	9
Overview of the Complete Document.....	10
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	11
Introduction .....	11
The History of Residential Living in Higher Education .....	12
An Overview of Crisis Management Frameworks .....	15
Crisis Decision-Making Theory .....	19
Crisis Impacting College/University Residence Halls.....	21
The Evolution and Role of Resident Directors.....	24
Summary .....	28
III. METHODOLOGY .....	30
Introduction .....	30
Research Design .....	31
Ethical Standards .....	33
Participant Selection .....	34
Data Collection .....	36
Data Analysis.....	37
Conclusion.....	39
IV. RESULTS .....	41
Introduction .....	41
Participants .....	42
Pre-Crisis Mitigation.....	45
<i>Defining Crisis</i> .....	47
<i>Training Ambiguity</i> .....	49
Active-Crisis Participation .....	50
<i>Lead as a First-Response Facilitator</i> .....	52
<i>Leveraging Experience</i> .....	54

	<i>Assessing Safety</i> .....	55
	<i>Objective Analysis</i> .....	57
	Post-Crisis Reflection.....	58
	<i>Managing Up the Chain</i> .....	59
	<i>Marginalized Voice</i> .....	62
	Summary .....	63
V.	CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS .....	65
	Introduction .....	65
	Overview of the Methodology.....	66
	Summary of the Findings .....	66
	Interpretations of the Findings.....	69
	Recommendations for Theory & Practice .....	72
	Recommendations for Future Research .....	74
	Conclusion.....	77
	APPENDICES .....	80
	REFERENCES .....	89

## LIST OF TABLES

### TABLE

1.	Participant Characteristics .....	43
2.	Major Themes: Crosswalk Table .....	45
3.	Crises Described.....	48

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Crisis is a term often defined in a broad sense due to its contextual complexity and ambiguity. Residential facilities, in higher education, become susceptible to crisis due to the decentralized operating environment and large amount of students who live in one area. Colleges and universities stand for opportunity and learning, but critical incidents are happening weekly on campus within the residence halls (Grinberg & Wade, 2007; Kennedy, 1999). Catullo, Walker, and Floyd (2009) expand on the identity of college and university crisis management, stating that university residence hall crises can threaten the well being of personnel, property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution. Whether it is a sexual assault, suicide attempt, alcohol/drug overdose, residence room fire, or facility emergency, Resident Directors are expected to manage through the crisis encountered.

The most severe crises and the proper response to those incidents are generally covered in university crisis response plans or training. However, there are countless crises or critical incidents that do not fall into a specific category within the university crisis management protocol, especially those occurring inside or pertaining to the residence halls. A lack of research with regards to emphasis on crises within the residence halls and how to respond effectively has led to increased risks and questionable response techniques on college campuses (Weisenbach-Keller, Hughes, & Hertz, 2011). There is a need for understanding crisis and how swift-decision making, or lack thereof, impacts outcomes for professionals in higher education who work in these environments. According to Clark and Harman (2004), there are numerous ways to respond at the time of a crisis when an individual is under enormous emotional distress, yet many choices become convoluted if those making decisions have limited experience and the

environment or professional role is marginalized. The role of crisis management at institutions of higher learning has been a subject of intense study with a substantive amount of literature (Asmussen & Cresswell, 1995; Duncan, 1993; Grinberg & Wade, 2007; Hale, Hale, & Dulek, 2006; Kelsay, 2007; Piotrowski & Vodanovich, 2008; Sauders & Reason, 2003). Piotrowski and Guyette (2009) point to inadequate safety planning, limited faculty/staff crisis plans, poor training of crisis managers, ineffective management, and uncoordinated communication methods as major areas of concern for colleges and universities.

A recent documented and analyzed example of a catastrophic crisis impacting higher education took place on April 16, 2007. This is when Seung-Hui Cho went on a premeditated shooting spree at Virginia Tech University, killing 32 students and faculty and wounding 17 more before committing suicide (Piotrowski & Guyette, 2009). The crisis began at 7:15 a.m. that day in the West Ambler Johnston dormitory in Blacksburg, Virginia. Through a detailed analysis of the Virginia Tech shootings, Catullo (2008) reported that student affairs staffs at residential universities perceive themselves to be effective in responding to crises on campus; however they need to be more proactive with regard to crisis planning and mitigation (Piotrowski & Guyette, 2009). From a security and public safety standpoint, Grinberg and Wade (2007) argue the foremost question now facing learning institutions is, how can they learn from these critical incidents and take better steps to manage crisis response procedures while making productive decisions to ensure their residence halls, students, and employees are kept safe from danger?

## Statement of the Problem

Most colleges and universities are poorly prepared to efficiently address and manage crises and subsequently, this has become a growing concern (Dolan, 2006). Crisis within a residence hall happens frequently and is something a Resident Director has to expect, prepare for, and develop responses to effectively mitigate. Recent studies suggests that senior student affairs officers provide the leadership in times of crises and set the direction as well as the tone for campus response due to their levels of experience; however entry-level administrators such as Resident Directors who have not been exposed to these same critical incidents move into uncharted territory in crisis management (Reason, 2001; Reason & Saunders, 2003). A 2009 study, designed to understand entry-level, live-in, Resident Directors, found that there is a strong need for well-qualified, educated, and trained live-in professional staff because more students than ever before are graduating and entering the residence life and housing operations profession as they start their careers in student affairs within higher education (Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009). While college and universities have made great strides to address how crisis management takes place, efforts still must be made to help entry-level professionals understand their role and methods of response when coming in contact with a crisis.

## Purpose and Focus of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how Resident Directors make sense of their professional role and choices when faced with responding to a crisis situation. Deeper levels of exploration and support took place by capturing the voice of those first-responders, Resident Directors, who often operate as the sole administrator living within the residence halls. Relationships between unique crises taking place in these living facilities and decision making of

Resident Directors were examined. The focus sought to explore how Resident Directors (RDs) perceive their role at the time of an encountered crisis within the residence hall and examined the factors influencing their response once a crisis occurred.

### Research Questions

The participants of the study were Resident Directors that are full-time, live-in, staff members at postsecondary institutions in the Midwest. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How do Resident Directors perceive their role when involved in a crisis situation?
2. What factors influence Resident Directors responses when experiencing a crisis situation?
3. How do Resident Directors construct and make meaning of an experienced crisis within the residence halls?

### Theoretical Framework

For this study, the crisis in context theory (CCT) was the framework to which the perceived role and response choices of Resident Directors who experience a crisis situation were examined. The crisis in context theory originated from an ecological model developed by Deiter and Pearlman (1998), in which they state that crises do not happen in a vacuum but rather are shaped and influenced by the cultural and social contexts in which they occur. Meyer and Moore (2006) support this assertion by recognizing that crises occur in context that included 1) individuals and 2) the systems in which the individuals reside or in which they are apart . These ideas are the foundation of crisis context theory and what the authors believe is the essential premise in advancing the field of crisis intervention and management.

A critical issue to consider in this model is the ability to understand the separation of focus on the individual responding to the crisis and the consideration of the system in which the crisis is occurring. Gladding (1998) emphasizes that a causal chain of individual and system influence cannot explain all problems resulting from a crisis. Additional support for the crisis in context theory is found in Kurt Lewin's (1951) field theory. Although dated, field theory holds to the idea that behavior taking place during a stressful moment is a function of the total situation, a more holistic belief, which also supports the need for crisis theory to take into account more than just the individual involved (Myer & Moore, 2006). Lewin's (1951) theory emphasizes the suggested premise that the individual and the system interact with and influence each other, which is central to understanding the overall impact of crises. Myer and Moore (2006) state that this concept provides a starting point from which to develop an ecological understanding of how a crisis can affect an individual and an institution.

Crisis in context theory consists of several components, each of which represents a person, group, or organization impacted by a crisis event. These effects within the model extend to several layers that are all interrelated (Myer & Moore, 2006). After a crisis situation is experienced, the initial layer is depicted as the "individual" and the "system". The individual is described as anyone who first comes in contact with the crisis and the system is the physical environment or structure in which the crisis is occurring. Once the individual perceives his or her role to engage in the crisis event, then multiple subsystems within the model can be dramatically impacted, those including stakeholders and the larger community apart of the system.

Myer and Moore (2006) identify three key premises constituting crisis context theory. Considered together, these three premises provide a powerful tool to conceptualize a crisis

situation and the usefulness is not in the ability to predict but rather in the capacity to marginalize factors that influence the overall impact of the crisis situation. The first premise is that individuals and systems experience a crisis event in multiple layers. Premise two is that in the total understanding of a crisis, the respondent must take into account that a reciprocal effect occurs among individuals and systems apart of the event (Myer & Moore, 2006). The reciprocal effect is comprised of the secondary relationships between individuals and the degree of change experienced by a crisis event. The third and final premise according to Myer and Moore (2006) is time factor, in the sense that time directly influences the overall impact of a crisis. Responses and decisions made during the time a crisis is occurring can play a role in the overall intervention in order to minimize damage and maximize the greatest good. Additionally, time can also refer to the length and duration of recovery for those individuals and systems involved in a crisis.

Framing this study and research questions within the crisis context theory allowed for a greater understanding of the perceived roles and responses of Resident Directors who experienced a crisis event. In addition, this conceptual model aided in the development of understanding Resident Director perspectives on the impact a crisis has on the individual(s), the system(s) and the stakeholder(s) within the community.

### Significance of the Study

The importance of crisis management, especially related to Residential Life administrators, has never been greater. This is due to the fact that current research is saturated with speculative training models, anecdotal suggestions, and offers no direction to Resident Directors who have to make decisions when dealing with a critical incident (Hale, Hale, & Dulek, 2006). Additionally, institutional crisis response is subsumed by the broader field of

organizational decision-making, with an extensive body of literature. Yet, a substantial gap exists on (1) the types of crisis occurring within residence halls (2) the perceived role of Resident Directors during critical incidents and (3) the factors predicting decision-making response choices by these Resident Directors.

This study searched to gain an understanding of the common and divergent areas of the response process among Resident Directors when they experienced a crisis. Pattern, themes, and categories, were explored during these instances. Although many executive administrators and crisis management teams (President, Dean, Vice President, & committees) make response choices and plans after the crisis has already taken place, they are generally not the first administrator at the initial scene of the incident (Edelson, 2009). Narrative stories, provided by those first present during an experienced crisis, were analyzed to gain a better understanding of how Resident Directors perceived their role and rationalized decisions and responses.

#### Position of the Researcher

While immersing oneself in the culture of a group of people being studied, the researcher must always be aware of his or her position on the continuum as the instrument within the study. This can often be explored through the use of reflexive, methodological, and analytical memos conducted by the researcher during the study. Throughout this specific study, the position of the researcher was analyzed frequently due to the previous professional experiences of the primary investigator. The idea for this study was generated from the researcher's role when working as the Assistant Director of Housing Operations at a public university in the Midwest. Although the professional position had no supervision or authority over the Resident Directors, collaboration occurred and was essential in order for the Housing and Residential Life offices to work

effectively. To explore how those Resident Directors experience and make sense of their own professional realities when dealing with a crisis, the researcher continually examined his position when collecting data and making sense of patterns, themes, and categories that emerged. The inquiry process had to remain open and reflexive in order for information to be useful. When reflection occurred, the researcher's worldview and methods became altered, however this is how an objective process of qualitative research generates practical meaning (Patton, 2002).

Moustakas (1995) describes how the research can be described as either: being-in, being-with, and being-for. Being-in is when the researcher is an open observer and leaves feelings, opinions, bias, and context out. Being-with is defined as coming into the study with one's own opinions, but willing to listen to others thoughts and feelings, as to explore what things mean together. Lastly, being-for positions the researcher as a clear advocate for the person or group being studied. Throughout this study, the researcher took the position of being-in, so patterns, themes, and categories emerged from what is being observed and told by those Resident Directors studied, along with responses from interview questions and data sources collected. The research remained open, reflexive, and emergent in this design (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002).

#### Definition of Terms

*Chief Student Affairs Officer* – The highest-ranking person at a college or university responsible for direct supervision of the student affairs division. The position is generally a Vice President or Dean (Ambler, 1993).

*Colleges and Universities* – Used interchangeably throughout this study to mean any institution of higher education, can be public or private, ranging from small college to large university (Wernsman, 2008).

*Crisis* – An event, often sudden or unexpected, that disrupts the normal operation of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the well being of personnel; property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution (Harper, Paterson, & Zdziarski, 2006).

*Critical Incident* – A negative event that commands a person’s attention (Sweeney, 2008).

*Residence Hall* – A facility provided on campus for students who are contracted with the institution to sleep, reside, and educationally/socially grow; historically they were referred to as dormitories (Wernsman, 2008).

*Resident Director (RD)* – A full time student affairs staff member who lives in a university or college residence hall, providing supervision, advisement, guidance, programming, counseling, policy adjudication, administration, and emergency response to residential students (Meyer, 1999).

*Student Affairs Professional* – College and university personnel who address student issues related to personal growth and development; generally departments provide services in: residential life, housing, counseling services, student life, disability services, athletics, and multicultural affairs (Weaver, 2005).

### Delimitations

This study was limited by its focus to Resident Directors who reside at public colleges and universities in the Midwest.

## Limitations

Limitations are defined as those factors outside of the scope of the research that may influence the results of the study (Creswell, 2009). Throughout this study it was assumed that Resident Directors who were interviewed responded honestly, however deeper meanings and explored layers of complexity were revealed through bias and/or reactivity. Efforts, such as follow-up interviews and participant data reviewed occurred in order to corroborate the context and synthesis of responses. Additionally, Resident Directors experience, such as years of service, and expertise within the professional field of residential life influenced the meanings, patterns, and themes that emerged. The findings included rich stories, descriptions, and detailed narratives that contributed to the analysis regarding the perceived roles of Resident Directors who experienced a crisis and those factors contributing to response choices.

## Overview of the Complete Document

This document consists of five chapters. Chapter I provides an introduction to the study, establishes the background, statement of the problem, purpose, focus, research questions, significance of the study, researcher perspective, critical definitions, delimitations, and limitations. Chapter II offers a review of the literature that includes the history of Resident Directors and their role in higher education, an overview of crisis management theoretical frameworks, and a detailed historical perspective of major crises impacting college and university residence halls. Chapter III describes the project methodology, including the data collection, analysis, and validity. Chapter IV examined the findings of the study. Chapter V concludes with the results, implications, and provides recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Several research studies analyzing present higher education and student affairs crisis management frameworks have demonstrated the need for a more robust understanding of a practitioner's role during a crisis (Clark & Harman, 2004; Hale, Hale, & Dulek, 2006; Keller, Hughes, & Hertz, 2011). In a published article released by *The Education Digest*, Dolan (2006) states that most colleges and universities are poorly prepared to efficiently address and manage a crisis within all levels of their operations. In Dolan's (2006) study conducted at the University of Southern California results found that college and university crisis unpreparedness could be attributed to numerous factors such as; the inexperience of higher education administrators, the bureaucratic structure at institutions, and an overall resistance to change historical processes.

