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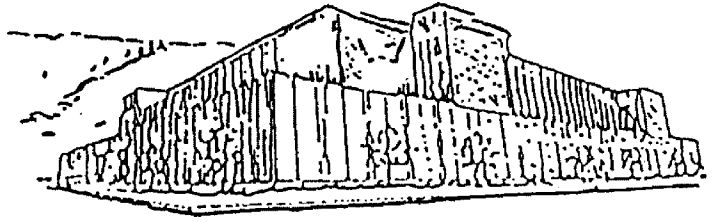
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ORDER AND ANOMIE IN UNIVERSITY DORMITORIES:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF DORM SUPERVISORS

By

Kimberly S. Bell

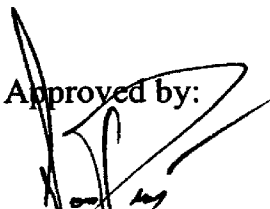
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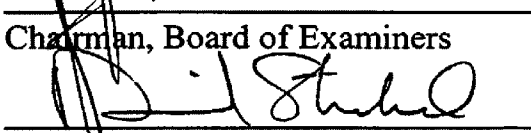
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1998

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Bell, Kimberly S., M.A., November 1998

Sociology

Order and Anomie in University Dormitories: An Ethnography of Dorm Supervisors (107 pp.)

Director: Jon J. Driessen

The focus of this study is to discover how dorm supervisors operate an orderly dorm. This is presented through an ethnographic description of the duties dorm supervisors undertake, and both the benefits and frustrations of the position. A typology is used to categorize patterns of rule enforcement, and helps to explain the necessity of co-supervisors to agree on the methods of rule enforcement with which to achieve order. It was found that if the Head Resident and Assistant Head Resident cannot reach agreement on rule enforcement, than the resident assistant staff would lack guidance which, in turn, would cause inconsistent enforcement and disorder resulting in anomie among the student residents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The track of this thesis is an interesting one. My qualitative research methods class sparked a desire to study sociological issues by using ethnography. Studying people and their situations through their own words and interpretations appealed to this sociologist. I decided on the method of study before I discovered the main thesis topic. I focused my study towards dorm life. This is a subject of which I am familiar because I served as a Resident Assistant for three years of my undergraduate work and a Head Resident for one year during graduate school. While I was comfortable with the dorm environment and the people who live there, I still knew there were many layers to this onion. My interest was in the day to day functioning of the dorm and how over three hundred college students can live together in close quarters with some order and community.

This study began with a broad focus: to observe dorm society and what life is like for the residents.¹ To begin the research for the study, I sat in the front lobby of a dorm and watched the residents interact. I noticed a few regulars consistently would “hang out” at the desk and make conversation with the staff. Then I asked a few of them if I could interview them for my research. Most of them agreed and were very excited to talk about themselves. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions and were about an hour long. The interviews helped me categorize the “desk flies²” into types and helped me describe them by using the interviewee’s own words. The study of the desk flies helped me learn how to gain access into a world through ethnography but I felt the desk fly study alone did not come close to explaining what goes on in a dormitory. I then decided to pursue other avenues to uncover dorm life.

Early observations and preliminary interviews led me to focus on the student supervisors, and describing their experiences during their work of “running a dorm.”¹ When I began this study, my intention was to observe dorm society. I wanted to describe everyday life in the residence halls. Then I began to focus on the resident assistants and other dorm staff members. My interest in this topic stems from my personal involvement with this University’s Residence Life Office. I am a HR of a dorm and have been a RA for the three years prior. Throughout my work history with Residence Life, I have experienced a broad range of opportunities and incidents that have made me a member of a unique group of people working together. I will use my work experiences along with the stories of others. In order to gain insight on this topic, I kept notes of my observations and had five preliminary interviews with the resident assistants and three interviews with student supervisors. I remembered one Head Resident telling me he thought the dorm atmosphere depended on how the student staff got along and particularly how the student supervisors lead their staff. The study then evolved into focusing only on the student supervisors: Head Residents and Assistant Head Residents. Throughout this study, I will use the term supervisor interchangeably with Head Resident or Assistant Head Resident. Each supervisor has stories to share about his or her experiences working in their position.³

Heading into the next academic year as a Head Resident, I decided to keep a detailed journal of my personal experiences on the job. This journal was intended to track my type of supervision, the frustrations and joys I had on the job, and any other patterns or practices I adopted. In addition to my own words, I needed more accounts of the supervisory position.

I asked the Director of Housing for permission to interview and study the supervisory staff on the University of Montana campus. I proceeded to contact and interview at least one of the supervisors from each dorm. As my study evolved, I thought it necessary to categorize the student supervisors into ideal types to describe certain tendencies in their different supervision styles. Because of my eagerness to find answers and theories quickly, I jeopardized some of the preliminary interviews. Part of the process of ethnography entails learning how to ponder quietly while patiently letting the study unfold. Deliberate wonder is a concept that was difficult to adopt yet necessary to discover what was really going on around me.

As I gathered more stories and accounts of supervisors, I gained more confidence with the interviewing process. The supervisors I interviewed all mentioned that their Assistant Head Resident or Head Resident was helpful or a hindrance. By this I mean they all talked about the partnership and it's importance in the success of their own performance. I then decided to look deeper into the previous studies that dealt with the topic of student staff in dormitories.

Previous Studies

The literature review revealed that there have been no studies completed that have focused on the ethnographic study of Head Residents and Assistant Head Residents. However, there have been several studies ranging from effective counseling as a RA (Carkhuff, 1969) to evaluations and suggestions for training student staffs of residence halls (Janosik, 1977-78; O'Donnell, 1978-79; Newton, 1974; Mitnik, 1979; Schroeder, 1973); as well as, literature on retention and drop-out rates of freshman college students living in the dorms (Korb, 1992; Barbett, 1996).

Another study was a professional paper done in 1980 by Watson at the University of Montana. Rather than focusing on dorm supervisors, Watson chose to focus on the RA as a helper and the training of communication skills for the RA. Watson's study outlines the training techniques and principles behind the techniques. Watson's study was interesting to read because my data reveals that not much has changed in regards to the RA job description, RA evaluation and basic mission for the residence halls in the past eighteen years. He describes the characteristics of a good helper and how to obtain these through listening tests and communication workshops. This study differs in so far as I chose to focus on the day to day experiences of the student supervisor as they run their dorm.

A thesis completed by April Keippel in 1998 deals with the topic of living at work. Keippel's study focused on communication strategies of resident managers and resident assistants. She specifically studied the dialectic tensions involved with jobs that entail living at work. Keippel was testing a particular theory and evaluated her data according to specific communication theories. I found interest in her study because it dealt with similar topics and was done at the University of Montana. Keippel used interviews to gather data; however, her study was not inductive and she did not use ethnomethodology in her study.

Greenleaf (1974) did a study focusing on the goals and purposes of residence halls. Using these goals as a guide, he determined eight job description responsibilities for resident assistants. Greenleaf's work is important because he pinpointed some basic concepts for dormitory organization. However, his work only outlines a goal or ideals for the work of resident assistants. One of these concepts is "to provide an environment that

enhances the student's ability to meet his academic purposes for being in school." He includes personal growth and responsibility. From the data I collected, I found these goals from the administration have changed little over the years.

What I hope to add to the arena of studies on dormitory student supervisors is an "everyday life view" on how supervisors themselves see and experience the actual work for their own dorm. Literature review reveals no studies on this topic that utilize qualitative methods to describe student supervisors views of what is really going on in the dorms. This study describes the world of the student supervisor's experiences and struggles while running a dorm.

Methods

The Sample

I decided that I needed to interview all of the student supervisors involved with the dorms that I could. There are eight dorms with two supervisors in each. Excluding myself, there were fifteen to be contacted. Two supervisors quit during the interviewing stage of the study. Two more cancelled the interview times but later were contacted for informal discussion about the topic. One supervisor did not want to participate in the study. To make sure I had enough data, I went back and interviewed the first three supervisors again at the end of their year as well as three newly hired supervisors for their first impressions of the job and their partner for next year. In all, I had eighteen interviews with fifteen supervisors.

The supervisors interviewed were excited and interested in the study and were open in their discussions. However, I did run into some problems of disclosure because of their desire to present their best side. As a Head Resident myself, I knew that a

supervisor takes the heat of the failures and the credit of the successes of their dorm. Therefore, in some interviews, lengthy discussions were necessary to uncover the realities of the job.