Scholars have expressed how complex college and university organizations are, emphasizing the need for effective crisis management plans, due to the countless and potential incidents that can occur (Hale, Hale, & Dulek, 2006; Kennedy, 2009; Piotrowski & Guyette, 2009). Kennedy (2009) conducted a study and found that many crisis response plans at institutions of higher education were not very structured and administrators, faculty, and staff did not clearly understand their roles when trying to respond effectively. Entry-level higher education administrators are vulnerable because a challenging feature of many crisis situations is the reality that critical, long-term impact decisions need to be made under time pressure with limited, unofficial information, and limited experience (Hale, Hale, & Dulek 2006; Moats, Chermack, & Dooley, 2008; Piotrowski & Guyette, 2009).

One significant barrier to improved crisis response and effective decision-making is that administrators tend to view crises as separate entities and fail to observe that there are many factors, issues, and perceived roles, regardless of the plans or policies in place (Lalonde, 2007). This tends to place newly hired staff at colleges and universities, such as Resident Directors in ambiguous roles when experiencing critical incidents. Grinberg and Wade (2007) argue that the foremost question now facing higher education institutions is how they can learn from institutional crisis and take better steps to manage response and decision-making to keep their campuses and residential student populations safe.

This chapter is divided into an overview of the history and role of Resident Directors in higher education, a summary of crisis management theory, and an examination of crises that have impacted college/university residence halls. The following research questions were used to guide this literature review:

1. How do Resident Directors perceive their role in a crisis situation?
2. What factors influence Resident Directors responses and choices when experiencing a crisis situation?
3. How do Resident Directors construct and make meaning of an experienced crisis within the residence halls?

### The History of Residential Living in Higher Education

Facilities used to house students in American higher education can be historically traced by examining distinct periods of time. From the beginning, American higher education was modeled after the well-known and established English universities, Cambridge and Oxford (Winston, Anchors, & Associates, 1993; Frederickson, 1993). It was in England where

residential facilities were built to meet logistical needs of housing students who attended university campuses from a great distance away from home. Residence halls were constructed to bring faculty and students together, and were looked at as an essential aspect of the university experience (Novak, 2008). Schuh (1996) expands on this by stating, that these structures (residence halls) attempted to meld learning both inside and outside of the classroom into an inclusive living/learning environment. Students shared common areas, advisors, and curriculum, leading to an increased partnership between students and faculty (Henry, 2003). Producing an educated citizenry was the main focus in the English model, so safety and general supervision of the residential students were not top priorities.

Administrators of colleges and universities in the United States wanted to emulate the English residential facility model, with the goal of bringing faculty and students together both intellectually and morally (Novak, 2008). However, there were a few variables inhibiting the development of residential facilities in American higher education. Henry's (2003) historical analysis found that parents who were sending their children long distances away to American colleges and universities expected institutions to provide an appropriate living and learning environment, one that resembled the likes of home and was safe. Limited infrastructure and funding caused many institutions to provide inadequate residential facilities, often staffed with unhappy faculty who were charged with the general supervision of students (Shroeder, Mable, & Associates, 1994). Faculty members felt resentment towards the academy because many believed their top priority was to teach and not to be live-in building managers.

Residential facilities struggled to create a system equivalent to the Oxford and Cambridge English models. Hampered financially, facilities were set up more as dormitories, where students ate and slept separately from academic infusion and curricular involvement (Novak,

2008). The true idea of residence halls within the missions of American higher education institutions became increasingly unclear. Disciplinary issues, poor living conditions and adversarial relationships between staff, faculty, and students did not parallel those facilities in England as originally intended (Schuh, 1996).

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, with housing stock in local communities still poor, on-campus residential facilities continued to deteriorate (Novak, 2008). This period also marked the beginning of colleges just for women and a parental concern for appropriate housing became a renewed interest for many university presidents to emphasize the need for new construction of college/university residential facilities (Novak, 2008). It seems as the college and university-housing priority became endorsed, the idea of new residence halls came into full bloom during the University Transformation era (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Due to the influx of students and a new focus on campus life outside of the classroom, including intercollegiate sports and co-curricular activities, campus housing became a more attractive option for students (Schuh, 1996).

As college presidents continued the push for the development of residential facilities in the first half of the twentieth century, goals were met with constraint as a result of the Great Depression. Henry's (2003) research suggests it was at this time that states enacted laws allowing for the issuance of bonds for on-campus residential facilities. Between 1900 and 1940, construction of new institutions and enrollments flourished under the passage of the G.I. Bill and the Housing Act of 1950 (Novak, 2008). According to Schroeder (1994), this period witnessed the enrollment of women and African Americans, which led to the rapid proliferation of higher education and expansion of residence halls.

Residential facilities were now becoming institutional priorities, primarily developed through the business and finance divisions of American colleges and universities (Novak, 2008). The sole purpose of these residence halls was to provide livable housing arrangements that were staffed with professionals and placed an emphasis on the safety and personal growth of students residing on-campus (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Henry, 2003).

The 1950s saw an even greater demand for campus housing and the federal government provided funding to aid in the renovations of existing halls, student unions and other co-curricular spaces (Henry, 2003). As residence halls were constructed quickly in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, little attention was paid to the design of these structures. The construction process gave little thought to the safety, educational, and developmental needs of residential students (Schroeder, 1994; Wuennenberg & Stratton, 2012). As a result, a greater emphasis for educational components and supervision to be integrated into residence halls began and subsequent staffing patterns emerged (Novak, 2008).

### An Overview of Crisis Management Frameworks

Due to disruptive crises taking place on college and university campuses and for the sake of this study, a review of how to define crisis in higher education along with how to manage these events needs to be understood. Catullo, Walker, and Floyd (2009) argue that because crisis is often defined in a broad sense because of the contextual complexity, it is important to narrow the focus and concentrate on the uniqueness of how crisis is defined for higher education

institutions, especially residential universities. Harper, Paterson, and Zdziarski (2006) provide a more specific definition of crisis pertaining directly to higher education, which states, “a campus crisis is an event, often sudden or unexpected, that disrupts the normal operations of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the well-being of personnel; property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution” (p. 5).

Given this definition of crisis, Harper (2006) suggested that there were various levels of crisis. These levels included: disasters, crises, and critical incidents. A disaster has the ability to drain campus resources as well as the resources in the surrounding community. A crisis is an event that only impacts and can be localized to that institution, and not the community. Critical incidents are isolated events on campus that have the potential to turn into a disaster if not handled in a timely manner. According to previous research in the field, the way a crisis is handled and decisions made may influence the level that a crisis will reach and the impact it may have on the future of an institution of higher education (Augustine, 2000; Fink, 1986; Millar & Heath, 2004; Mitroff, 2005; Powell, 2008; Rollo & Zdziarski, 2007; Zdziarski, 2006).

For higher education institutions, after examining a working definition of crisis, the next critical step is to understand how to determine if the college/university is prepared properly to manage the crisis (Catullo, Walker, & Floyd; 2009). Research in this area described four critical indicators that were evident when an organization was prepared to sufficiently manage a crisis. First, crisis management plans need to address each major crisis category. Second, crisis plans and procedures should provide preparation for the different phases of a crisis. Third, organizational systems have to support the crisis management program. Fourth, consider involving stakeholders in the planning process when preparing for a crisis (Zdziarski, 2001).

Residence halls are often subject to a variety of crisis that need to be resolved by those Resident Directors who live in these facilities. Mitroff and Anagnos (2001) suggested that an institution's comprehensive crisis management plan needs to prepare executive administrators (Presidents, Vice-Presidents, and Deans) in each of the subsequent categories related to residence halls, however it was not noted on whether or not Resident Directors were also prepared. These categories included the following: the loss of confidential information, loss of major equipment and master keys to facilities, the rise in vandalism and building damage, psychopathic acts, violence, sexual assault, alcohol/drug overdose, suicide attempts, and building facility disasters, which include fires and floods.

Shootings occurring on college campuses along with the permanent threat of those categories of crisis mentioned above all have the ability to disrupt campus life throughout higher education. Research indicates that administrators in higher education focus on crises related to high probability, high-impact events occurring on campus (Mitroff, Pearson, & Harrigan, 1996; Zdziarski, 2006). According to a study by Mitroff (1996) he states that, although there were numerous anticipated crises that were thought to be more prevalent in residential universities, administrators need to look for the unanticipated crises as well as those that may be of lower probability. Institutions of higher education should plan beyond those major instances that have been isolated and reoccurring throughout history and be willing to incorporate ideas and decisions made by those entry level administrators such as Resident Directors who experience crisis first hand. Catullo, Walker, and Floyd (2009) emphasize that crisis management plans should include a broad and multidepartment crisis management team that is supported by upper-level administration.

Success can be found amongst higher education crisis management stakeholders. Zdziarski (2006) found that an effective higher education institutional crisis management system had specific plans in various divisions. The overall preparation needed to include a specific plan that addressed the processes followed, designated who could activate the plan, and specified action steps to see the plan to fruition. Yet, some scholars argue that higher education institutional crisis management plans are less than proactive and not impressive. Blumenthal (1995) laments that; the greatest missed opportunity for proactive crisis management is in the lack of organizational structures and processes capable of generating useful data and supporting the decision process. She goes on to argue that committees at most higher education institutions have historically been better suited to exploring and debating the principles that underlie complex issues rather than in developing immediate solutions for urgent situations. Lastly, many scholars in the literature felt that the crisis decision and management process failed to incorporate diverse perspectives from the multiple stakeholders who generally are the first responders to a crisis on campus (Blumenthal, 1995; Catullo, Walker, & Floyd, 2009; Hale, Hale, & Dulek, 2006). It will take more fruitful conversations in the planning stages of crisis management involving those who are first-responders in order for organizational understanding, decision-making, proactive leadership, and emergency contingencies to become enhanced.

Perhaps the real benefit of examining crisis management theories will be what can be learned to help Resident Directors or any university administrators prepare for and respond to future crises effectively. Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) define a crisis in terms of two conditions: first, that the whole system be affected in its entirety, and second, that the basic assumptions of system members be challenged to the point where they are forced either to realize the faulty foundation of these assumptions or to develop defense mechanisms against them.

Many challenges pose threats to an accustomed way of life within a university community. However, as Blumenthal (1995) articulates, these threats declare themselves less suddenly and less violently than others; it becomes possible to deny their importance. Responses to these issues follow the traditional university pattern which is low signal detection, little recognition in the need to make hard decisions in anticipation of foreseen circumstances, and a lot of debate about principles with little push for evaluation, assessment, and resolution to occur (Blumenthal, 1995).

### Crisis Decision-Making Theory

Individual levels of response occur when one is tending to the larger event of extreme significance when managing a crisis. It is within these differentiating levels of crisis where decision theory predicts responses to events at all levels of severity (Sweeney, 2008). Some crises have more severe consequences than others, but crisis decision theory recognizes that even relatively inconsequential negative events may require considerable attention at the time they occur. This particular step in the crisis management process is highlighted because representatives from any human organization have to make decisions in order to limit the damage once a crisis is encountered.

Particularly to date, this step (decision-making) in effective crisis management has never been greater due to current research being limited with only speculative prescriptions offered (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Sheaffer & Mano-Negrin, 2003). To aid in filling this gap amongst the research Sweeney (2008) suggests a crisis decision theory to include a three-stage process that individuals go through when facing a negative life event.

Within the first stage of the crisis decision-making process, people assess the severity of the negative event using many types of information, including information about causes, comparative information, and information about consequences. Second, people determine their response options, which are limited by the controllability of the event and by the feasibility of various responses. Third, people evaluate their response options, it is at this final stage when the crisis manager determines the pros and cons of the options they generated at the second stage and then select a response that lends itself to the least amount of damage for the greatest good (Sweeney, 2008).

Crisis response theory is founded upon the principles assimilated to the broader field of organizational decision-making (Hale, Hale, & Dulek, 2006). Early research posed the decision maker as a rational actor executing a series of sequential analytical processes and choosing among competing alternatives to maximize utility (Ackoff, 1981; Huff & Reger, 1987). From such models a system of understood theorized decision-making produces a contraction of authority to which all decisions are made when a crisis is encountered (Greening & Johnson, 1997; Seymour & Moore, 2000). A portion of the analysis using crisis decision-making theory is vital in trying to gain an understanding of how Resident Directors perceive their role in a crisis situation. Greening and Johnson's (1997) work suggests that effective crisis-decision making is dependent upon a professional's age, tenure, and experience so this will be a comparative lens explored since more Resident Directors are entry level administrators with limited experience.

## Crisis Impacting College/University Residence Halls

Student affairs officers, particularly those working as live-in professionals, in whom they are a full-time university staff member housed in the residence halls, provide leadership in times of crisis (Reason & Saunders, 2003). Because higher education institutions are large and complex, they have experienced numerous incidents in which crises have impacted daily operations and interrupted campus life (Piotrowski & Guyette, 2009). The following section will provide an overview of these higher education crises documented in the literature.

Within the context of these crises taking place in residence halls it is important to understand the diversity of these types of events. Generally crisis can arise from an act of God, which seemingly are types of uncontrollable forces and impersonal outcomes beyond interpretable human understanding. Many times these critical events labeled acts of God are beyond any type of human control and can be attributed to a higher power creating chaos. In comparison, there are crises that manifest from systematic human behavior and social objective. Decisions and actions derived from those members of our living society. Within this research, the majority of those described crises taking place in college/university residence halls are the result of human behavior.

There are many instances throughout the course of history in higher education that many university/college leaders draw from to manage their institutions. Zdziarski, Rollo, Dunkel, and Associates (2007) state that, the understanding of what can occur on college campuses affects

priorities when planning and preparing. This understanding comes from the learning that has taken place from previous events such as shootings at the University of Texas in 1966, the murder of a residential student at Lehigh University in 1986, and a deadly meningococemia panic at the University of Illinois from 1991 to 1992 along with the numerous other incidents (Zdziarski, Rollo, Dunkel, & Associates, 2007).

In 1966, the innocence of college campus life was shattered when a mentally deranged sniper at the University of Texas started to randomly shoot residential students from the perch of a prominent campus building (Piotrowski & Guyette, 2009). This domestic tragedy accounted to 14 lost lives and additional 32 students injured. It was the first crisis to seriously impact a higher education institution and forced administrators, faculty, and staff to evaluate response processes. This would not be the last time a campus shooting would occur on a college campus

Grinberg and Wade (2007) state that on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Seung-Hui Cho, an English major at Virginia Tech, killed 32 people and wounded 17 more before taking his own life in what became the deadliest shooting at a college/university in U.S. history. This tragedy began in the West Ambler Johnston residence hall on the Blacksburg, Virginia campus. A number of university officials felt it was an isolated incident when the campus police were originally notified, but ineffective action led to an inordinate amount of horror over the next two hours when Cho would fire 174 rounds throughout five separate classrooms (Grinberg & Wade, 2007).

Campus crises, especially those impacting residence halls, are not just limited to university shootings. Kennedy (1999) conducted a longitudinal study on how crisis affects campus culture when examining a 1997 storm that raged through Fort Collins, Colorado and flooded much of the campus of Colorado State University. The school sustained more than \$100 million in damage, and hundreds of residential students, faculty, and staff were displaced.

Kennedy's (1999) analysis argued that because the university had an effective crisis management plan in place and administrators understood their roles; the school was able to react quickly to the crisis. Executing the crisis management plan enabled everyone (faculty, staff, and students) to believe in the strategies set forth, which lead the school back to normalcy (Kennedy, 1999).

Hurricanes and weather related crisis have offered another unique perspective on crisis management in higher education. In a case study of university administrators in crisis management, Piotrowski and Vodanovich (2008) examined Hurricane Ivan and the impact it had on the University of West Florida campus. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004 the eye of Hurricane Ivan struck the city of Pensacola, Florida and inflicted major damage to all of the academic and residential facilities on campus just after the start of the fall semester (Piotrowski & Vodanovich, 2008). A survey instrument on the extent of impact to daily operation and teaching was administered to 117 staff members. Piotrowski and Vodanovich (2008) findings indicated that disruption to standard practices was minimal within the classroom, so teaching was not affected. However, residential students were still displaced and residential halls had ongoing repairs impacting operation throughout the academic year.

When a crisis occurs either on or near the college campus, a number of needs arise and perceived roles are questioned (Kelsay, 2007). Longitudinal cross-sectional studies have begun to exam the implications different crises have on university communities. Traditions, campus culture, and monetary resources have been the areas to experience major change (Kelsay, 2007). Following the bonfire collapse at Texas A&M University, administrators declared a moratorium on the annual tradition of creating the bonfire (Lowery, 2000). Students living in the residence hall that burned at Seton Hall University in 2003 were re-located and clothes along with school supplies had to be bought for them. This led to the demolition of the residence hall and

construction of a multi-million dollar new facility on campus, tapping into limited university general fund resources (Kelsay, 2007). All of these findings accentuate the importance of understanding perceived roles when experiencing a crisis situation on campus and how to meet related needs and assist those staff and faculty involved (Kelsay, 2007).

### The Evolution and Role of Resident Directors

Dating back to the early 1960s, housing and residence life programs have reached several milestones including: increased professionalism in the field, the creation of standards and guidelines for professional practice, and substantive professional education (Riker, 1993). Transition has occurred within the residential life operation from staffing residence halls with housemothers to providing residence halls with professional full-time live in university administrators called Resident Directors (Frederiksen, 1993; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). Belch and Mueller (2003) go on to argue that as the philosophy of student development and the residential experience for college students has evolved over time, so has the philosophy and nature of staffing these programs and services.

Residence life positions, specifically, the Resident Director, is considered the key entry point for new professionals in the field of student affairs (Belch & Mueller, 2003). In fact, due to the substantial growth of the higher education system in the United States with more emphasis placed on co-curricular activities and residential involvement, Resident Directors identified practical work experience in residence life as the most frequently cited type of prior student service experience (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Delaney, 1990). Frederiksen (1993) claimed that the housing and residence life career field has become the primary provider of basic student affairs professional work experiences, with the majority of graduates moving into the role of a

Resident Director. In doing so, this offers an excellent experiential foundation for other career fields within student affairs.

Beyond serving as an entry point into the field of student affairs, Resident Directors have emerged as essential collaborators in the development of community and engaging students who live on campus (Belch & Mueller, 2003). According to higher education scholars, the critical elements for Resident Directors to focus on in order to ensure success in any residential community are to align academic programming with the social mission of the institution, maintain available opportunities for sufficient training/new experiences, and to make student safety and security an institutional priority (Stimpson, 1994; Winston & Anchors, 1993).

Despite the affirmation regarding the importance of Resident Directors within the department of residence life and higher education as a whole, staffing has been identified as one of the major challenges confronting residence life programs (Blimling, 1993). Challenges to hiring Resident Directors in residence life specifically include the following: the difficulty in finding qualified personnel, strong competition for the best graduates, policies regarding quality of life issues, the feminization of the profession, lack of autonomy in decision-making and input, and an expectation that staff live in the residence halls (Belch & Mueller, 2003). What remains interesting is that although preparation programs experienced a slight decrease in the number of students enrolling in the late 1980s, the profession is offering more options for employee preparation and educating more students than ever before (Coomes & Talbot, 2000; Phelps-Tobin, 1998). Percentages seem to vary but a consistent argument emerges and that is the majority of undergraduate and graduate students first job within student affairs is a Resident Director, now deemed “entry-level” positions by many affiliated with higher education (Belch & Mueller, 2003; Coomes & Talbot, 2000).

More than a decade ago two prominent national associations examined the recruitment and preparation of this group of new professionals and through the data analyzed, findings suggest that the profession has ignored changing societal attitudes about work, working conditions, and compensation, which have led to large turnover rates and an occupation that now is unattractive to a number of new student affairs professionals (Belch & Mueller, 2003). Komives (1998) forewarned the student affairs profession to examine the changing expectations of student workers and cited Resident Director positions as one example of an area in student affairs in need of redesign. Kearney (1993) argued that young student affairs professionals are not as willing or interested in taking live-in positions with long hours, limited authority, lack of privacy, and relatively low pay.

Due to these factors, an estimate of Resident Director attrition is extremely high, yet retention of these professionals is essential to the health of student affairs as a profession (Davis-Barham, & Winston, 2006). There is a strong need for well-qualified, educated, and trained entry-level live-in Resident Director professional staff in campus residence halls to support and achieve the academic and educational goals of the institution (Belch & Kimble, 2006; Belch & Mueller, 2003). Senior university administrators have acknowledged the concern with the availability of qualified Resident Directors interested in live-in positions and have indicated their greatest fear is for the impact on the housing and residence life profession and students they serve (St. Onge & Nestor, 2005).

Studies with regard to higher education culture and its impact on Resident Director job satisfaction, morale, and motivation have become prominent. Belch, Wilson, and Dunkel (2009) found that employee motivation, morale, and satisfaction coupled with the principles of engagement in the workplace carry great importance when dealing with new Resident Directors.

Initial experiences to the Resident Director profession, in both the recruitment and employment phases, were found to be critical in creating commitment to the field and affiliation to the larger university community (Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009). Despite the fact that the supervisory relationship is a key influence on career satisfaction and commitment (Davis-Barham, & Winston, 2006; Harned & Murphy, 1999), strong evidence confirms that ongoing supervisory contact with Resident Directors is not the norm or actively achieved (Ignelzi & Whitley, 2004; Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004; Sauders, Cooper, Winston, & Chernow, 2000; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Varied anecdotal evidence exists on the role of the Resident Director in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but the literature suggests many are asked to do more in their current jobs. Belch, Wilson, and Dunkel (2009) state that these university staff members have been permitted to chair committees in the department or the student affairs division, along with asked to be involved on campus-wide student success committees, teaching courses, and are contributing articles for university newsletters or publications; all of these duties on top of their primary job obligations. The length of time spent as an entry-level Resident Director can vary greatly; most only stay in the position an average of two to five years (Belch, Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009).

Higher education student affairs scholars seek to explore the fit of residence life culture with those new professionals who take on the job duties associated with being a Resident Director. Rather than sugarcoat or hide challenges such as location, salary, living quarters, or the demands from crises experienced in the residence halls, colleges and universities have begun to open up about these realities while providing these new professionals with supportive environments.

A social constructivist theory was used to explore the Resident Director's perception of their role within an experienced crisis to see if they had an active "voice" in the process or became a marginalized group who became frustrated with their decision-making and professional role. Additional data gathered in this study will be used to inform student affairs practitioners of additional factors that contribute or influence Resident Directors responses when experiencing a crisis situation.

### Summary

There has been a surge of violent events on college campuses in recent years despite efforts to incorporate more aggressive crisis management techniques (Keller, Hughes, & Hertz, 2011). Research in higher education crisis management has helped elevate the importance of the topic; however the literature has not focused on the perceived leadership role of the Resident Director when experiencing a critical incident, nor their response choices (Reason & Saunders, 2003). Keller, Hughes, and Hertz (2011) argue that there is opportunity for colleges and universities to become more proactive in crisis management, so further research is needed to inform those who are generally first responders.

The problem of Resident Directors understanding their perceived role when experiencing a crisis is a factor that remains unexamined in the prevalent study of higher education. Limited research on this group continues to perpetuate the problem of reluctance when entry-level student affairs administrators are faced with making sound and swift decisions when trying to deal with a crisis effectively (Clark & Harman, 2004). In Dolan's (2006) report on how many universities and colleges are ready to manage a crisis, he laments on the importance of how there needs to be appropriate pro-active action with minimal barriers and clearly defined roles for

those involved in the crisis. As higher education institutions continue to become more complex there are variables involved in crises that cannot be anticipated, however further research must be conducted in order to contextualize effective multi-modal crisis management frameworks that can contribute to the safety of all those members within the residence halls and the university community (Hale, Hale, & Dulek, 2006; Kennedy, 1999; Piotrowski & Guyette, 2009).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This qualitative study explored how Resident Directors perceive their roles and make response choices when experiencing a crisis situation. Qualitative research was framed within the study of social phenomena through naturalistic and interpretative genres drawing upon multiple methods of inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). As indicated through the literature review, a need existed to learn more about Resident Director's perceptions regarding their role and how they make sense of response decisions when encountering a crisis situation. This social constructivist study sought to explore how Resident Directors construct their reality and worldview in experienced crisis situations from their perspective through research questions framed in crisis management theory. The focus of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between decision-making and perception of one's professional role during a crisis.

A qualitative study was chosen because of the holistic nature of this approach and it provided the most appropriate method for answering the research questions posed. In particular, the experiences of the research participants were best discovered by asking them to tell their stories based on open-ended responses and semi structured conversation. A holistic approach allowed for all aspects within the participant responses to be incorporated into the data collection process. The qualitative approach also allowed for the ability to learn more about the lived experiences and constructed realities of the Resident Directors studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The responses articulated by the participants were the main source of data and was the reason for

using a social constructivist approach. Constructivism begins with the premise that the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently (Guba & Lincoln, 1990). Patton (2002) goes on to clarify further by stating that a social constructivist approach studies the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others.

This chapter explains several elements of the methodology proposed for use in this study. Within the next several sections, qualitative research will be discussed further, with an overview of the research design, consideration of human subjects and ethical standards, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and conclusion. The following research questions were used to frame and guide this study:

1. How do Resident Directors perceive their role during a crisis situation?
2. What factors influence Resident Directors responses and choices when experiencing a crisis situation?
3. How do Resident Directors construct and make meaning of an experienced crisis within the residence halls?

### Research Design

Attempting to make contextual sense of human perception and professional identity can be a complex process. Due to life experiences, education, and the larger environments people are apart of, the capacity to interpret and construct realities exists. Baxter-Magolda (1999) asserted that adults, when constructing reality, are holders of the truth however external forces

are prevalent in constructing their reported perceptions, explanations, beliefs, and worldviews. The abstract process of inventing concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of the experience, such as crises, is the reason why social constructivism was the most appropriate theoretical orientation for this study to be grounded in (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Verbal communication and responses can inform qualitative inquiry and reveal meaning. Polkinghorne (1995) states that through the application of constructed knowledge about reality, humans gain an understanding of their experiences while continually testing and modifying based on the consequences of these constructions. People arrange their experiences in a manner that gives the events meaning and a coherent order (Atkinson, 1998). In order to gain an understanding of these meaningful experiences, social constructivist design depends on the extensive data collection that takes place through on-site visits, interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Resident Directors conceptualize and interpret events against a backdrop of unclear boundaries and a variety of interrelationships occurring on a daily basis within the residence halls. Framed in ideas presented by Lincoln and Guba (1990), the researcher explored relevance rather than rigor, was inductive rather than deductive, and attempted to discover rather than to verify through the open-ended responses and site document analysis. Inherent in social constructivist methodology are the beliefs that there are multiple realities and perspectives in human interactions and there will be further interaction between the researcher and the subjects of the inquiry, which allowed for new possibilities to emerge from the context of this qualitative study (Baxter-Magolda, 1999; Patton, 2002).

Methodologically, a social constructivist approach involves making sense of the data collected both during and after the inquiry. The emergent design is continually developed rather

than predetermined and patterns/themes are analyzed rather than specific variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). According to Lincoln and Guba (1990), the benefit of social constructivism inquiry stems from focusing on social reality. Resident Directors that participated in this research became empowered by this approach, as it was their perceived realities and roles that were used to construct meaning. The resulting interpretation was used to understand the organizational scheme the participants bring forth to make sense of their world. Additional questions that emerged from the social constructivist design throughout the course of the interview process were viewed as providing new paths of inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Patton, 2002).

#### Ethical Standards

Maintaining high ethical standards is important in any research where human subjects are involved. This research provided significant learning opportunities for both the student affairs profession and higher education institutions. The student affairs profession will benefit from the insight provided by Resident Director experiences and higher education institutions can gain a deeper understanding about the complexities and importance of crisis response. This could lead to training reform and improvements in organizational crisis response, decision-making, and management. A summary of the results from this study will be offered to all participants upon request.

The researcher ensured confidentiality of all participants included in this study, including the colleges and universities, by using pseudonyms in all drafts and reports. Digital data and any printed data were securely and privately stored and maintained by the researcher. The digital data files were stored on a personal computer hard drive and a backup flash drive. Some data

was also stored in QSR International's NVivo software program (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012). Any printed material was stored in folders away from the research sites. Audio-recorded data was erased immediately after copied to the researcher's hard drive and transcribed. All data will be retained for five years after the completion of the dissertation and then will be destroyed as suggested by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association's 6<sup>th</sup> edition (2010).

All participants of this research study signed a project consent form (Appendix B). In addition, the colleges and universities designated for site visits signed a letter of approval (Appendix B), granting permission to interview their Resident Directors. In preparation for this study, the researcher passed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), which is necessary in the study and use of human subjects. Once this proposal was accepted, the researcher applied for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the host university.