Interviews

The formal interviews were transcribed from tapes. These transcriptions along with the notes from the informal interviews, my personal journal, and notes from observations were coded and sorted into topics. I utilized the Atlas.ti qualitative software program to assist in organizing the data collected. As I sorted and categorized the data, I concluded that I had reached a point of saturation and began to find patterns in the words of the supervisors. The main topic that I uncovered was that of my thesis statement. If the Head Resident and Assistant Head Resident do not agree on how to enforce rules in the dorm, then the Resident Assistant staff will be confused on what to enforce resulting in inconsistent order. This inconsistent order will produce normlessness or anomie among the residents due to the lack of set standards for behavior.

The interviewing process used involved a conversational style with open-ended questions (Denzin, 1970; 126). Interviews were unstructured and the student supervisor took the lead for topics of conversation. The second round of interviews explored the topics in more detail. The interviews were transcribed and coded into topics and subtopics for analysis.

Interviews began with a general question regarding the basic definition of what the supervisory job entails. The student supervisor then described his or her residence life story. For instance, supervisors discussed the practices they use in the job, staff relations, basic duties, and problems on the job. Most of the interviews were scheduled

and tape-recorded, however, since I lived and worked in a dorm, I had the advantage of discussing the study with student supervisors and resident assistants on a regular basis. My informal discussions and observations were kept in a field note journal and were used in this study.

Data Analysis

The research data consisted of verbatim transcriptions of tape-recorded interviews. I coded the data gathered by using a qualitative computer software program. This software is called Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti allows one to enter the data, code into topics and subtopics, and discover links from which one can build theory. Atlas.ti was created for qualitative studies and is based in “grounded theory” principles.

Grounded Theory

The methods used in this study are based on grounded theory and the strategies of qualitative data collection. The Discovery of Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used as the guide for the methods in this study. The supervisor told their story and described their situations in their own words. I was faithful to the text I received from the transcripts. By staying grounded in the text, I prevented needless analysis and digging for theory. In addition to this, I kept a journal with my own personal thoughts and notes about the job so I could track my description of my own type of supervision. This study provides a view from the point of the student worker. Ethnography gives a view into the dorm world with some understanding of what is going on in that particular place, according to the student supervisors.

Overview of the Chapters

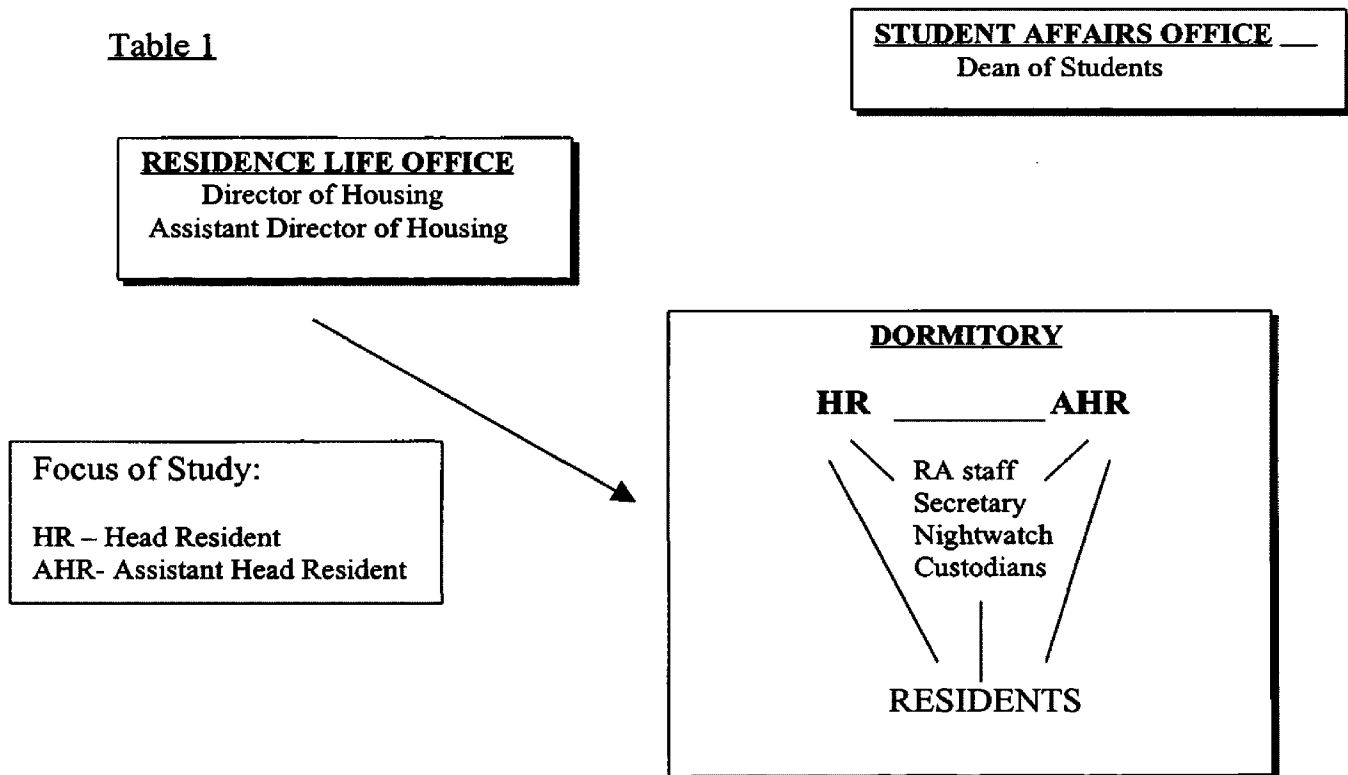
The first part of this thesis will describe the aspects of the dorm supervisor's job. This will include Job Descriptions and Division of Labor in Chapter One. Chapter Two will deal with the relationships that the supervisors maintain on the job. Living at Work will be the final chapter devoted to the description of the work of a dorm supervisor. The reader will begin to understand how the demands of the job contribute to conflicts among the dorm staff. Then in Chapter Four, I will present the Types of Styles of Supervision I found while interviewing the supervisors. This typology will provide reinforcement for my thesis statement. I argue that if the Head Resident and Assistant Head Resident can not agree on rule enforcement, the RA staff will lack guidance and the dorm will lack order resulting in anomie. In Chapter Five, the reader will learn how certain types of supervisors have conflicting views on rule enforcement in the dorms. The description of these conflicts will show the effects that they have on the dorm. In summary, I will conclude with implications of my findings and arguments.

CHAPTER ONE: Organization and Focus of Study

The Division of Labor in Dormitories

In this chapter, I will explain the various job descriptions of people involved in this study. I will elaborate on these various positions and how they relate to the student supervisor. Along with the job descriptions, I will provide quotations from the interviews with the supervisors about particular positions involved in the study. In addition, I will identify the focus of the thesis and provide a big picture view of the supervisor's position, including job frustrations and benefits. Table 1 clarifies where the student supervisors or focus of the study are in relation to the span of control. The table also shows the hierarchy of the dormitory system at the University of Montana:

Table 1



Director of Housing/ Assistant Director: “Administration”

First, the main supervision of the dormitories comes from the Residence Life Office. The Director of Housing and the Assistant Director supervise and make administrative decisions for the housing system. These decisions are in accordance with the Student Affairs Office. One of the main functions of the Director of Housing is to assist the supervisors with enforcement of the Student Conduct Code. The Student Conduct Code contains the written rules that all students at the University of Montana are expected to follow and any student can be in violation of them. The Student Conduct Code provides the ideal framework for keeping order in the dormitories. On occasion the supervisory staff will refer a student to see the Director of Housing. They will do this if the student has violated the student conduct code for a serious violation. For example, if a student is caught using illicit drugs, then the student will most likely get referred to the Director of Housing. I will elaborate on this process of referrals in the chapter on Rules and Enforcement later in the thesis. The Director and Assistant Director also oversee and train the student supervisory staff to implement policies and dormitory procedures, as well as instruct how to train the RA staff. The Director and Assistant Director are in frequent communication with the student supervisors. One supervisor spoke of the importance of this communication:

Well, I think that our direction and guidance is pretty clear. I feel like I can run my dorm how I want to but at the same time there is a definite way of doing things. I think that I feel pretty comfortable going to either one of them (Director of Assistant Director) and asking them what they think about some situation or even if I don't like the policy. For instance, I had a kid in my dorm that had messed up in another dorm so he got sent to my dorm. He had been enough of a bother to one dorm so why not kick him out? He caused a lot of headaches but

nothing big enough to warrant a dismissal. So I was pretty fed up and I went to (the Director) and he talked with me and said he understood my frustration but his hands were tied because of this, that, and the other. But the next time that kid did something (the Director) called me and told me he was being suspended and removed from the dorm.