### Participant Selection

This study aimed to analyze the responses given from Resident Directors who have experienced a crisis situation. Invitations to participate in the study were sent via email to eighteen Resident Directors. Contact information for these staff members could be found on institutional websites. From those invitations, nine Resident Directors agreed to participate in this qualitative exploratory study from three public universities within the Midwest. The sample size was hard to estimate in this qualitative study, as it was important to be open and receptive to paths of inquiry as they emerge during data collection (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). However, the sample explored allowed the researcher to learn about Residence Directors' experienced crises and responses through open-ended structured interview questions framed in a

constructivist approach (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). These interviews were conducted with two to five participants in small groups at the college or university in which they were employed. In a given study, a series of small group interviews were conducted to get a variety of perspectives and increase confidence in whatever patterns may emerge (Patton, 2002). It was the researcher's hope that these small groups would lead to a deeper discussion and full disclosure regarding experienced crises. Patton (2002) supports the use of small groups stating, the object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others.

Individuals were eligible to participate in the study if they worked as a live-in Resident Director at a public college or university in the Midwest. Further eligibility was determined based on institutional characteristics, such as residential population, academic profile, and overall enrollment. Participants were identified through university and college public directories and staff website pages. Those who qualified to be part of the study were emailed and invited to participate (Appendix D).

Small group sessions with the participants were scheduled for two-hour interviews with an additional follow up interview being scheduled if needed. Creswell (2009) notes that after a period of time, selected participants will begin to repeat themselves and/or saturate the data with similar responses of those interviewed previously. This is when the researcher identified that there were a reasonable number of research questions and no additional participants were needed for the sample (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Patton, 2002). A target of twelve interviews and thirty hours of observation was set for this study in order to allow for saturation, which is the point where the researcher hears nothing new (Stern, 2007).

## Data Collection

The data collection process began with the Resident Director small group interviews. Data triangulation included multiple data sources such as: site documents collected, field notes, reflective memos, and observations. Patton (2002) supports the idea of data triangulation stating that it is a way to ensure findings from the data are credible. Standardized open-ended semi-structured questions were used to ensure consistency and built trust and rapport with all participants by asking the same questions and allowing for conversational discussion, which added rich meaning and depth to their responses (Appendix A). Open-ended questions allowed participants to respond on their own terms, as the questions do not presuppose which dimensions of feeling or thought will be salient for the interviewee (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) emphasizes the importance of informal discussion throughout the interview process stating, that these aspects make the interviewees feel at ease and allow for trust to be established between the researcher and participants. All interviews were audio-recorded, with the permission of the participants, to allow for data transcription, review, reflection, and accuracy of responses.

Data was collected through semi-structured observations as a way of gaining insight to useful pieces of information such as the setting and/or environment of the residential hall and campus community that the Resident Director resided in. The researcher remained aware of their role as the instrument guiding the study and reflection took place throughout and after observations. These observations were to give the researcher an insider understanding of how a particular Resident Director's physical environment may impact their role when encountering a crisis situation (Gibson & Brown, 2009).

Site documents, which included emails, incident reports, and crisis response plans, were collected from those Resident Directors who participated in the study. Only documents relevant to the scope of the research study were reviewed in order to maintain the integrity and confidentiality of those participants. Items were categorized and assembled for coding and all personal information was eliminated from the collected documents. All documents were returned or stored securely after analysis was completed.

Field notes were kept from the small group meetings and after the analysis of site documents. Patton (2002) states that field notes are the most important determinant of qualitative analysis and provide the researcher a description of what has been observed in the study's setting. Additionally, these field notes contain the researcher's own feelings, reactions to the experience, and reflections about the personal meaning and significance of what has been observed (Patton, 2002).

The researcher used reflective, analytical, and method memos to track reflexivity and the role of the researcher as the instrument in the study. Memos and the process of being reflexive involved self-questioning and self-understanding. This process within the research study allowed the inquirer to be attentive and conscious of the narrative, social, and cultural origins of one's own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those Resident Directors interviewed (Patton, 2002).

### Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore how Resident Directors make sense of their professional role and choices when faced with responding to a crisis situation. Data analysis was the process that transformed the small group interviews and site documents collected into

interpreted meanings of the findings (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). The data analysis process defined by Creswell (2009) states that the researcher must 1) organize all the data, 2) read through the data after it has been transcribed, 3) code the data, 4) develop themes, patterns, and categories that emerge, and 5) interpret the findings. This research study generated voluminous amounts of qualitative data that was examined using the five steps outlined above.

All recorded interview responses were transcribed by a professional and once these interviews were transcribed, field notes were typed, and comments from site documents were recorded, the Resident Directors who participated in the study were invited to member check the reported data. Additionally, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions while simultaneously playing the audio recordings to verify accuracy in the typed responses from the small group interviews. Member checking was a way to increase credibility of data and allowed for participants to review and comment on the gathered data and correct, advise, and elaborate on responses given to clarify meaning if necessary.

The coding process of all transcribed data, field and observation notes, and site documents were uploaded into the QSR International NVivo software. Further examination of patterns, themes, and categories emerged from the use of the computer software that utilized axial coding which allowed easy organization and aided in the formation of interpreting data outcomes.

When reading through the transcribed data, the researcher was in search of recurring statements and was coding these statements into interpretable units that relate to the research questions posed for this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1998; Patton, 2002). As initial themes emerged from this process, they were compared and cross-indexed with each of the focus group

interviews. Convergence, the process of determining what statements, phrases, and ideas fit together; took place once developed codes were established (Patton, 2002).

Grouping the coded data were created by inductive inferences (Schwandt, 1997). The inductive inference process is used when qualitative coding is formed from the text of narrative response (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, this process explores and identifies themes based on raw data. Thematic experiences developed from the data collected allowed for broader conceptual dimensions to form, helping the researcher gain meaningful interpretations (Patton, 2002).

The researcher was involved in reflecting on the data to understand how the experience(s) of the Resident Directors came together in a meaningful way, which is known as internal homogeneity (Moustakas, 1995; Patton, 2002). As meaning started to allow for relevant contextual dimensions to take shape when the sources of information become exhausted, to the point where sets of categories and new sources led to redundancy, the data analysis process had concluded. The researcher then attempted to have findings of substantive significance.

### Conclusion

The focus of this study was to explore how Resident Directors perceive their role and make responses when experiencing a crisis situation within the residence halls. The researcher sought what Moustakas (1995) described as the position of being-in, which is described as being an open inquirer leaving feelings, opinions, bias, and context out of the research study. The research questions were defined to provide focus while remaining general to allow for reflexivity. Using a social constructivist approach enabled the researcher to bring meaning to the reported perceptions of Resident Directors who have been part of a critical incident (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participant's world and their environment (residence halls) was entered

contextually, as social constructivist inquiry relies on interpretation and is influenced by the emphasis on the organizational foci, which are the claims, concerns, and issues voiced in responses to the open-ended interview questions (Patton, 2002). Small groups provided the appropriate medium that resulted in the synthesis of constructed knowledge through stories reported, which Reason (2001) describes as especially useful in student affairs research.

Approval of this proposal by the dissertation committee and Institutional Review Board will contribute to the larger field of student affairs research, higher education crisis management and departments of Residential Life. The methodological approach was outlined in this chapter and ensured the research study complied with appropriate ethical guidelines, including those required by law such as consent to participate, explanation of all risks and benefits, and the participant selection process. The following chapters will provide an overview of the results, a comprehensive summary of the findings including implications for Resident Directors and student affairs administrators, along with recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how Resident Directors make sense of their professional role and choices when faced with responding to a crisis situation. The study focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between decision-making and perception of one's professional role during a crisis. The data collection and analysis process used the following research questions to guide the open-ended interviews conducted with the participants:

1. How do Resident Directors perceive their role when involved in a crisis situation?
2. What factors influence Resident Directors responses when experiencing a crisis situation?
3. How do Resident Directors construct and make meaning of an experienced crisis within the residence halls?

A social constructivist approach was used to frame the inductive data analysis. This theoretical orientation allowed the researcher to explore how Resident Directors constructed meaning and conceptualized their own social reality when experiencing a crisis event (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). Their experiences help to fill the existing gap on (1) the types of crises occurring within residence halls, (2) the perceived role of Resident Directors during critical incidents, and (3) the factors influencing decision-making by these Resident Directors.

To organize and comprehend the immense amount of data collected through three separate small group interviews, audio recordings from each site visit were converted to typed transcriptions. These interview responses within the transcriptions were then reviewed multiple

times by the researcher while re-listening to participant responses on the audio recordings in order to begin the data reduction process. Key phrases, ideas, and themes were noted and cross-referenced with handwritten notes. Open coding continued with the addition of triangulating emerging themes and patterns from extracting excerpts from site documents such as: Resident Director incident reports, emergency response manuals, and reflective memos written after the site visits. After utilizing constant comparative analysis techniques, axial coding allowed for more focused themes and grouped ideas to emerge within interpretable units (Patton, 2002).

The sections that follow provide an overview of the participants, institutions they are a part of, and a synthesis of their responses paired with the major themes that emerged to provide the foundation for the conclusions and analysis. The development of themes as described by the voices of the participating Resident Directors provide thick, rich descriptions of how they make sense of an experienced crisis situation. Collected data and results will coincide and relate to the research questions used to guide and inform this study.

### Participants

Nine Resident Directors participated in this qualitative exploratory study from three public universities within the Midwest. Small group interviews were used to collect responses through consistent semi-structured opened ended interview questions (Appendix A). This qualitative research method of using semi-structured interviews was used to determine the essence of the experiences from the participants (Creswell, 2007). Two group interviews were conducted during the fall semester and the last group interview was conducted during the winter semester of the 2012-2013 academic year.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Gender	Age	Yrs. of Experience	Degree
Male	32	7	Bachelor's
Male	38	9	Master's
Female	25	3	Master's
Female	29	5	Master's
Female	25	1.5	Bachelor's
Female	24	1.5	Bachelor's
Male	32	4	Master's
Male	25	3	Bachelor's
Female	25	2	Bachelor's

All of the Resident Directors that participated in the study were full-time live-in administrative professionals at their respective institutions. Gender, age, experience, and degree level varied for all participants allowing for a more representative sample (Table 1).

Group one had four participants, two males and two females. Age ranged between 25 and 38 years old and the range of experience for this group was three to nine years. Three members of the group held master's degrees, while one individual held a bachelor's degree.

Group two had two participants, both of which were female. Age ranged between 25 and 29 years and their experience was the same, both working as a Resident Director for 1.5 years. Both members of the group held a bachelor's degree.

Group three had three participants, two males and one female. Age ranged between 25 and 32 years and range of experience for this group was two to four years. One member of the group held a master's degree, while two participants held bachelor's degrees.

The duration for interviews lasted 75 minutes for group one, 48 minutes for group two, and 58 minutes for group three. All interviews were conducted in private meeting rooms at three separate residential facilities on three separate campuses. The location of the interviews allowed the researcher to see the layout of the facility where the crises described actually took place. The

researcher posed a set of 24 predetermined questions to each small group of Resident Directors (Appendix A). These questions were designed to elicit multiple responses of the realities constructed by the participants and relate implications of those constructions to their professional work and perceived roles through a social constructivist framework (Guba & Lincoln, 1990; Patton, 2002).

Data triangulation and comparative analysis gave way to each of the nine Resident Directors providing rich details when making sense of their professional role and response choices when experiencing a crisis within the residence halls. This resulted in three major themes containing a number of subthemes that relate to the interview questions posed (Table 2).

The major themes and sub-themes that emerged were the following:

- I. Pre-crisis mitigation
  - A. Defining crisis
  - B. Training ambiguity
- II. Active-crisis participation
  - A. Lead as a first-response facilitator
  - B. Leveraging experience
  - C. Assessing safety
  - D. Objective analysis
- III. Post-crisis reflection
  - A. Managing up the chain
  - B. A marginalized voice

Table 2. Major Themes: Crosswalk Table

	Themes		
	Pre-Crisis Mitigation	Active-Crisis Participation	Post-Crisis Reflection
Interview Question #8	X		
Interview Question #6	X		
Interview Question #7	X		
Interview Question #14	X		
Interview Question #12		X	
Interview Question #22		X	
Interview Question #10		X	X
Interview Question #11		X	X
Interview Question #16		X	X
Interview Question #18		X	X
Interview Question #9		X	X
Interview Question #15		X	X
Interview Question #17		X	X
Interview Question #22			X
Interview Question #23			X
Site Document Analysis	X	X	X
Memos	X	X	X

The Resident Directors interviewed articulated thoughts, perceptions, feelings, response choices, and challenges associated with these findings. The next section of this chapter and pages that follow present these data that represents the study in its entirety.

#### Pre-Crisis Mitigation

The first major theme was “Pre-Crisis Mitigation” determined by the participants trying to conceptualize how to define a crisis in terms of their own reality and reflecting on crisis preparation and training. The definition of a crisis and training ambiguity were the designated sub-themes. A number of Resident Directors interviewed stated that, “we always thought an active shooter would be the event we thought of in terms of a crisis but there are smaller incidents, which can still be significant, that take place in our facilities and due to experiencing them they should be classified as a crisis because they are all intense”. All of the professionals

interviewed described crisis events that they had experienced while on the job that had lasting impacts on how they approach their work. As a synthesis of the majority of those interviewed, all of the participants stated that, “these crisis events may be experienced by us for the first time once we are initially exposed to them, but they then become catalogued, which helps us respond more effectively if we were to experience them again”.

In addition to defining a crisis, a number of the participants interviewed exposed limited preparation that takes place for them in the “pre-crisis” phase of mitigation. Only two out of the nine Resident Directors who were interviewed in this study recall any substantive crisis training while they have been on staff. As one Resident Director group reported:

We did have a session a couple of years ago. I don’t remember who the speaker was. I don’t even remember if I really learned anything honestly, but we did have someone talk with us about how to handle active shooters, but that was like two or three years ago.

In general, there was limited direction with regard to extensive crisis planning given to the Resident Directors interviewed for the study and many expressed a sense of vulnerability in their professional role. This prevalent short-coming of “unpreparedness” came about in some of the reflective memos written during the data collection process. An excerpt from one such memo stated:

Suspicion seemed to resonate as all of the participants kept suggesting that they could not initially recall any serious type of crisis training exercise that would be considered “normal” in the profession. As expressions of self-doubt and confusion became apparent on the participants’ faces, an exhaustive examination of university protocol on institutional websites demonstrated no such planning exercises announced or

documented. Additionally, limited information related to crisis was actually publicized on those Residential Life and University Housing websites, as most information just directed the reader to generic institutional operation manuals.

In the next section the sub-themes of “Defining Crisis” and “Training Ambiguity” are discussed in more detail.

### *Defining Crisis*

While discovering how Resident Directors perceive their role and make response choices when experiencing a crisis situation, the data collected revealed how these professionals defined crisis within their own reality. The specific question asked was:

- Can you please describe a crisis that you were directly involved in at this college or university? Please take your time in describing the event.

Crisis events expressed from the participants who experienced them are grouped in sub-categories (Table 3). Mental health issues, specifically suicide attempts by residents, were the most common shared story. Participants shared that, “one residential student had a shunt in their stomach, and this student chose to try to take a book and repeatedly hit their stomach and break their shunt immediately causing great bodily harm”.

The second most common crisis was assault within the residence hall, which included descriptive stories of residents fighting one another with the intent to do great bodily harm and one case that involved a sexual assault. In the specific sexual assault instance the Resident Director interviewed shared, “I found out at one of my hall programs that a resident was raped in

my facility after it was disclosed to me indirectly”. The participant would go on to describe this moment as confusing for something perceived as such a major incident, adding, “she wasn’t sobbing, she wasn’t not talking; she was telling me everything and that threw me off because that’s not what we hear in training”.

Additionally, a facility emergency was mentioned in which a sprinkler system flooded a whole floor of a residence hall causing large amounts of damage to student belongings. In this situation the participant described the event in detail remembering that:

The sprinkler system went off because someone held a lighter to it but nobody from facilities or the residential life staff knew how to turn it off so it was probably going for 30 minutes, which is a lot of water in the building.

The last crisis described compromised young lives, where a death threat was made to youth residents staying on-campus during a summer camp in a specific residential facility. This crisis was described as, “significant, intense, and unique”. This Resident Director stated that, “a summer camp student had received death threats and someone from home was going to come up to campus looking for them”. What transpired was a “lengthy meeting with a bunch of university officials and we had to go into our security alert in which officers were assigned to the residential facilities and a number of others patrolled campus”.

Table 3. Crises Described

Theme	Sub-Category
Mental Health	Suicide Attempts
Assault	Residents Fighting / Battery / Sexual
Facility Emergency	Flood
Compromising Life	Death Threats

### *Training Ambiguity*

Resident Directors are administrative professionals hired in Student Affairs to provide general oversight and are responsible for the students living in their residential facilities. The second portion of the interview intended to gather information about their experience with crisis preparation while being employed as a Resident Director. Some questions asked were:

- Explain if you had any in-depth training exercise on crisis management since becoming a Resident Director?
- Can you describe any type of formal crisis response protocol that your institution has and articulate what the crisis response process is?
- Can you explain how often you consulted another Resident Director during the event or if you referenced any training materials or response plan guidelines?

All of the participants interviewed provided significant and emotional stories when recalling the crises they were part of during their professional tenures, yet eight of the nine interviewed could not describe any serious active crisis training received while in their current role. As one group of Resident Directors expressed, “we haven’t really had significant crisis training, it is more of educating us on whom to contact when we don’t feel safe”. Small training exercises and reviews were mentioned with regards to knowing how to handle mental health issues and who the appropriate contact person was; as one participant said, “We’ve been given some training on how to talk to a student if we think they might kill themselves or hurt themselves”. However, most of the participants suggested that participating in more mock crisis situations, as a department, would be beneficial. One group of Resident Directors interviewed said the following, “I think we received the same level of crisis management training as our Resident Assistants, and that kind of scares me, because we are supposed to know what to do”.

Of those Resident Directors interviewed, the majority believed that they were not the relevant professionals to have formal crisis training. University Police and the administrators to whom they report were labeled as the group needing training experience. All of those interviewed mentioned how important their relationship was in trusting University Police to effectively respond and collaborate with when dealing with a crisis situation. Resident Directors from all three groups described themselves as just trying to “manage the critical incident” and then call “university police and they take it from there”. If time permits depending on the seriousness of the crisis, the majority suggested that they would “call their direct supervisor” while the incident was taking place or immediately after it had concluded.

#### Active-Crisis Participation

The second major theme to manifest within the data collected was “Active-Crisis Participation”. Sub-themes within this major theme were: lead as a first-response facilitator, leveraging experience, assessing safety, and objective analysis. These all provided context to the Resident Directors describing their roles and responsibilities while being immersed within crisis as it was happening. The participants expressed viewing themselves as a first-responder who was trying to,

Extrapolate the facts from fiction, and it starts with the phone call from our staff or a situation that we observe in which we are just trying to observe, figure out the initial details, assess my own safety, and then start calling those staff and/or administrators that need to be aware or can assist me.

Additionally, on-the-job experience played a critical role in being able to identify the crisis and effectively respond to it. As one Resident Director interviewed stated,

It is beneficial to have experience in this role because those of us who have worked in residential life long enough don't need a manual or a flip chart because we know what to do in most cases if the crisis event is familiar to us.

However, those who were novices in their Resident Director roles expressed comments such as "confusion" and "surprised". One less experienced participant said,

Those of us who are new to the position do not really know what to expect regardless of the training, because your role is so different once you experience a chaotic residential hall crisis those first few weeks on the job.

Analyzed cite documentation from one such crisis, in this case a flood caused by the sprinkler system, was analyzed further through the institutional incident report. The documentation went on to state:

I became notified that a sprinkler head had malfunctioned in my facility. After alerting the residents at 0815 that they needed to vacate some of the corresponding rooms, it was unclear who to contact. I tried to contact campus facilities, but the current contact number just gives me the general line which is operational during university business hours. Since this is still Week 1 for me on the job, I also contacted (Resident Director #2) to help assist me. Subsequently, campus police were notified, who then were able to reach the main campus on-call facilities staff. Please note additional follow-up as this information is needed for future incidents.

The participant went on to state that, “those of us within the profession become better Resident Directors, especially when it comes to handling a crisis, once we become exposed to these types of events and have experience.... We understand so much more now”.

#### *Lead as a First-Response Facilitator*

A variety of comments were generated when responding to an interview question on what they (Resident Director) thought their role was when responding to the crisis event described. This section of the interview was designed to answer one of the primary research questions: How do Resident Directors perceive their role when involved in a crisis situation? Questions from the semi-standardized interview framing this included the following:

- Can you elaborate on what you felt your role was during the crisis event?
- In evaluating your response to the crisis did at any point you think about how it would affect your role at the institution or within your department? Please explain.

The data was saturated with responses from all three groups related to remaining calm, observing what was or is happening, listening to those involved, and then becoming the first-responding facilitator. A synthesis of the Resident Directors responses is articulated by the statement from members of group three that, “their role is not to solve the crisis but getting the right people and personnel all the information they need to know in order to effectively resolve the crisis”.

Resident Directors from group one suggested that action and response was always described as “triaging” when discussing their role. “First, we make sense of what is going on,

then assess the crisis situation, and then lastly, start making phone calls to those administrators who are really in charge”. All three groups insisted that they “serve as a connector to the other resources that were needed in order to get the right people on site”. One Resident Director offered the following,

Ultimately, it is just us trying to recognize the issue, while dealing with it in the most proactive possible way; which is either start barking out orders or get on the phone to those support services needed, those being the police or ambulance.

Groups two and three started self-identifying as “efficient organizers”. Resident Directors of group three placed emphasis on being “fluid” and “flexible”, generalizing that the role of a Resident Director experiencing a crisis changes depending on the environment and what is happening, ultimately affecting response behavior.

This finding challenged some of the researcher’s assumptions of how Resident Directors perceived their role during a crisis and analysis drew upon this study’s corresponding theoretical orientation. The following excerpt from an analytical memo describes this further by stating:

Upon reflecting on all of the interviews conducted, it was expected that these participants would tend to view themselves as leaders, especially with regard to responding to a crisis. Contradiction was at play with some general assumptions made about these professionals, with all of them describing their role as a communicator, facilitator, organizer...with leader not mentioned. These data support the use of social constructivism even further as these Resident Directors really are constructing their own reality and defining their experiences differently from what others (those who work with them as colleagues / professionals) might think. For example and to expand on this, one might see an empty beer bottle as simply that, a container holding a liquid to drink, but someone else might

view that bottle as a vase or a decoration. General defined realities are influenced by a number of factors, all of which determine how we perceive experiences.

### *Leveraging Experience*

The theme of “Leveraging Experience” materialized from a combination of coding individual responses provided by participants to the open-ended questions while cross-referencing reflective memos conducted by the researcher after separate site visits. A deeper level of contextual meaning was discovered when searching to answer another research question framing the study: What factors influence Resident Directors responses when experiencing a crisis situation? What was discovered is that Resident Directors make sense of their response choices through mentally assessing the crisis event once they arrive to the initial scene in order to see, feel, and listen to what is transpiring. Sample questions to gain additional insight from the participants included:

- What steps did you take to seek out information during the crisis response process?
- Describe your own decision-making process when the crisis event was taking place?
- Could you explain if the type or timing of crisis impacted your decision-making?
- Can you describe if you felt that you could control the outcome of the crisis with your decision-making?

The subtheme of “leveraging experience” was exposed through the participants’ categorizing these crisis events while working in some capacity of Residential Life. Group one made sense of this step within the response process as once safety is determined, then you start to

make “decisions” based on past experiences. In other words, the crisis then dictates the response. Resident Directors shared how they have techniques and plans for responding to a mental health issue versus an assault versus a facility emergency. A synthesis of all the respondents to support these remarks would be, “we are just trying to identify what the crisis is early into our assessment when responding; and then how to appropriately deal with it immediately with the most efficient use of resources available”.

Trouble and inefficiency started to become emphasized if the crisis experienced could not be categorized into a previous experience. According to all of the Resident Directors interviewed, this occurs frequently when a “new staff member is hired and they do not have a lot of previous professional experience or even worked in Residential Life”. Synthesis from group one and two expressed that once you arrive and do not have the experience or are not familiar with the crisis, “panic, confusion, nervousness, limited communication, and a general sense of chaos” can start to occur. They went on to state that this can be circumvented if these new Resident Directors with limited experience relied on more experienced staff (i.e. a tenured Resident Director) or the University Police when incidents occur so they can assess and experience the crisis as a team in certain scenarios.

### *Assessing Safety*

Resident Directors from all three groups lamented on the importance of assessing the levels of safety upon experiencing any described crisis event. “Vigilance” and using “caution” were the terms most prevalent when coding responses, which also matched the first disclaimer of the crisis / emergency protocol and plans that all of the institutions had established. While

triangulation occurred, cite documents supported this notion of safety at an institutional level, with each website stating something similar to the following:

When responding please exercise caution and safety for the best interest of yourself and those groups involved in the crisis / emergency situation. Use appropriate safety measures to contact all university support resources and recognize the importance of avoiding panic, anxiety, and speaking with one organized voice.

During one group interview a participant expressed what is on the forefront on his mind in any situation saying, “for me, ultimately in any situation, I am always going to evaluate safety, for my own sake, my staff, and for the other residents involved”. Another participant in the same small group interview said, “every situation is different, yet the approach remains the same: as we assess for safety and adapt accordingly, trusting our instincts and never relaxing until we are in control of the crisis situation”. This response generated follow-up statements by other Resident Directors being interviewed setting off a feeling of uneasiness, many of them saying,

We never know what lies on the other side of that door or what type of student we are going to come in contact with...they could have a gun, a knife, or be looking to fight; this is all a part of our job.

While emphasis was on assessing safety, a substantial time period exists when ambiguity does occur when responding to the critical event. This could be attributed to the effect environment, in this case the residential hall, has when responding. The participants suggested, “we cannot start assessing until we see the complete situation, which can be difficult when called to a room because the unit door acts as a natural barrier with the unknown happening on the other side”. Once they do make first contact with the individuals involved, the first statement/question from every participant interviewed was asking “is everyone okay?”

### *Objective Analysis*

The subtheme of objective analysis became an apparent and distinct factor when exploring the interview responses to the questions about crisis response choices and decision-making. All three groups expressed the salient point of “not jumping to conclusions or making any type of judgment, until you can make the most sense of what is going on in the moment”. Additionally, the term “objective” came up at every interview session as something that is necessary and a challenge. A number of participants stated that, “responding to these crisis situations can be hard, and you can make the wrong decisions because we see these students and form relationships with them every day”. Thus, making response choices is difficult at times because “you know them [students] on another level, something different than those who may see them around campus and our decisions and responses could have a significant impact on their well-being and whether or not they continue at our institution”.

Lastly, participants of all three groups stated that, as first responders, they could clear their head and make better rational decisions “when they encountered a crisis with an objective sense of mind”. One Resident Director shared that, “I think assessing the situation objectively is one of the most important concepts to keep in mind; really figuring it out and not prematurely interpreting anything”. This was juxtaposed against the other end of the continuum, which was being subjective and letting feelings take control of the situation when responding; this often resulted in the following remark: “Once we (Resident Directors) assume the worst or fear the worst, we become emotionally frozen and not helpful in these types of situations impeding our ability to respond effectively”.

## Post-Crisis Reflection

The theme of “Post-Crisis Reflection,” emerged as Resident Directors began to examine the latter stages of how they were constructing and making meaning of their response choice process. The following distinct sub-themes became apparent: Managing up the chain and this notion of having a marginalized voice. Many of the supporting statements to follow are related to rationalizing “who” and “when” to follow – up once the crisis has been experienced. Additionally, an epiphany of resentment and truth became pervasive when trying to grasp how frustrated they all were when trying to have their voice, ideas, and decisions taken seriously by those in executive roles and even direct supervisors.

When discussing how they started to make meaning of these situations when they were together in groups, all of them stated that: “post-crisis follow-up is always a crucial piece in the decision making process”, oftentimes because it brings closure to the event. However, there can be some significant challenges within this step of the response process. Seven out of the nine Resident Directors interviewed stated that, “the most important step of the post-crisis management process is follow-up but I am often unsure about when that should take place”. In two group discussions at separate site visits, the Resident Directors often shared feelings of uncertainty when trying to describe the follow-up stage. “We often struggle in the decision-making process if this is something a supervisor needs to know tonight, or can it wait until the morning?” Many of the participants became uncomfortable because of the inconsistencies and lack of clarity. All three groups shared that, “there have been crisis situations where we did not call and the supervisor wanted us to call and then the next time we did call, they did not want us to call”. Questions of when to follow-up are often dependent on the timing of the crisis event. The participants exhaustively shared that, “often these events occur at 4 or 5 a.m. and we do not

know if we should call then or if it can wait until our boss gets in at 8 a.m.” A number of participants from all three groups suggested that, “sometimes it is easier to go to one of my experienced peers than to wake my boss up in the middle of the night.”

Many of the groups expressed frustration with the follow-up reporting and discussion which takes place with their supervisor. All nine Resident Directors emphasized the importance of talking about the crisis afterwards with other colleagues especially those Resident Directors they work with because,

It exposes them to the crisis even though they were not a part of it and we can debrief and hear their thoughts on how they would have handled it and if they thought the actions taken were appropriate and acceptable.