Secretary: “dorm mom”

The next position involved in this study is the secretary. Dormitory secretaries work at the front desk of the dorm from 8am to 5pm on Monday through Friday. The secretaries are professional, full-time employees for the University. They maintain communication with the main office or Residence Life Office (RLO) daily. Secretaries are there to provide administrative support for the basic functioning of the dorm. For example, secretaries will reassign rooms, enter work orders for damages to the building, check out keys, and sort mail. They are an information source for the students of the building. Secretaries work closely with the student supervisory staff to assist the RAs run their individual floors. They let the student supervisors know if any paperwork needs to be done and if any process of the functioning of the desk needs to be improved. The student supervisors and secretaries will ideally work together to provide for the students of the dorm.

Without her, I don't know what we'd do. I constantly check in with her and see if she needs anything or if I need to ask her to do something. She has a system for everything in that office and it works well. I'm not about to tell her how to do something, but on the other hand, she told both (my Head Resident) and I that if we think the staff or nightwatch do get something and we need to change it she will. She's very open to change for the better. I kinda see her as the dorm Mom. She let's me vent but always kicks me in the butt if I don't take care of business.

Another supervisor had a different view.

Well, I guess I would say she is a very caring person but.... hmmm... she does her job well and gets everything done but she definitely has her way of doing things. Which is okay but sometimes annoying. Like she is very possessive

about her supplies, she puts her name on everything; I can kinda see why she does it but its still funny. She also loves to find out our personal lives. That doesn't bother me but it does bother some of the staff. I just think they need to learn how to deal with it better. If you don't want to share then don't, it's that easy.

Overall, the supervisory staff agreed that the secretary played an important role in keeping the dorm functioning. Most of them had a good relationship with the secretary and were the first to admit they would be at a loss without her. Those that did not get along with their secretary managed to maintain a somewhat functioning working relationship and admitted that their lack of a good relationship did cause some tension. I will later address this in the chapter called Relations of Supervisory staff.

Resident Assistants: “first line of defense”

Next, the resident assistant staff is the group of students with whom the dorm supervisors have the most contact. For the remainder of the study, I will refer to the resident assistants as RAs. The RA staff creates the main link between the student residents and the rest of the dorm system. Ideally, they also provide a link to all campus resources. Each RA maintains a floor in the dormitory. They are in charge of planning programming and floor snacks for their floor. In addition, the RA enforces quiet hours and the student conduct code. RAs report to the supervisory staff and attend staff meetings weekly. They also work closely with the dorm secretary to provide room inventories⁴ for the main office and custodial staff. To insure a successful year, most of the supervisors I interviewed mentioned that they needed to keep in close contact with their staff of RAs and be a strong support. Most supervisors defined “successful” as the staff getting along in a professional manner and the dorm having order.

This Head Resident states:

There are going to be some people on your staff that you don't like as much, but you need to try to treat them all the same or you're going to be in trouble. For the most part, I enjoy all my staff members but I get annoyed with the ones that don't take their position seriously. They tend to slack off or try and take advantage of the position. When I see that happening I lose some patience. I try to tell them what I see and ask them if they agree. Then I try to express to them that if they don't take their job seriously then the residents won't either and why we get people acting like idiots on the floor. The RAs are so important to the dorm and they are the first line of defense in a way. They see and talk with the residents the most and need to keep that going.

Another dorm supervisor felt this:

I am so lucky to have the staff I do. We did a good job picking this year. Most of them are new and want to do a good job. I also think that we did a good job letting them know our expectations of them from the beginning. The old RA members of our staff are good examples too. I think when we all have the same ideas about how the dorm should be then we all can support each other better.

Both of these supervisors maintained that the community of the dorm and how the residents behaved directly relates to how the RA staff was performing. The supervisor's reaction and support of the RA staff determines the order for the dormitory.

Nightwatch: "Security"

The nightwatch staff is trained only on desk procedures and certain dorm functions⁵, including rounds of the building. They do not have as many responsibilities and call on the RA and supervisory staff to make decisions during incidents which require disciplinary action and when they face situations which they are not trained to handle. The supervisors are responsible for training, hiring, firing, and completing payroll for the nightwatch staff. The nightwatch "man" the dorm desk when the RA on duty leaves the desk at night. Most nightwatch shifts are from nine p.m. to one a.m. or one a.m. to six a.m. This Assistant Head Resident reported:

The nightwatch can give me a headache. They are so necessary for the security of the building and it is such a cake job. People get paid to sit behind the desk and do their homework. They have to do rounds and report anything strange in the

night log or to the RA on duty. For some reason, there is a lot of turn over in the job. I think it's because of the late hours or something.

This dorm supervisor was frustrated with the constant hiring, firing, and training of the nightwatch. He went on to say:

Not all of them our like that though, if I could replicate about three of them I would. The three I'm thinking about do everything right, they fill out paperwork correctly, they actually go on their rounds and care about their job. The night they work I feel like I don't have to worry as much about the building, it's nice.

The nightwatch are key in the dorm's security and play a major part in maintaining the late-night order in the dorm. They are the eyes and ears for the dorm staff during the evenings. Without the nightwatch, the dorms would lack peace, order, and security and the staff would lack rest. Next, I will identify the main focus of this study within the overall division of labor in the dorm.

Focus of the Study: Head Resident and Assistant Head Resident

The dorm supervisory staff is the focus of this thesis. There are two supervisors for each dorm. Throughout the rest of the study I will call them the HR and the AHR. They are expected to work with each other in order to co-supervise their team of RAs. Their working partnership and sources of conflict will be the constant theme throughout the next chapters. According to the supervisors, the main functions of the job alone are quite extensive and demanding.

The Job

The student supervisors pass on information they receive to the RA staff. They train, advise, and organize the RA staff. Student supervisors draw on their own experiences to guide RAs to maintain order on their floors and attempt to develop community with the student residents. The RA job involves responding to the needs of

the students in the dorm by enforcing student conduct codes, overseeing dorm programming, and being an information source and direct supervisor for the RA staff. The direct supervision of the RAs and nightwatch will ideally provide for a safe and livable dorm environment for the residents.

The supervisory staff also needs a close working relationship with the dorm secretary in order to keep desk operations running smoothly. For example, the supervisors and the secretary have to agree about how to exchange monies, rent equipment, file paperwork, and perform other desk operations for accuracy and consistency. Overall, the supervisor's are ideally supposed to keep the dorm livable and promote academic and personal growth of residents while managing a staff to assist with reaching those goals. A dorm supervisor described his mandate:

We are here trying to provide an academic, social environment that is safe enough for everyone to enjoy themselves, to hopefully take away from college the experience of living in the dorm, of meeting 300 other people, you know, understanding the different cultures. That's as far as providing an atmosphere for them. I think our main responsibility here is to help the residents and to provide them with the information that they need to succeed in their college career as well as provide them with any opportunities that will hopefully help them gain involvement in University activities and whatnot. And along with that I guess, you know, there's always the discipline aspect, but that's part of the providing a safe environment for people. Everything we do and every time--or everything we do in our discipline meetings, I explain to the residents that we don't do it to go out and intentionally pick on anyone. We do things because it's for the safety of the dorm, it's for the safety of the residents, and their neighbors so to speak. And hopefully--you know, and nine times out of ten they react to that and they realize that, yeah, we are here to do a job and they understand that.

In order to perform all of these tasks in the mandate, I found that the Head Resident and the Assistant Head Resident must work well together. I show how the success of this relationship provides for strong leadership resulting in an orderly dorm. A successful relationship, between the supervisors, is one that agrees on how to enforce

rules in the dorm. On the other hand, I also illustrate how a non-working relationship between the HR and AHR is the direct cause of a staff without direction resulting in a dorm without constant order. To start this argument, I will provide an overall picture of a supervisor's job, describing the joys and the frustrations of the job as told by the supervisor's I interviewed. The big picture is intended to show the reader what a dorm supervisor will encounter on the job. Then I will move on in Chapter Three on Types of Styles of Supervision that I discovered. Later, in Chapters Four and Five, I will elaborate further on some of these topics as they reinforce the thesis argument. The elaboration will deal with how the HR and AHR cope with tensions of their job and their effect on their working relationship.

Joys of the Job

Network: "working on a great staff"

The joys of the job include meeting a large number of people, a feeling of importance, feeling connected to the University, the ability to lead by passing on guidance, and compensation. Many of the dorm supervisors agreed that the people they worked with were what drew them to the position. Several comments are examples of common thoughts:

Meeting People

The social aspect, being able to interact with all the different types of people that come to the University of Montana. When I was just a resident my freshman and sophomore year, I studied continuously, I didn't get out of my room much, I really didn't get to know people that well.