Generally, this was the only type of follow-up forum that took place. As a whole, the participants would welcome “opportunities to discuss the crisis event further with their supervisor and colleagues in a group setting because this could provide a valuable learning / training experience”. It became apparent that just having the reported follow-up, which often comes in the form of an incident report, is the norm at these institutions; however, reflection and a debriefing session with a larger group of the professional staff would be largely beneficial if done more often.

### *Managing up the Chain*

When analyzing the data it became evident that when Resident Directors encounter a crisis, communicating to their Director was always extremely important and a priority. The theme of “Managing up the Chain” surfaced as the Resident Directors began to discuss how they made sense and began to construct meaning after they encountered a crisis event. When

deconstructing the experience, all of the participants described their main obligation of duties as the first responder who had the responsibility to communicate with their superiors about what was transpiring. The Resident Directors represented in this section tended to be in conflict with themselves about the purpose and timing of “Managing up the Chain” while trying to understand this reality within experiencing a crisis. Some questions that were asked to frame these responses were:

- How did you feel when the crisis was taking place?
- How did the crisis experienced impact you as a professional?
- Were there any specific consequences you were concerned about when formulating your responses?
- Upon reflecting on the crisis described, please share your thoughts on what you learned as a Resident Director throughout the process?

Minimizing involvement came to illustrate some of the challenges associated with “Managing up the Chain”. The terms, “tough, challenging, and barrier” were frequently used by participants in all three groups when describing and discussing the process of communicating the crisis event to their Director or others who were higher-ranking than them in the organizational chart. Groups one and two described themselves having a difficult time stating, “being the first responder we have to gather information, because our bosses are going to want to know what is happening.” This often leads to us “becoming air traffic controllers because the space starts

filling up with University Police staff, our administrators, facilities staff, and EMS personnel.”

Participants of group two stated that,

When you are trying to control the situation, it does not help when you are filling the situation with useless help... I know individuals have to be there and want to be filled in on the crisis or critical incident but they just begin to hover and really do not need to be present.

Resident Directors interviewed from group three reaffirmed this belief by emphasizing that, “one of my biggest challenges is really dealing with people just hanging around when the crisis takes place and more often than not they end up getting in the way.”

Participants of group one discussed the implications of effective mitigation when their superiors trusted them to handle the crisis situation, even after being notified. This group shared that, “we have witnessed the higher-ups arrive and be on their phones to continually communicate to those staff and administrators who need to know, but they will generally still let us run the show.” This was attributed to those superiors not really being immersed in the situation and not dealing with the initial emergency because after they arrive, the crisis has generally moved into the latter stages of development or has concluded. Additionally, participants in group one suggested that limiting supervisor involvement can happen through them recognizing that “we (Resident Directors) have the trust of the student, just by them knowing our faces and having a relationship with us, because living in the same facility as them enhances the chances of the crisis coming to a positive resolution.”

### *Marginalized Voice*

The “Marginalized Voice” subtheme materialized as the Resident Directors were reflecting on how they felt when trying to manage the crisis and report up the chain of bureaucratic command. In the context of trying to manage the scenario in the best way possible given the circumstances, policy and decisions are often made after the fact from a single report without supervisors reaching out for additional input. When asked about challenges experienced after the crisis situation, when following-up with their supervisors, many answered with responses like, “We get frustrated with the due process, when others who we report to do not listen to what we have to say.” Others went on to state that,

They (supervisors) feel like a decision cannot be made right away, or at least until others are contacted and they tell us this has to wait until tomorrow, but they are not the first responder dealing with the crisis right here and right now.

Participants from group one felt concerned that their voices were being marginalized when dealing with the crises that take place within the residence halls. Many stated that, “we were kind of frustrated and felt like we were not being heard.” This feeling of not being heard, lead to the Resident Directors questioning their ability to control and impact the outcomes of an experienced crisis. They went on to say, “sometimes I do wonder if they are going to value our thoughts? Are the senior administrators going to take us seriously? Is this happening just because we are just Resident Directors?” Self-efficacy and the belief in the crisis response process was compromised and questioned for a number of participants.

Another group of participants stated that as, “we aspire to move up in administration, we will not take for granted or forget the individuals who are on the front lines and are the first responders.” Many suggested the importance of hearing from those employees who deal with

these types of events on a week-to-week basis. Those interviewed at all three institutions went on to state that “some administrators tend to forget what it was like to be the front-line first responder or they were never that person, which can be a substantial challenge.”

### Summary

A number of major themes emerged from the data collected, which support how Resident Directors perceive their role and make response choices when experiencing a crisis situation. The first theme, “Pre-Crisis Mitigation”, surfaced as participants made contextual sense of how they define crisis they have experienced and also the perceived impact preparation and training has on their ability to effectively respond to these crises. Mental health issues, assaults, death threats, suicide attempts, and facility emergencies were referenced in detail as crises that were experienced within the residential facilities. Overarching sub-themes that manifested were these notions of: defining a crisis within the residence hall and training ambiguity.

The second major theme identified was “Active-Crisis Participation”, which offered insight to how the participants made sense of their role and organized themselves when actively encountering and becoming a part of the crisis event. There were a variety of factors that had implications associated with this major theme found within the analysis. In a sense, these factors became outcomes, which surfaced as the underlying sub-themes, those being: first-response facilitators, leveraging one’s professional experience, assessing safety, and this idea of objective analysis. All of these sub-themes revealed deeper layers of analysis that fit together with those Resident Directors perspectives of expressing what they believe are their constructed reality when engaging with a crisis.

The third major theme was “Post-Crisis Reflection” and it became prevalent as participants came to understand how they interpreted the crisis event while reflecting on their initial assessment. Often this assessment and reflection guided a majority of the post-crisis reporting and follow-up. Salient sub-themes were identified as: managing up the chain and the abstract concept of having a marginalized voice. These sub-themes were rooted in progressive reflective sense making and associated feelings of responsibility toward departmental policy and supervisor support. Many of those interviewed were in conflict with themselves when describing the consequences and challenges that occur when trying to make sense of a crisis situation after it had concluded.

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the results exploring how Resident Directors perceive their role and make response choices when experiencing a crisis situation. The following chapter will provide conclusions, interpretations of the results, and implications to consider for further study.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the purpose, methodology, interpretation of findings, and significance of this study. The sections that follow include a detailed summary, recommendations and implications for practice, and conclude with suggestions for future research.

The purpose of this proposed study was to explore how Resident Directors make sense of their professional role and choices when faced with responding to a crisis. The focus of this study looked to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between decision-making and perception of one's professional role during a crisis. Crises that took place within the residence halls were examined through a social constructivist theoretical framework. All participants were full-time, live on, Resident Directors who worked at higher education institutions in the Midwest, offering perspectives on how they defined reality when experiencing a crisis situation. The following three research questions provided the foundation and were used to guide the study:

1. How do Resident Directors perceive their role when involved in a crisis situation?
2. What factors influence Resident Directors responses when experiencing a crisis situation?
3. How do Resident Directors construct and make meaning of an experienced crisis within the residence halls?

## Overview of the Methodology

A qualitative research design, framed through social constructivism was employed for collecting and reporting data. Rich, descriptive, and meaningful data emerged as Resident Directors responded to a series of open-ended semi-structured interview questions. It was intended that the participants would provide detailed and thoughtful feedback about their lived experiences and constructed realities. Supporting data was found through triangulation, after text analysis took place when examining institutional crisis response plans along with supplemental Resident Director incident reports. Nine Resident Directors participated in the study from December 2012 through February 2013. All interviews, along with supplemental data, were transcribed and then coded. The following is a summary of the salient findings as they relate to research questions posed.

## Summary of the Findings

The first research question posed how do Resident Directors perceive their role when involved in a crisis situation?

- Analysis of data collection related to this research question manifested into a major theme within the findings titled “Active-Crisis Participation.” Participants described and defined their primary role as a first-response facilitator.
- The first-response facilitator role was one in which, once a Resident Director experienced the crisis event, they viewed themselves as the professional who needed to observe and make sense of what was happening. Also, it was their responsibility to relay information to those who could start helping right away

(campus police, counseling services, additional Resident Directors, etc.) or communicate with supervisors who could start making decisions.

- The participants talked about managing through the different phases of communication and decision-making. Often described as triaging, this technique engages the appropriate stakeholders involved to maximize safety while minimizing ambiguity and confusion.

The second research question sought to explore what factors influence Resident Directors responses when experiencing a crisis situation.

- Participants stressed the importance of leveraging their own professional experience in the midst of making decisions during a crisis.
- The feeling was that professional experience mattered and became pertinent in compartmentalizing response choices, because certain “correct” decisions become natural and instinctive if you have experienced or recognized the crisis event before.
- Any response choices made, either prior, during, or after the crisis, expressed safety as the most important underlying priority and it was at the forefront of every participant’s mind when making decisions.
- How the participants viewed their own role when making response choices, both within the department and on the professional hierarchy, was critical. Resident Directors within perceived leadership positions or who had the most experience often trusted their own instincts and felt comfortable making decisions when it

came to crisis mitigation. However, newly hired professionals who were interviewed often deferred to their supervisor or a more tenured Resident Director on staff when trying to make sense of how to respond.

The third research question examined, how do Resident Directors construct and make meaning of an experienced crisis within the residence halls?

- Descriptions of crisis events brought about intense stories of reflection from the participants detailing crisis events that fell into categories of mental health issues, sexual and physical student-on-student assaults, and facility emergencies.
- Attention was brought to events defined as crisis relevant to the residential facilities; however, the affects extended through the campus community, having an impact on multiple institutional departments and constituents.
- Post-crisis follow up and communication played one of the most considerable and larger roles when making meaning of the crisis. This often brought closure to the emotional and dramatic event experienced. Additionally, if the follow-up was executed properly and efficiently, Residential Life departments could use these real life case studies as an educational tool for training exercises in the future. Discussion following the event with other staff often generated a revision or analysis of current institutional crisis policy.
- Larger implications to the profession and field were exposed after the participants were able to articulate how they constructed and made meaning of the crisis events they described. Many highlighted reform with regard to crisis training,

reporting, and governance. New initiatives were brought forth to properly define levels of crises in the context of Resident Directors working as student affairs professionals in Residential Life departments.

### Interpretations of the Findings

The results from this study suggest substantial ambiguity exists with regard to how Resident Directors perceive their role and make response choices when experiencing a crisis situation. However, the data revealed that strategic reflection, training exercises, and communication plans could provide effective crisis mitigation and response plans, specific to residential facilities that could be incorporated into an institution's larger existing crisis response/emergency planning policies. This reflects the existing gap occurring within the literature corroborating findings that tout a lack of research with regards to emphasis on crises within the residence halls (Dolan, 2006; Piortrowski & Guyette, 2009; Weisenbach-Keller, Hughes, & Hertz, 2011).

Findings from this research exacerbate the need for Resident Directors, especially those with limited professional experience, to receive practical and intentional crisis related training exercises throughout the academic year. These comprehensive planning sessions should include appropriate attention to the types of decisions made as one moves through the different phases of response; those including pre-crisis mitigation, active-crisis participation, and post-crisis reflection which are identified in the findings.

Risk, safety, decisiveness, efficiency, and triaging were key words that kept being voiced, essentially becoming the mantra of the participants when describing how they made meaning and sense of encountering a crisis in the residence halls. Across the data, especially responses to the

open-ended questions, found an inherent connection between a Resident Director's experience and whether or not they have processed the responses associated with being involved in a crisis they have encountered in the past. Those respondents with large amounts of experience tended to describe having an intuitive approach when making sense of the critical incident, which often dictated how they responded. It was described as rudimentary and processed, engrained in an established mental model. Senelick (2012) describes this intuitive approach as automatic, and something that occurs on an unconscious level. Participants in the study who were found using this intuitive approach tended to feel more comfortable and less anxious when making responses. Although effective, these specific intuitive diagnoses and responses can fail to consider other possibilities that could affect the crisis.

Findings suggest that a deeper level of cognitive analysis takes place when the participants start to make sense of their response choices when experiencing a crisis. Research conducted by Dieter and Pearlman (1998) identified that crises do not happen in a vacuum but rather are shaped by cultural, social, and environmental notions that shape the outcome of the event. This led to the creation of the crisis in context theory (CCT), which frames this study. Participants provided insight related to how crisis was influenced by factors (cultural, social, and environmental) associated with CCT, which ultimately assisted them in the construction of rote mental response models. To elaborate on this Burns (2000) described mental models as, adapted belief constructs used to predict decisions and behavior within an encountered situation. Described here is what was transpiring with those more experienced Resident Directors when they faced a crisis. Largely, the opposite manifested when those less experienced Resident Directors (within their 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> year of employment) tried to define and describe their

appropriate response choice and decision-making when rationalizing their experiences. This could be attributed to the limited professional knowledge established to create those relevant mental models, which could be useful in choosing an appropriate course of action when responding to a crisis as a Resident Director.

Previous research fails to explore the role of the Resident Director and how they construct their own identity and view themselves as working professionals. Novak (2008) lamented that as the residence hall construction boom took place throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, emphasis was placed on staffing these facilities with professionals to provide educational components and general supervision for the students they served. Resident Directors who participated in this study reflected on their role and revealed that they define their role as a first-response facilitator that triage crisis response through objective analysis.

Through this study, cognitive maturity and identity began to emerge and surface as the participants did not view themselves as leaders or those who were deemed in charge when responding to the crisis, but more of a communicator. As one participant shared, “I feel as though I am the air traffic controller in student affairs when a crisis takes place”. Baxter-Magolda and King (2004) described this process as constructed self-identity, in which the capacity exists to internally define a coherent belief system. This level of understanding and defining the perceived professional role of a Resident Director experiencing a crisis suggests a paradigm shift from just educator and supervisor, to a more expanded intrapersonal foundation of identity.

## Recommendations for Theory & Practice

Crises at colleges and universities have become an unfortunate reality and area of focus in higher education. Hale, Hale, and Dulek (2006) stated that speculative training models and anecdotal response methods exist for Resident Directors engaging in critical incidents taking place throughout residence halls on-campus. This study was an attempt to address this gap in the literature. The following provides an overview for recommendations and suggested crisis response planning reform for those practitioners who are aspiring or working Resident Directors.

Institutions that were part of this study all had published documents included on their websites and ancillary handouts that provided a comprehensive overview of crisis management plans. However, only two of the participants interviewed for this study can remember actually taking part in a significant training exercise while they have been employed. Institutional leaders, from across multiple departments on campus, should be charged with developing and maintaining effective crisis educational and training exercises throughout each academic year. Additionally, published materials should be checked periodically to ensure all of the information, guidelines, contact numbers, and policies are accurate for each institution.

A number of crises that take place in the residential facilities can be unique, and the participants discussed how they define and perceive crisis. Levels of readiness have to be established for the multiple categories that crises can fall into along with the continuum of different phases experienced, those being, pre-crisis mitigation, active-crisis participation, and

post-crisis reflection, all of which the Resident Directors may encounter. It may be unlikely for Residential Life departments to develop response and contingency plans for every crisis situation; however, being aware, documenting, cataloging, and training for unique instances has potential impacts and could reduce risks while also eliminating larger consequences associated with a crisis.

Risk assessment committees and multi-departmental crisis response teams have been assembled to become more proactive and were often used to handle and make decisions regarding campus crises. What must not be lost in thinking about who should be at the crisis decision-making table are those first-responders. This is often the Resident Directors who know the individual(s) and context of each situation on a deeper level than those senior student affairs officials, campus police officers, and executive university administrators. Those that participated in the study expressed frustration when trying to manage the crisis situation, conveying confusion and resentment when discussing how they felt when their opinions and voices were not heard, even though they had the most familiarity and experience with the crisis. This notion of the Resident Director having a marginalized voice became extremely prevalent, and acknowledged the need for them to be an intricate and formidable member of institutional crisis planning committees, where their ideas would be valued and decisions embraced.

Lastly, as a means to adequately prepare newly hired Resident Directors with limited professional experiences, it should be noted that they need continual support from their supervisors and those most tenured Resident Directors. As Belch and Mueller (2003) state, Residence Life positions, and specifically Resident Director jobs are considered the entry point for new professionals working in college and university student affairs divisions. Substantial burden is placed on these professionals, as they serve as the supervisors to countless students

living on campus. Executive administrators who oversee these professionals need to resist the urge to simply limit crisis training and adopt a uniform and comprehensive support model enabling those less experienced Resident Directors to feel confident when experiencing and making response choices during a critical incident. With this will come inherent benefits, such as increased crisis readiness, less anxiety and confusion, and proactive experiential professional development opportunities when ongoing attention and support across the broad spectrum is given to new Resident Director hires. The question that needs to be answered is: can we teach novices to think from an expert's perspective without experience? Additional thoughts and discussions should revolve around Resident Directors needing some prior experience as a Resident Assistant, Graduate Assistant Hall Manager, or even some level of apprenticeship so they can become more experienced and acclimated to the demands and challenges they will encounter. This fundamental baseline knowledge is necessary to bridge the novice gap towards becoming more of a professional. Reframing institutional policy and critically examining professional staff training can impact productive behavior and decisions made by those first responders.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on exploring how Resident Directors perceive their role and make response choices when experiencing a crisis. Underlying questions have risen due to a deeper examination of the crux of this research, which is further understanding the relationship between decision-making and the perception of one's professional role during a crisis. A number of suggestions for additional research have emerged and will be explained in this section.

Although this study utilized a sampling of higher education institutions in the Midwest, further replication of this study extending to a variety of residential post-secondary institutions, both domestic and abroad, should be made to expand the sample size of Resident Directors that participate. It would be beneficial to further validate the espoused meanings that were revealed related to decision-making and the perceived role of Resident Directors at other institutions. Expanding that data set to include institutions with a variety of staff reporting structures should be incorporated to see if complex hierarchies or simple and small organizational charts have any affect on the participants' perceived role and response choice autonomy.

This study specifically explored the perceptions of Resident Directors who experience a crisis situation in their residence halls. While the data revealed that this group has significant involvement in the crisis response process, it was apparent and acknowledged that meaningful university constituents and stakeholders play a vital role in crisis management planning, response, and mitigation. Future research should explore additional departments, divisions, and groups of employees such as: Resident assistants, campus police, academic affairs offices, campus facilities departments, governing boards of our colleges and universities, and even those students who occupy and live in these residence halls as additional comparison groups and to supplement the results for this study. Perspectives from these collaborating partners could add new rich data and uncover deeper levels of understanding and meaning related to how institutions make sense of crises that take place within the campus community.

Post-secondary institutions have been scrutinized by government, the general public, and the students they serve. Protecting institutional assets and reputation has led to a number of colleges and universities to invest in establishing general counsel departments to represent them when litigation arises. Institutional liability and risk management related to higher education

crisis is an arena that needs more study and additional attention. Recommendations could provide strategic direction for members of university counsel exploring the challenges associated with ambiguity surrounding these critical incidents involving students on-campus.

Vigilance should be given when generalizing findings to residential post-secondary institutions employing Resident Directors. While participants in this study were live-on professional staff, a number of institutions contract services out to third party professionals along with some staffing models that do not require Resident Directors to live in the residence halls. Further exploration is needed with these groups to provide answers to effectiveness in crisis response and perception of one's professional role when trying to make interpretations of the findings.

Finally, this study depended on semi-structured open-ended questions, which placed a large burden on the knowledge of those Resident Directors who participated in the study. Although responses paralleled supporting information that was allowed for the researcher to include in the data, additional supporting site documentation, such as police reports and responses from the students involved in these crises could provide a more robust data set that could have implications for institutional practice, policy, and response. Layers of context and review of additional supporting data collected over a series of years would help shed light on some longitudinal trends established in the field. This could help with building a framework of understanding for the types of crisis taking place within residence halls on campus that Resident Directors will come to experience.

## Conclusion

This study addressed the need for research regarding how Resident Directors experience a crisis situation and provides contributions to the scholarly literature on this topic and informs the Student Affairs practice. As noted by Weisenbach-Keller, Hughes, and Hertz (2011), an absence of research exists with regard to emphasis on crises taking place in residence halls and appropriate methods in which to respond. This has led to questionable response techniques and increased risks that compromise those professionals who staff these facilities and the students they serve. This research has demonstrated that appropriate methods and training exercises can be implemented for Resident Directors who experience crisis within these complex, often decentralized operating environments of post-secondary institutions.

The following three research questions were used to frame this study:

1. How do Resident Directors perceive their role when involved in a crisis situation?
2. What factors influence Resident Directors responses when experiencing a crisis situation?
3. How do Resident Directors construct and make meaning of an experienced crisis within the residence halls?

As Resident Directors are considered the professional staff managing the residence halls, there needs to be an understanding of the foreseeable complex critical incidents encountered while fulfilling their job responsibilities. This study revealed that crisis takes place frequently and to effectively manage and respond, those Resident Directors have acutely defined their role under these circumstances. These professionals become a first-response facilitator and arbiter of all communication that takes place with university officials when encountering a crisis.

Spontaneous decisions need to be made, and that often includes contacting the appropriate public safety and emergency personnel needed to assist in mitigating the crisis. Effective triaging of these responses when taking on the role of a facilitator becomes critical in minimizing risks and limiting negative outcomes.

The second research question sought the factors influencing Resident Directors responses when experiencing a crisis. Professionals taking on the RD role must consider safety and level of severity of the crisis when responding accordingly. Professional experience was a salient factor and determined if a Resident Director could respond intuitively to the crisis and impacted decision-making when dealing with the crisis. Cognitive recognition and the ability to categorize the crisis from a tangible mental model they had experienced prior determined sense-making and response steps. Additional relevant training exercises that take place frequently and the ability to debrief with senior administrators and other Resident Directors on topics surrounding crisis in residence halls needs to be considered. Institutional policy and employee consequences associated with liability or risks for responding to crisis should to be explored further, as these factors were found to guide response.

The final research question asked how Resident Directors construct and make meaning of an experienced crisis within the residence halls? Participants articulated that crisis within these facilities on-campus cannot be categorized, therefore limiting structured crisis response models. However, it was prominently discussed that new learning occurs for both the professional and those university personnel involved in crisis, and this learning can become profound if packaged in a way that structured reflection and strategic development can take place through these instances. There is no doubt these professionals valued their work and are soliciting respect and support from the institutions they are a part of in making crisis response a campus community

priority. As the role of Resident Directors continue to evolve, it is important to keep exploring the scholarly work associated with crises and the Student Affairs profession.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### STANDARDIZED OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Participant Information**

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is the highest degree you have completed?
4. How many years have you been a Resident Director?
5. How many staff members and residents are your responsible for?

#### **Crisis Information**

6. Explain if you had any in-depth training exercise on crisis management since becoming a Resident Director?
7. Can you describe any type of formal crisis response protocol that your institution has and articulate what the crisis response process is?
8. Can you please describe a crisis that you were directly involved in at this college or university? Please take your time in describing the event.
9. How did you feel when that crisis was taking place?
10. What steps did you take to seek out information during the crisis response process?
11. Describe your own decision-making process when the crisis event was taking place?
12. Can you elaborate on what you felt your role was during the crisis event?
13. Please describe your own behavior while the crisis was taking place?
14. Can you explain how often you consulted another Resident Director during the event or if you referenced any training materials or response plan guidelines?
15. How did this crisis impact you as a professional?
16. Could you explain if the type or timing of crisis impacted your decision-making?
17. What were the specific consequences you were concerned about in formulating your response to the crisis?
18. Can you describe if you felt that you could control the outcome of the crisis with your decision-making?
19. In choosing your response did you feel you had enough time to making your decision? Is this supported by your superiors?

20. Explain any challenges to effective crisis response when mitigating these types of situations within the residential facilities?
21. Please discuss if you felt in control of the outcomes based on your decisions?
22. In evaluating your response to the crisis did at any point you think about how it would affect your role at the institution or within your department? Please explain.
23. Upon reflecting on the crisis described please share your thoughts on what you learned as a Resident Director throughout the process?
24. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

ADULT CONSENT FORM



**Study Title:** An Exploration of How Resident Directors Perceive Their Role and Make Response Choices during a Crisis Situation: A Qualitative Study

Research Investigators' Names and Departments:

Nick Wagner  
Doctoral Candidate  
Central Michigan University  
Phone: 989-964-2468  
[Wagne1nj@cmich.edu](mailto:Wagne1nj@cmich.edu)

Dr. Anne Hornak  
Department of Educational Leadership  
Central Michigan University  
Phone: 989-774-2215  
[Horna1am@cmich.edu](mailto:Horna1am@cmich.edu)

**Introductory Statement:** This study is intended to explore how Resident Directors perceive their role and make response choices when experiencing a crisis situation. You are invited, as a participant, to take part in this research, and will be asked to respond to several standard open-ended interview questions in a small group. As the primary investigator of this research project, I will be available to answer any questions you may have at this time or throughout the study.

**What is the purpose of this study?** The study involves research and the purpose is to understand how Resident Directors, within the field of Student Affairs perceive and make meaning of their role when they have encountered a crisis situation. Responses given will hopefully articulate how they reached decisions during the experienced incident and might provide implications for how crises in defined within Residential Life, how to manage crisis effectively in the residence halls, and if there are any current challenges when responding to crisis in this type of professional role

**What will I do in this study?** As a participant in this research study, you will be asked a series of standardized open-ended questions amongst a group of 3-5 other Resident Directors. Your responses will remain completely confidential and anonymous. All interview responses will be audio recorded.

**How long will it take me to do this?** The interview should last about 90 – 120 minutes.

**Are there any risks of participating in the study?** The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study.

**What are the benefits of participating in the study?** There are no inherent benefits to you for participating in the research but your responses will benefit the field of crisis management and departments of residential life and housing within higher education.

**Will anyone know what I do or say in this study (Confidentiality)?** Only the researcher and professional transcriber will have access to research results and data collected. No identifiable information will be collected from the participant and no identifiable responses will be presented in the published dissertation of this study. All data reported and/or described will be a synthesis of group responses and no exact remarks by individuals will be quoted in the study. In all other instances, any data under the investigator's control will, if disclosed, be presented in a manner that does not reveal the subject's identity, except as may be required by law. All data will be stored in a secure location only accessible by the principal researcher. At the end of the study, all records including audio recordings will be destroyed.

**Will I receive any compensation for participation?** There will be no compensation or incentives provided for participating in the study.

**Is there a different way for me to receive this compensation or the benefits of this study?** No, there is not a different way for you to receive compensation or benefits for this research study.

**Who can I contact for information about this study?** Please contact the following if you need additional information about the study:

Nick Wagner

Phone: 989-964-2468

[Wagne1nj@cmich.edu](mailto:Wagne1nj@cmich.edu)

Dr. Anne Hornak

Phone: 989-774-2215

[Horna1am@cmich.edu](mailto:Horna1am@cmich.edu)

OR

The Central Michigan Institutional Review Board  
251 Foust Hall  
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859.  
989-774-6777

You are free to refuse to participate in this research project or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in the project at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your participation will not affect your relationship with the institution(s) involved in this research project.

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which this study is being conducted, you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any complaints to the Institutional Review Board by calling 989-774-6777, or addressing a letter to the Institutional Review Board, 251 Foust Hall Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859.

*My signature below indicates that all my questions have been answered. I agree to participate in the project as described above.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

***A copy of this form has been given to me.***

\_\_\_\_\_ Subject's Initials

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Responsible Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

## APPENDIX C

### REQUESTING PARTICIPATION LETTER

Dear (Dean or VP of Student Affairs),

My name is Nick Wagner and I am an administrator at Saginaw Valley State University working in the Enrollment Management Division. I am writing to ask permission in using your Resident Director staff to participate in a qualitative research study on exploring how Resident Directors perceive their role and make response choices when experiencing a crisis situation. In addition to my administrative duties, I am also a doctoral student at Central Michigan University. This is part of my requirements to fulfill a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership.

Participation in this study will include an interview conversation with a small group (3-5) of Resident Directors that are willing to participate. The interviews should last approximately 90 - 120 minutes and will be conducted after scheduled work hours in a private location on campus. This conversation will be audio recorded and I will also be taking written notes. If needed, a follow up meeting may occur which will allow me to check for the accuracy of responses and to clarify any additional questions the participants may have after reviewing the transcripts of our first meeting.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing from the study. All participants will be read and given a consent form prior to the study outlining the purpose, methods, and use of data collected. If the Resident Directors agree to participate in this study, their identity will be kept strictly confidential. Names of the individuals and the institution will not appear in the study. All data reported and/or described will be a synthesis of group responses and no exact remarks by individuals will be quoted in the study. All transcripts will be kept on a hard drive and backup flash drive in a secured location within the researcher's home.

If you are interested in allowing your staff to participate please contact me by replying by email to [wagne1nj@cmich.edu](mailto:wagne1nj@cmich.edu). You may also feel free to contact me by phone at 989-964-2468 or my chair Dr. Anne Hornak at [horna1am@cmich.edu](mailto:horna1am@cmich.edu) if you have any questions or concerns related to participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Nick J. Wagner

## APPENDIX D

### INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear (Resident Director),

My name is Nick Wagner and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Central Michigan University. Your institution gave me permission to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study.