I think it teaches you to be a more effective communicator. It enhances any apparent leadership skills that you already have, and brings out new ones, and introduces you to a large part of the campus. It allows you, at least as far as the RA job is concerned, to become fairly intimate with a group of guys or girls, and

it also gives you the experience of working closely with an exceptional group of people. I've had the benefit last year of working on a great staff, and I think this staff is actually probably, well, it might be too early to tell, but it's also really, really good.

Importance: “residents take me a lot more seriously”

Another benefit of the position stems from feeling of importance it produces.

Two supervisors described it this way:

You are seen as someone with authority, someone who has information that the resident may need, and it just opens up so many doors for you to speak with the residents. And pretty soon if you tend to speak with them more and more you build a bridge of communication and hopefully, you know, you allow the people in that you want to become part of your life, and hopefully it makes your time at the University just that much more enjoyable.

I think you're taken more seriously when you're a supervisor. My residents take me a lot more seriously than the residents I've had over the last few years. I think that when you're dealing with people on campus, other resources, they definitely know who all the supervisors are and they'll offer themselves a lot more, I think, to supervisors. It's kind of a good feeling to know that you're a part of the campus. I think that's kind of an advantage. And I just feel like more of a leader on campus.

Pass on guidance: “we’ve been through it”

In addition, several talked about how working as an advocate for the student residents was satisfying. The supervisors discussed the importance of helping the dorm residents with the transition of entering the college years. Also, some added that a “joy” was training and guiding their RA staff. One described:

I've come to realize that it may be more to reach out to the people and develop the community and get the students really involved on campus, because I think there are so many people who can come to college and go through classes and never get involved and, you know, see it as, oh yeah, I got a degree and now I'm going to go to my job and whatever, when this is a time in your life when you're trying to find out who you are. You're breaking away and you have freedom for the first time. You're kind of lost and you don't know what to do.

And so we're here to provide some sort of guidance because supposedly we've been through some of it, and encourage people to get involved or help people out when they're having a problem because they're used to Mom and Dad solving the problems, you know, or give them resources to make it a fun place to live, as well as a healthy, safe place to live.

Another supervisor said:

You know, this job's probably opened my eyes to many more things than I would have ever realized. When you're put in a position like this, I think, you know, you're required to do so many different little things within the dorm to help everything run so smoothly. You know, you have to be the leader, you have to be -- you have to be the friend to the RA to hopefully help them out in situations. You have to be the advisor, the counselor. You have to be a partner, you know, to your assistant. Basically you're kind of the person in charge and people look up to you and they have questions every day that you have to answer, you know, and you have to find answers to, and it's not a matter of just putting it off. You definitely deal with probably a crowd that is a little bit more immature by conventional standards. But in the same light, you know, myself, I've seen a lot of people grow over this year. And that's probably one of the neatest things, is you see freshmen that come in. They don't have a clue what's going on. All they want to do is party, socialize. Schoolwork's kind of a, you know, it's down the rung on the ladder, so to speak. And pretty soon you start to notice a change halfway through the semester. They tend to study a little bit more, they realize what the dorm is about, meeting new people. They realize what discipline is about, especially if they've been involved in it. They really sort of come of age, which is pretty interesting. I've met a lot of people this year that I consider friends and it's been a fun year. I certainly can't deny that.

Compensation: “a place to get away”

For their work, dorm supervisors get room and board in addition to a monthly stipend.⁶ This compensation adds to the benefit of having the position. Only a few mentioned this as a joy of the job. Most said that it wasn't the reason that they wanted the position, yet it did help with being able to get away. Objectively, compensation for the supervisory position is how most of the HRs and AHRs got through school financially. I believe none of the supervisors would do the work for free, however, they were hesitant to say that the compensation was the reason for being a supervisor because

of the stigma attached. It is commonly known among the Residence Life workers that promotions are given to those who have the motive to perform the job because they wish to gain experience and leadership skills over those who are only interested in the stipend, room, and board.

For example:

Well, obviously, I think I would be lying if I told you that the apartment and stipend didn't provide incentive for the job. I love to be able to live on campus and yet have my own kitchen and bathroom. It's great, it's a place to get away. But I wouldn't take the job for that reason, I think if someone did take this job for that reason they would be very unhappy because you have to want to do this job to do it well.

Frustrations of the Job

In the final section, which covers the big picture of the supervisory work, supervisors talked about the frustrations of the job. When asked about the negative parts of the supervisory position, the overwhelming stories focused on disagreements with their partner, disciplining RAs, and burnout. Other frustrations described were privacy, politics on the job, and disagreements with certain policies of the University administration. First, I will present some thoughts of the supervisors having difficulties that are staff related problems. Then I will describe their day to day stresses: burnout, privacy, politics, and policies.

Staff Related Problems

Resident Assistant Staff: *"it's like dealing with a stupid freshman"*

The supervisors that I talked with said that having to talk with a RA about immature behavior and sloppy work performance was one of the most difficult things to

do. This is so because they felt they shouldn't have to tell a RA what they already know.

The following two accounts are examples:

I guess one of my least favorite things is having to approach a staff member whose doing something wrong or poorly because I like giving compliments a lot more than telling somebody that they're doing something wrong.

* * * * *

I hate when people put me in a bad spot, like the RA's, because I don't want to be mean to them. Like walking out of the office, one of our RAs was on duty, he was supposed to be behind the desk, and he was out shooting homeruns with a whiffle ball bat and it's (the ball) going up in the ceiling fans and smoke alarms. And as soon as he looks at me, he knows he's doing wrong and he tries to hide the bat from me. And it's like dealing with a resident. It's like dealing with a stupid freshman. He was like ha ha ha and tries to hide the bat. It's like wait a second, this guy is a RA. I shouldn't have to do this—I shouldn't have to say anything to him, and I don't want to.

This supervisor emphasized his frustration with a RA who is having trouble with certain job duties:

Charlie's got good people skills. The guy can talk to anybody about anything and stay calm and diplomatic. And he's just so good with residents when it comes to discipline or anything else. Well, he's a royal pain when it comes to anything else, paperwork. I'm happy if he puts up signs on his floor. He just doesn't learn the basics, that's hard to deal with. I like him so much- he's a cool guy but he's a touchy one, sensitive, so it's hard to let him know when he's messing up.

Other supervisors mentioned difficulties with their co-supervisor.

Co-supervisor: "he didn't support me at all"

Finally, the frustration of not agreeing with their HR or AHR was also discussed at length. This HR recalled this incident:

One time she just decided to take matters into her own hands without asking my opinion. That kinda got to me. The staff kept forgetting to do something regarding the computer. My assistant decided to discipline them by taking a privilege away without talking with me. I came back to the office and there was a sign on the computer. I didn't agree with that action but couldn't let the RAs know or we wouldn't look like a team. So I just asked to talk with her in my room and told her I wanted to be a part of decisions like that. I wasn't that mad

but it was kind of irritating – I mean the staff needed to use the computer for work and they couldn't because of her decision.

Working out a comfortable way of checking in with each other seemed to be more difficult for some yet this difficulty was common for all the supervisors at various points in the year, as these two supervisors explained:

I hate it when I don't agree with my partner, one time, he didn't like my idea on something and made me feel stupid in front of the staff when I brought it up. I just wanted them to hear it and see what they thought but when I mentioned it he said he didn't want to be a part of it and didn't support me at all. That's fine if he didn't like it but he made all the other staff kinda feel like they couldn't support it either.

* * * * *

Disagreeing with your partner is hard. Like if I like doing something one way and she doesn't. I think that the hard part is not letting your pride get in the way – the whole power trip thing. You just have to work it out, try to see their side and if you can't then you need to reach a compromise and do it quickly so it doesn't get in the way of your whole dynamic.

Next, I will describe some of the day to day challenges that the supervisors faced on the job. These are the most typical stories told during the interviews.

Daily frustrations

Burnout/schedule: “the damn fire alarm”

A supervisor's schedule is extremely busy. The supervisors have to learn how to manage time well and prioritize work, school, and personal commitments. Scheduling is a major part of a supervisor's workday. These two accounts are typical:

As far as what constitutes a hard day I think is when those times where the work aspect of this job tends to override your academics. I mean, I've come to pretty much accept the fact that your social schedule is absolutely flexible around job and school, and that's not hard for me but when you have to write a thirteen page paper due the next day and you're up all night with a fire alarm or a resident needs to talk then I think that's the most stressful situation.

* * * * *

There's been a couple of nights in the past where like I'll have something due or a test and be very stressed out about it and end up having to deal with multiple problems and it's something I just have to deal with. I guess the worst night was when I had two finals the next day and I was stupid, but, I went downtown and stayed out til 2:00 in the morning and when I came home to go to sleep the fire alarm went off. The damn fire alarm kept us up dealing with it for about two hours in the cold and I had residents all around me telling me that they had to study and sleep—like I don't know this. Anyway that was pretty frustrating and I just had to kick myself for staying out late.

When one lives where one works, there are unique problems that occur. However, most supervisors do not mind living at work or they would have never made it that far in the dorm system, but the situation can provide frustrations regarding privacy.

Privacy/ "the rumormill"

For example, this supervisor took issue with the watchful eyes and open mouths of his co-workers.

I actually think it's kinda funny how for some reason this group of people find it necessary to know every little thing about everyone's private life. I've heard some crazy things about myself that I think it's amazing how something will start so innocent and then end up so out of context or something. One time it got back to (the Director) about how I had done something that I didn't – it was no big deal but he gave me a bad time about it in a joking way. Anyway it bothers me but I guess that how it is with all of us working and living together on campus. I'm guilty of it too--I like to know what's going on but I think I'm pretty good about not spreading stuff that's crap.

Another supervisor commented on her participation in the rumormill:

And as sad as it is, I think you become absorbed in residence life, in that little world, and therefore you take interest in other people's lives maybe for a lack of, you know, anything else, you know. You don't know the outside world in a sense and so it's the only thing that you hear about, it's all that you have to do, and so it may be a circumstance of boredom. And so as much as I would like to say that I don't get involved in the rumors, I am just as bad as the next person, you know. I want to know, oh, who got fired and why'd they get fired, or who's going out with who or I don't know, you know. It's just -- I think it is a lack of touch with the outside world and we're just so wrapped up with what we're doing. Everybody has friends on another staff and you're inclined to hear something and tell a good

friend that you have on another staff, and then they tell somebody on their staff and it takes like a day for something to get across campus.

Politics: “it’s who ya know”

Another irritation that was expressed by the supervisors was the “political game” that sometimes goes on with the hiring process. There are politics in any job situation. For the supervisors, their concern was with the way it made them uncomfortable with the hiring process involving the RA staff. These two supervisors had different takes on the issue:

Yeah, there’s a lot of politics with the job, but I think its important to note that there is in the real world too, and that’s the way it goes. The thing that bothers me is that we interview everyone, then one or two people can say “nope” that person is out. But I don’t know another way to do it. It’s who ya know.

Mainly I think the politics is in the hiring process, I think we all get treated pretty fairly and equally from day to day. I hope to think that I treat my staff equally and those who do well I compliment but don’t favor for specific things. I think they all get the same treatment.

Finally, another frustration was disagreeing with policy. However, due to some position autonomy, most of the supervisors tended to follow policy with the “common sense” of knowing how to work with college students in their own dorm. To elaborate, position autonomy involves the supervisors receiving some leeway on how to run their buildings as long as the student conduct code is respected and the dorm is orderly. One demonstrated this frustration by explaining his feelings on the guest policy:

Disagreeing with policy: “enforce what you follow”

The guest policy is crap. Plain and simple. I almost quit over it because I couldn’t live that way. At my age, I want to be able to have my girlfriends stay over if they feel like it. I understand that they want us to be examples and all that but they gotta know that college students sleep with each other and that’s the way it is and always will be. They (the administration) go home to their houses and have their private lives, just because we work here doesn’t mean we stop living the way

we do. I think this job takes up enough of my time and I give a lot of myself so when I want to have people stay in my room behind closed doors then I'm gonna. The problem they are having is that roommates get upset at each other for having there significant others stay and blah, blah, blah... but if you're a good RA then you can handle that situation with your residents – common sense.

This AHR added:

I don't agree with telling my staff that they can't have their girlfriend/boyfriend over, especially if they're smart about it. I tell them that its hard to get the residents to respect you and do what you say if you don't do it yourself. Enforce what you follow but I'd like them to enforce the rules. The guest policy is written funny. You can have 24-hour visitation but they can't sleep there so you can bother your roommate with your boyfriend by having sex in front of them or watching a movie at 3am but you can't have them sleeping quietly. Hmm... College kids are going to do that so the RAs need to know their residents and gain respect by talking with them about what's reasonable and what's not. People understand and if they don't they are assholes and probably are breaking other rules as well. Bottom line is that there is a reason for the guest policy: fire codes and parents. We can deal with that but no RA is gonna gain respect from his resident by telling them not to have their girlfriends over. Sorry – that's just the way I see it.

In conclusion, the purpose of this chapter was to familiarize the reader with the division of labor and the duties involved with dorm supervision. The HR and AHR are at the center of the dorm system. Their position is an informational source as well as a guide for the staff in the dorm. Ideally, the HR and AHR will strive for the same goal as the RLO has put forth. This goal is to provide the residents with a safe and educational atmosphere in which the resident can be productive while feel a sense of community to help with their transition into college.⁷ However, each team of dorm supervisors is different and work together using various styles of supervision. Some of these styles are successful, resulting in working staff relationships and an orderly dorm. Other types of styles can provide difficulty regarding the working relationship of the HR and AHR. These findings will be discussed in Chapter Three. The next chapter will describe in

further detail the job of a dorm supervisor. **The Relations of Dorm Supervisory Staff describes the complexities of the number of relations that supervisors maintain through their work.**

CHAPTER TWO: Relations of Dorm Supervisory Staff

“I guess personally I think it's crucial to have a supervisory staff that gets along, acts very professional, has specific goals in mind for not only the residents but the RAs, and is courteous and helpful and shows leadership as well. So I think if you don't have that, you have problems.”

- Head Resident

Head Resident and Assistant Head Resident Relations with Other Staff

In this chapter, I will begin to present my thesis and show how it holds true by demonstrating how it is embedded with the realities of the dorm supervisory staff. My thesis statement is as follows: If the Head Resident and Assistant Head Resident do not agree on rule enforcement, the Resident Assistant staff will lose confidence in their superiors and in the direction of the work goals, which in turn causes inconsistent enforcement. This inconsistency will not set clear standards for resident behavior in the dorm. If clear standards are not set, then the residents will suffer from “anomie.”⁸

The first part of this chapter describes the relationships between a dorm supervisor and other dorm staff. The supervisory staff relations, with other dorm employees, are dependent on how they get along with their HR or AHR. If a supervisor gets along with all the other workers involved in their dorm, yet does not have a functioning relationship with their HR or AHR, the dorm order suffers. The second section specifically deals with the relationship between the Head Resident and the Assistant Head Resident. This relationship plays a cardinal role in determining the dorm's success for the year in terms of dorm order. I will provide quotations from the dorm supervisors that tell of their relations with the RA staff, the dorm secretary, the

residents, the Administration, the nightwatch, and the custodians. The supervisor needs to maintain contact with the all of the people involved with the day to day running of a dorm. This involvement varies from supervisor to supervisor, yet most agree that they need to maintain a working and friendly relationship in order to be aware of what is going on in the dorm so they can do their job effectively.

One Assistant Head Resident explained:

A lot of times the secretary or the custodians, night watch, get left out of the staff picture. But really, I mean, if we didn't have them they wouldn't--we wouldn't be able to function. And so I really--one of my major roles is--for myself--is to keep in contact with those people constantly, take them to lunch, go and visit them, help them out when they need help, things like that, because I think it makes a difference as far as how a healthy staff operates. If the custodians aren't happy or the secretary's not happy, then the rest of the staff is not very happy as well. That's one of my roles that I really work for.

Dorm Supervisors and RAs

RA Staff: "It's like a family. They keep saying the staff is like family. Families fight, Families argue."

The Head Resident (HR) and Assistant Head Resident (AHR) pick resident assistants from a pool of finalists. The Director and Assistant Director of the RLO (RLO) oversee a meeting of which the supervisors pick newly hired RAs to be on their respective staffs. The HR and AHR need to agree on the people they choose together. Most often this process depends on compromise. The dorm supervisors wish to get the best staff possible. With this in mind, the supervisory staff put great effort and time into choosing their staff. Since this is the first task many supervisory staffs tackle with their partner, it provides a sense of how the HR and AHR will compromise and work together to meet a goal. A dorm supervisor explained,

It's like picking your family. You want them to be hard working but at the same time you want them to get along with everyone and be fun. It was hard for me and my assistant (to pick) because we are so different and we like different kinds of personalities—you know? But I think we lucked out and got some really great people on our staff. They get along enough, but some of them come to me more and some of them go to her more which I think is kinda expected.

Another Head Resident explained:

You're kind of in charge of not only selecting people to be on your staff, you know, in a way you are in charge of selecting someone, trying to get them to come together as a staff and that's your training, you know. You're the main -- one of the main trainers, getting them to geared up for the school year. And you're also kind of their support system and if they need -- if they need anything you're hopefully there, they can come to you and confide in you. Just trying to be as supportive of the staff, it's part of the job, being available to the staff when they need you, knowing when to kind of stay out of their way so they do the job, and learn from the job and, I don't know, just be there, you know, when things might not be going right or as well as they could be but try and provide support for that, encouragement, and also telling them when they are doing a good job, encourage positive feedback.