As an administrator and student of higher education, I am fascinated at how crisis can have an impact on colleges and universities, specifically related to the residential facilities on-campus. The title of my project is: *How do Resident Directors Perceive Their Role and Make Response Choices When Experiencing A Crisis Situation: A Qualitative Study.*

For this study I will be recruiting three to five Resident Directors from your campus to participate. Subjects will participate voluntarily and no incentive will be offered. The participants must be full time, live-in, staff members at the institution. A number of standardized open-ended interview questions will be asked amongst a small group of you in a private room located on-campus. The interview process should last approximately 90-120 minutes. All of your responses will be audio recorded but your names will not be used.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and all of your responses and any identifying information, including the name of your institution will be kept strictly confidential. The researcher will securely store the data collected at all times. The results from the dissertation will be published, however your names will not be used. All data reported and/or described will be a synthesis of group responses and no exact remarks by individuals will be quoted in the study.

If you would like to participate in this study please contact me at [wagne1nj@cmich.edu](mailto:wagne1nj@cmich.edu) to confirm.

Should you have any questions concerning this research study, please call me at 989-964-2468 or email me at [wagne1nj@cmich.edu](mailto:wagne1nj@cmich.edu) or you may contact my chair Dr. Anne Hornak at [horna1am@cmich.edu](mailto:horna1am@cmich.edu). In case you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or should you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Central Michigan Institutional Review Board at 989-774-1958.

Sincerely,

Nick J. Wagner

APPENDIX E

TRANSCRIPTIONIST CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audio recordings and documentation received from Nick Wagner related to his doctoral study on: *How Resident Directors perceive their role and make response choices when experiencing a crisis situation*. Furthermore, I agree:

- To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio taped interviews, or in any associated documents;
- To not make copies of any audio recordings or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts;
- To store all study-related audio recordings and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession
- To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Nick Wagner in a complete and timely manner.
- To delete all study related documents and data on my hard drive and/or storage devices upon completion of required work.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## REFERENCES

- Asmussen, K. J., & Creswell, J. W. (1995). Campus response to a student gunman. *Journal of Higher Education*, 66(5), pp. 575-591.
- Ackoff, R. L. (1981). *Creating the Corporate Future*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Atkinson, R. (1998). *The life story interview*. Sage University Papers Series on Qualitative Research Methods, 44. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.
- Augustine, N. R. (2000). Managing the crisis you tried to prevent. *Harvard business review on crisis management*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Baxter-Magolda, M. B. (1999). Constructing adult identities. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(6), pp. 629-644.
- Baxter-Magolda, M. B., & King, P. M. (2004). *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Belch, H. A., & Kimble, G. (2006). Human resources: In B. McCluskey and N. Dunkel (Eds.), *Strategies for the future of the housing profession* (pp. 69-95). Columbus, OH: Association of college and University Housing Officers International.
- 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), pp. 29-46.
- Belch, H. A., Wilson, M. E., & Dunkel, N. (2009). Cultures of success: Recruiting and retaining new live-in residence life professionals. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 27(2), pp. 176-193.

- Blimling, G. S. (1993). New challenges and goals for residential life programs. In R. B. Winston, Jr., S. Anchors, & Associates, *Student housing and residential life* (pp. 1-20). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Blumenthal, J. (1995). Crisis management in university environments. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 4(3), pp. 248-254.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Burns, K. (2000, May). *Mental models: Normal errors in naturalistic decision-making*. Paper presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference of Naturalistic Decision-Making, Sweden.
- Catullo, L. A., Walker, D. A., & Floyd, D. (2009). The status of crisis management at NASPA member institutions. *NASPA Journal*, 46(2), pp. 301-324.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Clark, J. & Harman, M. (2004). On crisis management and rehearsing a plan. *Risk Management*, 51, pp. 40-44.
- Cohen, A. M. & Kisker, C. B. (2010). *The shaping of American higher education: Emergence and growth of the contemporary system*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Coomes, M., & Talbot, D. (2000). *Directory of graduate preparation programs: Preparing student affairs professionals, 2000*. Washington, DC: American College Personnel Association.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

- Davis Barham, J., & Wilson, M. E. (2006). Supervision of new professionals in student affairs: Assessing and addressing needs. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 26, pp. 64-89.
- Deiter, P. J., & Pearlman, L. A. (1998). Responding to self-injurious behavior. In P. M. Kleespies (Ed.), *Emergencies in mental health practice: Evaluation and management*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Delaney, J. M. (1990). Mid-level residence life professionals: Academic preparation, previous student services, experience, present job responsibilities, and career aspiration. (Doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1990). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 51, no. 4A. 1129-1338.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive biography*. Sage University Papers Series on Qualitative Research Methods, 17. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dolan, T. G. (2006). Few schools are ready to manage a crisis. *The Education Digest*, 72(2), pp. 4-8.
- Duncan, M. A. (1993). Dealing with campus crises. *Handbook of student affairs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Edelson, P. J. (2009). Quality university decision-making in times of crisis: Advice to continuing educators. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 57, pp. 117-119.
- Eisenhardt, K. (1989). Making fast strategic decisions in high-velocity environments. *Academy of Management Journal*, 28, pp. 821-843.
- Field, A. (2009). *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London: Sage.

- Fink, S. L. (1986). *Crisis management: Planning for the inevitable*. New York, NY: American Management Association.
- Frederiksen, C. F. (1993). A brief history of collegiat housing. In R. B. Winston, Jr., S. Anchors, & Associates, *Student housing and residential life* (pp. 167-183). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gibson, B., & Brown, A. (2009). *Working with qualitative data*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gladding, S. T. (1998). *Family therapy: History, theory, and practice*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Greening, D. W. & Johnson, R. A. (1997). Managing industrial and environmental crises. *Business & Society*, 36, pp. 334-361.
- Grinberg, M, & Wade, J. (2007). In the wake of Virginia Tech. *Risk Management*, 54(12), pp. 24-28.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1990). Can there be a human science? *Person-Centered Review*, 5(2), pp. 130-154.
- Hale, J. E., Hale, D. P., & Dulek, R. E. (2006). Decision processes during crisis response: An exploratory investigation. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 18(3), pp. 301-320.
- Harned, P. J., & Murphy, M. C. (1999). Creating a culture of development for the new professional. In W. A. Bryan & R. A. Schwartz (Eds.), *Strategies for staff development: Personal and professional education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (pp. 43-53). *New directions for student services*, No. 84. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Harper, K. S., Paerson, B. G., & Zdziarski, E. L. (2006). *Crisis management: Responding from the heart*. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

- Henry, C. S. (2003). The history of campus housing in the United States. In Dunkel, N. W. & Grimm, J. C. (Eds.), *Campus Housing Construction*. Columbus, OH: The Association Of College and University Housing Officers – International.
- Huff, A. S. & Reger, R. K. (1987). A review of strategic process research. *Journal of Management*, 13, pp. 211-236.
- Ignelzi, M. G. & Whitely, P. A. (2004). Supportive supervision for new professionals. In P. M. Magolda & J. E. Carnaghi (Eds.), *Job one: Experiences of new professionals in student affairs* (pp. 115-136). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Kelsay, L. (2007). Aftermath of a crisis: How colleges respond to prospective students. *Journal of College Admission*, 6, pp. 7-13.
- Lalone, C. (2007). The potential contribution of the field of organizational development to crisis management. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 15(2), pp. 93-104.
- Langley, A. (1990). Patterns in the use of formal analysis in strategic decisions. *Organizational Studies*, 11, pp. 17-46.
- Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social science*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lowery, J. W. (2000). Bonfire – tragedy and tradition. *About Campus*, 5(3), pp. 20-25.
- Kearney, P. A. (1993). Professional staffing. In R. B. Winston, Jr., S. Anchors, & Associates, *Student housing and residential life* (pp. 269-291). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Keller, E. W., Hughes, S., & Hertz, G. (2011). A model for assessment and mitigation of threats on the college campus. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(1), pp. 76-94.

- Kelsay, L. (2007). Aftermath of a crisis: How colleges respond to prospective students. *Journal of College Admission*, 6, pp. 7-13.
- Kennedy, M. (1999). Surviving a crisis. *American School & University*, 72(2), pp. 42b-42e.
- Komives, S. R. (1998). Linking student affairs practice with preparation. In N. J. Evans & C. E. Phelps Tobin (Eds.), *State of the art of preparation and practice in student affairs: Another look* (pp. 177-200). Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.
- Magolda, P. M., & Carnaghi, J. E. (2004). Preparing the next generation of student affairs professionals. In P. M. Magolda and J. E. Carnaghi (Eds.), *Job one: Experiences of new professionals in student affairs* (pp. 201-227). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mattingly, C. (1991). Narrative reflection on practical actions: Two learning experiments in reflective storytelling. In D. A. Schon (Eds.), *The reflective turn: Case studies in and on educational practice*, (pp. 235-257). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Millar, D. P., & Heath, R. L. (2004). *Responding to crisis: A rhetorical approach to crisis communication*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Mitroff, I. I. (2005). *Why some companies emerge stronger and better from a crisis: 7 essential lessons for surviving disaster*. New York: AMACOM.
- Mitroff, I. I., & Anagnos, G. (2001). *Managing crises before they happen*. New York: AMACOM.

- Mitroff, I. I., Persona, C. M., & Harrigan, L. K. (1996). *The essential guide to managing corporate crises. A step-by-step handbook for surviving major catastrophes*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moats, J., Chermack, T., & Dooley, L. (2008). Using scenarios to develop crisis managers. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 10*, pp. 397-424.
- Moustakas, C. (1995). *Being-In, being-for, being-with*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc.
- Myer, R. A., & Moore, H. B. (2006). Crisis in context theory: An ecological model. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 84*(2), pp. 139-147.
- Novak, J. F. (2008). A comparative analysis of differences in resident satisfaction, retention, and grade point average between University of Central Florida owned and affiliated housing. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Central Florida, 2008). *Dissertation Abstracts International*.
- NVivo qualitative data analysis software; QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012.
- Pauchant, T. & Mitroff, I. (1992). *Transforming the crisis prone organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Pearson, C. M. & Clair, J. A. (1998). Reframing crisis management. *Academy of Management Review, 23*, pp. 59-76.
- Phelps Tobin, C. E. (1998). Recruiting and retaining qualified graduate students. In N. J. Evans & C. E. Phelps Tobin (Eds.), *State of the art of preparation and practice in student affairs: Another look* (pp. 83-104). Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.

- Piotrowski, C., & Guyette, Jr., R. W. (2009). Lockdown: Reactions of university faculty and staff. *Organizational Development Journal*, 27(4), pp. 93-99.
- Piotrowski, C. & Vodanovich, S. J. (2008). Hurricane Ivan: A case study of university faculty in crisis management. *Organization Development Journal*, 26(2), pp. 25-31.
- Polkinghorn, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration and qualitative analysis. In J. A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative*, (pp. 5-24). London: Falmer.
- Powell, R. (2008). Managing PR crises. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, pp. A34-A35.
- Reason, R. D. (2001). The use of narrative inquiry in student affairs research. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 20(2), pp. 93-103.
- Reason, R. D. (2001). Supervisory responsibilities of senior student affairs officers: What we know about the position. *ISPA Journal*, 13(1), pp. 51-67.
- Reason, R. D. & Sauders, K. P. (2003). The conflict between personal and professional roles of senior student affairs officers during a time of national crisis. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 22(2), pp. 137-149.
- Riker, H. C. (1993). Foreword. In R. B. Winston, Jr., S. Anchors, & Associates, *Student housing and residential life* (pp. xiii-xvii). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rollo, J. M., & Zdziarski, E. L. (2007). The impact of crisis. In E. L. Zdziarski, N. W. Dunkel, & J. M. Rollo & Associates (Eds.), *Campus crisis management: A comprehensive guide to planning, prevention, response, and recovery* (pp. 3-34). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Saunders, S. A., Cooper, D. L., Winston, R. B., Jr., & Chernow, E. (2000). Supervising staff in student affairs: Exploration of the synergistic approach. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41, pp. 181-192.

- Schroeder, C. C., & Mable, P. (1994). Residence halls and the college experience: Past and present. In C. C. Schroeder, P. Mable, & Associates, *Realizing the educational potential of resident halls* (pp. 3-21). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schuh, J. H. (1996). Residence halls. In Rentz, A. L. & Associates (Eds.), *Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education* (pp. 269-297). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishers LTD.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1997). *Qualitative inquiry: A dictionary of terms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Senelick, R. (2012, July 8). Teaching doctors how to think. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com>.
- Seymour, M. & Moore, S. (2000). *Effective Crisis Management: Worldwide Principles and Practice*. London: Cassell.
- Sheaffer, Z. & Mano-Negrin, R. (2003). Executives' orientations as indicators of crisis management policies and practices. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40, pp. 573-606.
- Stern, P. (2007). On solid ground: Essential properties for growing grounded theory. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.). *The Sage handbook of grounded theory* (pp. 114-126). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- St. Onge, S. & Nestor, E. (2005). [An international survey of the recruitment and retention of entry-level staff in housing and residence life]. Unpublished raw data.
- Stimpson, R. (1994). Creating a context for educational success. In C. C. Schroeder & P. Mable (Eds.), *Realizing the educational potential of residence halls* (pp. 3-21). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Sweeny, K. (2008). Crisis decision theory: Decisions in the face of negative events. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(1), pp. 61-76.
- Weaver, N. L. (2005). An examination of perceptions of job satisfaction among live-in resident directors at selected Pennsylvania State System of higher education institutions. (Doctoral dissertation, Marywood University, 2005). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, pp. 1-137.
- Weisenbach-Keller, E., Hughes, S., & Hertz, G. (2010). A model for assessment and mitigation of threats on the college campus. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(1), pp. 76-94.
- Wernsman, G. M. (2008). The process of designing and constructing an accessible residence hall for people with disabilities on a public university campus. (Doctoral dissertation, Colorado State University, 2008). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, pp. 1-193.
- Winston, R. B., Jr., & Creamer, D. G. (1997). *Improving staffing practices in student affairs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Woennenberg, P. & Stratton, J. (2012). *Shaping our buildings to shape our students. Talking Stick*, (29)6, pp. 27-34.
- Zdziarski, E. (2001). Institutional preparedness to respond to campus crises as perceived by student affairs administrators in selected NASPA member institutions. (Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2001). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 62, 3714.
- Zdziarski, E. (2006). Crisis in the context of higher education. In K. Harper, B. Paterson, & E. Zdziarski, II (Eds.), *Crisis management: Responding from the heart* (pp. 3-24). Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Zdziarski, E. L., Dunkel, N. W., Rollo, J. M., & Associates. (2007). *Campus crisis management: A comprehensive guide to planning, prevention, response, and recovery*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.