Establishing a Relationship

The above quote points to the dorm supervisors point out the need to maintain constant contact with their RA staff. The supervisors need to establish a comfortable relationship with their staff so if the RAs find them approachable and full of information.

This Head Resident said:

I think what, I guess, myself is what I've tried to do is hopefully set out the guidelines that I feel are most important that, you know, we should be responsible for, we should act in a professional way towards. And then what basically I do is I let the RAs take care of their floor. If they have questions they come to me and then I try to hopefully -- if they ask questions or advice, then I try to, of course, advise them on what I think should be done. Sometimes you obviously have to intervene and tell them exactly what should be done, but a lot of times I think I just try to give them guidance and let them take care of the situation so that even if it's my point of view coming across, they feel like, okay, it's their situation. They're going to handle it. And that way a lot of times the floor ends up respecting them for that, respects the RA, and they see that. And it just kind of helps keep the

floor, I guess, in a more maintained manner, you know. It doesn't let it get out of hand. But, yeah, I'd say just the biggest thing is try to advise them and let the RAs take control of the floor and, you know, hopefully offer anything that I can.

On the subject of approachability, another supervisor responded:

I made an attempt in the first week or so that my staff was here to try to get them to know me and my personality, as well as try to be, you know, a leader and go through the manual and go through the policies and procedures with them. But we also would meet all day, do the kind of scheduled events, but then we would always do something social that night or, you know, that afternoon. And it's kind of like letting people see you in a supervisor position and then letting people see you with your hair down and, you know, just as a friend, a person you hang out with. And I think people realizing and respecting that you have both a capability to be both people makes you more approachable.

Get to Know Each Other

Yet another dorm supervisor mentioned that in addition to creating a relationship between herself and each RA, she feels it is important to provide an opportunity for the RA staff to get to know each other. She stated:

I believe that you establish some kind of relationship amongst everyone in the first part of the year, hopefully allowing them to get to know one another ahead of time before they get deeply involved in their academic workload and the entities of the job. I think if you establish that at the beginning of the year you establish some kind of camaraderie. It doesn't necessarily have to be friendship because not all personalities will gel together. Some people, their personalities will conflict. And I think what you have to do is hopefully relate to your RAs that we all have a job to do, each one of you has a certain responsibility based on your floor and your work at the desk in front of the residents. Build that respect between your RAs so that they understand everyone well. And then hopefully that just provides you with a more conducive environment. As far as allowing the RAs to get along outside of the job together as a staff so that they're not isolating themselves and they're not building these little niches, I think that just extracurricular activities outside of the dorm, whether it be bowling or going off to our secretary's house, for example, to go have dinner. It's kind of nice just to get away from the dorm, get away from the responsibility that an RA has because it is their responsibility, to be able to get away and hopefully relax, let your hair down, talk to one another, find out past histories so

that the RA gets a sense that they know the other person and they know a little bit about them, they know how to react to them. Again, not everyone's going to, you know, particularly like everyone else. But you hopefully -- you give them the opportunity to get to know the each other and you.

Stay Approachable

Most supervisors mentioned that being approachable is a necessity for a dorm supervisor. According to the interviews, the RA staff needs to stay informed and have their questions answered. This Assistant Head Resident explained how he felt about talking with a RA who questioned an issue. He stated:

I think that if someone came and approached us about anything that we've dealt with, if they disagree with us, if it's a discipline situation where they were the only party involved, we'll sit down with them and discuss and find a happy medium. Like maybe we felt the resident should go to the Self Over Substance program and be very strict. Maybe the RA felt there should be some exceptions here and this is why. We'll take that into account and sit down and talk with the person until we reach some kind of happy medium where, you know-- we're not all completely satisfied with the situation but at least it's resolved reasonably. And like if someone--I don't know--we make a call on something as far as the staff goes and they disagree with it kind of as a whole, like if a couple people, or even one person disagrees, it means we'll probably sit down and have a meeting and say, hey, you guys, you know, what do you think about this and what can we do. I mean, if you really disagree with this what can we do otherwise?

Disciplining Staff

One of the frustrations of relating with RAs, that a dorm supervisor runs into, is the disciplining of a staff member. It is difficult to tell a friend or even a peer that they are making a mistake. Most of the dorm supervisors I interviewed mentioned their dislike for this aspect of the job. For example, this AHR stated:

I guess one of my least favorite things is having to approach a staff member who's doing something wrong or poorly because I like giving compliments a lot more than telling somebody that they're doing something wrong. But that comes with... you get better at it the more you do it. And I tend

to, you know, try to be really gentle about it or whatever, but that can bother me for an entire day when I know that I'm going to have to approach somebody about an issue like that.

This Assistant Head Resident told a story that illustrates the frustration of correcting a RA on his staff. He told the following:

One of the RAs was out, who was on duty, was supposed to be behind the desk, is out shooting home runs with a whiffle ball bat and a whiffle ball and it's going up in the ceiling fans and smoke alarms. And as soon as he looks at me, he knows he's doing wrong and he tries to hide the bat from me. And it's like dealing with a resident. It's like dealing with a stupid freshman. He was like, ha ha ha, and tries to hide the bat. It's like, wait a second, this guy is an RA. I shouldn't have to do this to--I shouldn't have to say anything to him, and I don't want to. When they put me in that position, I hate that. Or another RA asks for all these nights out. He knows he's stepping over and just keeps pushing and pushing. I guess wherever you go in life in a management position of any sort people are going to do that and it's good experience for me, but I hate it when that happens. I don't like to have to do that. These people I consider most of them my friends because I work closely with them and I get along with them. Or like when my Head Resident told one of the RAs to not bat prunes into the damn parking lot and they wouldn't stop doing it. And then I felt like I had to step in and, you know, quit fucking doing that now. That drives me nuts too.

He went on to say:

But like I--how I feel about that is that you're always going to have conflicts, you're always going to have a little something, a little tension here or something, whether it's one party or both. There's always going to be that little tension. It's like a family. They (the RLO) keep saying the staff is like family. Families fight, families argue. We live together and work together. So things are going to happen like that. I've seen the RAs snap on each other.

Secretary: "She seems to have her fingers on the pulse of what's going on in the dorm."

Another part of the "staff family" is the dorm secretary. The secretary keeps in constant contact with the RLO or RLO, and ideally the supervisory staff of her building. Dorm supervisors reported that if they do not communicate with their secretaries they

have a situation that eventually leads to tension in the dorm office. On the other hand, the interviews revealed that dorm supervisors that kept their secretaries informed benefited from her knowledge of the dorm, the residents, the RAs, the custodians, the nightwatch, and the RLO. During this study, I observed that minimal communication provides the basics for the operation of the desk but, if the communication is open and the parties involved are approachable, than the dorm supervisors will know more about their building. This open communication with the secretary also sets the stage for a friendly working environment. All of the dorm supervisors mentioned the need to “touch base” with their secretary. For example, this Head Resident said:

Well, I do the office hour, 8:00 to 9:00 every morning so I have a chance to start the day out with the secretary, take her coffee in the morning. We go over any problems that she's noticed in the office and try and fix them, identify what the problems are, and the good stuff, and just kid around so we get to know each other better. And my assistant pulls her office hour two--well, three days, Monday, Wednesday, Friday. So all three of us get a chance to really go over things, lots of things, so that's a good thing.

Another similarly commented:

I work an office hour, which is a really good time to touch base with the secretary. She seems to have her fingers on the pulse of what's going on in the dorm. She provides customer service at the desk during hours from 8:00 to 5:00, work orders which, you know, if anything goes wrong with the physical structure of the dorm she has to submit a piece of paper in writing, on a computer actually basically. It's a way of logging what things are wrong and how to fix those situations. She also deals first hand with a lot of the students to make sure that she is in the know about what she needs to be doing to benefit them as a customer service person. It's a very important aspect of the dorm functioning as a whole and as a head resident -- of course, a head resident has to make sure that the secretary understands what he wants and the vice versa.

Nightwatch: “I’d say on certain aspects the nightwatch are higher maintenance than the RAs.”

The nightwatch are the students that dorm supervisors hire to “man” the desk⁹ when the RA staff or secretary are off duty. The desk is only closed from six a.m. to eight a.m. Desk hours from nine p.m. to six a.m. are covered by the nightwatch staff. This staff is trained only in the basic functions of the desk. For example, the nightwatch staff check out equipment, exchange money, check out movies and give packages to the residents. The nightwatch are also instructed to do a round of the dorm every hour and call on the RA staff and dorm supervisors when they run into discipline problems. They track the activity in the dorm in a night log and are instructed to record any problems. The nightwatch maintain the quiet at night and help secure the dorm. The dorm supervisors are in charge of training, hiring, and firing of the nightwatch. They are on the dorm payroll and are a part of the dorm staff.¹⁰

This Assistant Head Resident describes his relationship with the nightwatch:

Night watch, on the other hand, when they come in, we train them. Obviously we don't have the time or energy to train them in the in-depth manner that RAs have been trained. So what we try to do is help give them a better understanding of what's expected of the residents. We definitely go over how they should act in the office, of the procedures of the office. And then as far as rounds go, we definitely let them know that we -- what the rules are and hopefully, just like I say, general understanding of what's expected of the residents. A lot of times we suggest to the night watch that if they have a particular problem that they feel uncomfortable dealing with or are unable to deal with because they don't know certain information, we do have an RA on duty on a particular night. They should call that RA or a supervisor and hopefully get that information from them there. Again, it's -- a lot of it falls back on the fact that we just don't have the time nor energy to train them at the depth as the RAs are trained.

Another Assistant Head Resident provided his view of the nightwatch:

I'd say on certain aspects the night watch are higher maintenance than the RAs. The RAs are just through the interview process, which is kind of an elimination process, you're more -- usually more sure of getting quality people. The night watch, they're usually -- there's more of a gamble involved as far as whether the people are going to keep on task and do their jobs well. The RAs are generally more self-motivated, where the night watch aren't always, though obviously we have a lot more invested in the well-being of the RA in making sure that they're doing their job as opposed to the night watch not doing theirs. While they both are important, the RA and the nightwatch. And I would say as far as like little nit-picky things about things at the desk or aspects of the job, you have to be a lot more -- you have to watch the night watch a little more closely, a lot more closely than you do the RAs. The RAs are less likely to make mistakes on just the general running of things. The night watch has a much higher turnover rate than the RA job fortunately. And so keeping up with who's trained on what is also a part of the job that I think is really, really important, to make sure that everybody knows everything that they should when a new person comes in or if they switch shifts, going from just a desk job to roaming the building or something like that.

Custodians: “They can be eyes and ears of the dorm that the residents don’t suspect.”

The dorm custodians are in charge of keeping the dorms clean. Cleaning up after three hundred college students day after day is a big job. The custodians are part of the residence life umbrella. They work out of the RLO where they get work orders. Each dorm has it’s own custodial staff that remains the same all year. The dorm staff pointed out the importance of getting to know the custodians. Most of the dorm supervisors saw the need for this involvement not only to benefit from the custodians’ view of the dorm but to show appreciation for the thankless job that they perform as well. One Assistant expressed her need to stay in touch with the custodians during the week:

It's also an opportunity to see the custodians because they usually stop by the desk at that time. They also know what's going on in a different sort of way. They can be eyes and ears of the dorm that the residents don't suspect. For some reason residents will spout off about something right in front of custodians without thinking that the custodians will care enough to tell us. That's the wrong idea because the custodians care about the building and the environment they work in.

Not only do the custodians provide a clean dorm, but they also can build relationships with the residents and staff. If a supervisor can encourage their staff to build relationships with the custodians, then ideally, the custodians will feel appreciated more often. One supervisors explained:

Some of the residents have a great relationship with the custodians, mainly because those custodians make an effort to know them and say “Hi” and ask how things are going. I’m lucky to have such great people here. The custodians here really get along well with the staff and the residents love them. And I think its not because we have done such a great job of including them but they include themselves and like what they are doing. They like the students, well, some of them.

Residence Life Office (RLO), Campus Police, and the Dean (VP of Students):
“Sometimes I feel like they have no idea about what’s going on here”

Generally, the viewpoint of the dorm supervisors towards the overhead administration and VP of student affairs was poor. The complaints of the dorm supervisors varied from saying she was out of touch to, “Well, she does what she can because she has to please parents.” The consensus for the RLO was that the Director and the Assistant Director do a good job at keeping them informed. Most dorm supervisors also said that they could go to one or the other about things that came up in the dorm. For instance, some supervisors mentioned that if they had a resident that was “out of control” they could go to the Director and ask him what to do. For the most part, the supervisors were in agreement that the RLO made up for where the Campus Police and Vice President of Student Affairs fell short. For example, the RLO served as a buffer for the dorm supervisors. Although sometimes they didn’t agree with policies of the administration, they basically understood the need for the policies when the RLO explained them.

When it came to campus police, some dorm supervisors complained of lack of support and tardiness. They told of campus police disregarding the dorm supervisors' authority and overstepping their bounds. Some mentioned that the experiences with campus police were dependent on what officer arrived on the scene. They reported that some of the officers were difficult to work with because they thought they were not effective. For example, this Head Resident recalled an incident:

I remember one time I called the campus police and told them I thought that I smelled pot smoke. Oh, about twenty minutes later (a policeman) waddled in and casually came up to the desk and would only address my assistant because he's a guy. It was like I wasn't even there even though I was the one on duty and I was the one who knew what was going on. Then we all went up to the room in question and he said "that's not marijuana, that's something else-maybe a candle." So I said whatever and he said, "well let's go in and put the candle out and tell your resident that they shouldn't burn candles." Well, anyway the door was locked and I wasn't going to key it because the person wasn't answering the door and I didn't think there was a candle anyway, but he asked me to key the room. Like I didn't know that we weren't supposed to--he's was an idiot. He wanted me to key it so he wouldn't get in trouble or something. I didn't and we just left. The resident was probably laughing at us through the door--stoned.

One Head Resident stated:

I think that we couldn't ask for better leadership when you look at (the Director and the Assistant Director of RLO). They stop everything to talk to you if you have a question or a concern about something. I think they do the best they can with being fair and rules because they have the Dean on them to keep parents happy and staff. I mean especially (the Director), he knows because he has been in our position. He ran a dorm and he knows how to use common sense but they also have to follow policy.

Because of incidents like the two described, many of the supervisors felt that the administration did little to help with the inconsistent police work.

This dorm supervisor expressed his frustration with the administration by recalling an incident that happened with a RA on his staff. He said:

Sometimes I feel like they have no idea about what's going on here because like when our RA got in trouble for joking about drinking too much on her 21st and one of her stupid little freshman girls went to their daddy and he told so and so and yada yada finally it got back to (the Director) and we had to write her that stupid letter of warning and she was so upset. She's probably one of our best RAs too. Anyway, she went to the Dean and apologized – I'm sorry but that blew. That's just administrative shit.

Another supervisory staff member explained:

I think that they do a good job at training us – they put some major time into the RAs and supervisors. I like that part of it but sometimes the rules are the rules and like the guest policy. The guest policy is a joke. I think they know that but they still expect us to enforce it and make everyone follow it. Sure, no problem. I don't think so. I wish the Dean could or whoever made that rule-probably from the parents or some kid who could tell his roommate to stop having his girlfriend over so he told his mommy instead -- I wish they could come over here and tell people the guest policy. Please, they want us to help these kids grow up, right?

Student Residents: “I think it's the residents that come back and talk to you year after year.”

Many dorm supervisors mentioned that the residents were the reason they wanted to do a good job. The experiences they had with the residents are one of the major benefits listed when asked about the perks of the job. A direct relationship with the residents happens most often the RAs because they have more contact with them. The dorm supervisors usually have been RAs at one time and miss that aspect of the job so they cultivate relations with their staff or they make an effort to be seen at the desk to get to know the residents of the dorm.

I just think the more time spent in front of residents and in front of the staff you get more experience with being a leader. And basically, like I said, I think it's all in the confidence you have in yourself and also an ability to say I don't know when you don't know, but I'll find out the answer. So that that's what you tell your resident assistants is, you know, you're not expected to know everything, but you're leading your floor and you're running -- you're helping run the floor. So when people come to you with a question, give them the best answer that you know. But if you don't know, don't make something up and refer them to the right people.

This HR mentioned:

A supervisor also tends to get lost in the shuffle, so to speak. They're not as visible as a RA oftentimes so a lot of the residents will tend not to know who the Head Resident is and even that he's a male if that may be the case. And I think that a good supervisor would do all of his or her part to make themselves present to the residents of the dorm in hopes that they build some kind of communication with the residents and they build some kind of understanding so the residents know who they are as supervisors. I just believe that that's part of the communication process as far as making the things run smoothly as possible, making the best possible environment.

This Head Resident described the appeal of the job for her:

I think the job always appealed to me from the beginning as a way to interact with students, fellow students, and to help them with their -- whatever the personal or academic needs, and so that was always the attraction to the job for me. And so -- and I think the only way that you can do that for the most part is to be available for the students, you know. And I think, speaking for myself, I think I've been pretty available to the students for a couple of reasons. I'm perfectly okay to stay at home. I don't need to be out all the time. I don't, you know, even on my nights out I stay in because I feel comfortable being in and being available.

Yet another agreed by explaining the good experiences:

I'd say the good experiences are those where you realize that you've made a positive impact on somebody, and it doesn't even have to be something really big as far as like last year I happened to have a guy who didn't know he was epileptic and had a grand mal seizure in the middle of the night. And we took him to the hospital and everything and got him all secured and taken care and he was really, really appreciative of it, and still comes back and visits and things like that. I think it's the residents that come back and talk to you year after year. Like I had three residents from my floor last year that decided to come up to this floor this year specifically and it's things like that, I think, that really make the job worthwhile and make it a really positive experience.

The hard part dealing with the residents is the discipline. None of the dorm supervisors said that they liked to discipline the residents. Writing a resident up and holding a disciplinary meeting was referred to when asked about the downfalls of the job.

This Assistant Head Resident explained:

Some things that I don't like. It's really hard even -- I mean, this is my second year and it's really hard for me to treat the residents the same way as I did last year. Last year I was willing to give them the benefit of the doubt a lot of times and handle things that way. This year I find that they're very stupid. They annoy me. And I think it's just because I've been at it and I -- anyone who has been in the dorms longer than two years I can imagine that they feel the same way, if not more so. It's a problem for me trying not to -- because they make the same stupid mistakes that I've seen already and it's hard not to say, you're being so stupid, you know, and just treat it the same way. That's hard.

The supervisors have less direct contact with the student residents, yet, reported that this contact is valuable. Most described relationships with the residents as challenging at times but also rewarding. The main frustration with the resident and supervisor relationship was disciplinary action. The main joy with this relationship was the ability to guide student residents through the first years of college. Finally, the relationship between the Head Resident and the Assistant Head Resident will be described by the supervisors.

Head Resident and Assistant Head Resident Relationship

Speaking Up and Checking In: "I've seen it get really ugly."

A major part of the relationship between the Head Resident and Assistant Head Resident is the extent of open communication they have. If a relationship is strong then they will feel free to speak up if they have a problem and check in if they want to verify a decision. I will refer to the Head Resident as the HR and the Assistant Head Resident as the AHR. This AHR explained how he checks in:

...and then also just to ask other people that you work with. I know I constantly ask the secretary what else I can be doing or if I handled something correctly, things like that. And I ask my HR the same. And with those two especially, I know I can get honest feedback and I really value both their opinions. And then I also ask the RAs too, but sometimes I wonder whether I'm getting the same sort of feedback that I can get from HR or the secretary. We both know that I don't

take offense if somebody says, you know, you really should do this instead, or more of this or something like that.

Another AHR explained why she feels it is necessary to speak up:

I go tell him. I do, and that's just the type of person I am. I'm very open and very straightforward and if I have a problem, I'll talk to him about it, and I don't do it in front of the staff, definitely not. It needs to be done in private so I'm not challenging his authority because he's my boss. But if I disagree with him I tell him. He is really receptive to that. We'll sit down and we'll try to talk it out. And there's been a couple of things that I really disagreed on and they still happened, and that's fine because he makes the call. He needs to make those calls. But he does need to talk about it and I am not shy at all about going to him. I think that there's been a lot of troubles with not telling your feeling about things in the past. I know we'll be facing things where the supervisor and staff may not necessarily compliment each other as much as (The Director and Assistant Director of the RLO) had hoped they would.

If the HR and AHR do not communicate well then the relationship will start to break down. This breakdown causes confusion and may cause work duties to suffer.

For example, an AHR described what he had witnessed in the past.

Well, I've seen – I've seen it get really ugly, like people don't want to talk to each other about things or somebody is apprehensive about, you know, saying something to the other person on that team because they don't want to hurt their feelings. But it's – at the same time you've got to think of it as a job. People need to be taken – residents need to be taken care of, RAs need to be taken care of, things need to get done. And a lot of times I've seen where people aren't doing their job but nobody tells them, especially their partner doesn't tell them they're not doing their job. Last year that was a big problem. The Assistant was a great guy, but he was afraid to tell the Head Resident when she was screwing up and when she wasn't doing what she was supposed to be doing, and a lot of us suffered, you know. Not doing write-ups for two months, not typing them into the computer, losing them, that kind of thing. He knew it was going on, he knew she wasn't doing them, slacking on them. He was telling me about it but he never told her. That was bad. He was afraid to tell her, afraid to hurt her feelings. Things get ugly.

To further illustrate this point, this HR explained how he dealt with an issue by speaking with his AHR so they could come to an understanding. In this instance, the AHR put a

sign on the staff computer informing them that they had lost a privilege. The HR was not informed of this action and felt left out of the decision. He explained:

Because she took the initiative, she put the sign up, she signed it, you know, I let it go and I supported her decision because I don't think it's right for me to go back and contradict her, you know. The RA staff sees us as a team and if we can't perform as a team and if we can't agree on certain issues, then pretty soon the RAs begin to split and some try to – or some tend to favor one head resident versus the assistant head resident, or you get everyone ganging up on one person and that's no good. I don't think that's appropriate, you know. She has authority and I think she should be given the opportunity to express that.

K.B. Did you deal with her then? I mean, did you talk to her about it?

I mentioned it. I guess I – what did I say? I think I probably just spoke in general about, well, I kind of – I don't even know how I really worded it. But I think I mentioned that, you know, I think we probably have to talk to the RAs about the computer and, you know, why it's so vital that we do this so that we don't mess up our networking system. And then not punish them for something that, you know, is relatively new to them. And I don't know whether it was taken in the right respect or whether it even got across, the message got across. I guess at the time I didn't want to step on toes. Being early in the year I felt that it was probably better just to kind of let it go, speak general about it and move on. And thus far we haven't really had major problems with the staff. It's just how we do things.

K.B. Does communication happened more now?

I think it does. I think we, opposed to the beginning of the year, we do speak quite a bit more and we try to communicate as to what's going on in the dorm and how we want to handle it. She may give her input on it and then, of course, I'll – if I agree with her or disagree, you know, it really doesn't matter. I'll give my input and tell her, yeah, okay, this is what I think. And usually what we do is try to come to some sort of consensus on it that we both will agree to. You know, it's just kind of one of those things where again, you know, we're trying to work as a team, you know, and to be professional and to be in the supervisory staff position that we're in, I think that we have to show the same kind of cooperation that we expect out of our RAs. It's a give-take relationship and if you don't act in a certain way, you know, if you isolate yourself and you become the authoritarian figure, then how can you expect your RAs to expect that, you know. I guess that goes back to being an example too.

Common Goals: “It’s just a necessity and both parties have to be receptive to finding common goals.”

According to the interviews with supervisors, common goals for the dorm staff and the dorm environment need to be understood by both the HR and the AHR. Most dorm supervisors mentioned the need to agree with each other or compromise when they discuss the ideal goals for the dorm they jointly manage. For example, this HR shared a practice that he and his AHR agreed upon. He explained:

And my assistant -- and I agreed at the beginning of the year that we would never -- what would I -- how do I want to say -- we would never put the other person down in front of the staff or to question some remark -- question a decision in front of the staff. Like if we were both approached by a staff member about a question and I answered it one way, we decided that for the most part we would back each other in that when we were in front of the staff, and if we had some problem with it then we would talk about it privately, obviously unless it was huge, I don't agree, or I said something completely out of line, you know. But basically don't make the other person look bad in front of the staff, always have support and open communication.

This AHR told how he and his HR communicated to their staff the goals they ideally expected. He states:

The fact that my HR and I set out pretty clear goals on what we wanted to happen as far as in the job and then also within the staff, them relating to one another, things like that. And they've met or exceeded all of those, I think. The staff conflicts that we've had, if you can even call them that, have been very, very, very minimal. We haven't had anybody, to my knowledge, really, really disagree with each other. I mean, well, they've disagreed, but, you know, nothing like they will avoid each other for days on end, things like that. They work well as a cohesive unit.

In the above case, the HR and AHR had agreed upon how to let their RA staff know what was expected. Another supervisory team had common goals as well. In this case, they anticipated a difficult year for discipline based on the size and reputation of their particular dorm. The AHR of this dorm explained:

We went into our dorm thinking we were going to have a hell year. We didn't want to deal with all the discipline type of stuff. So we basically laid it out that we were going to be extremely strict from the very beginning and keep it going. Not extremely strict, I guess, but we were going to make sure that the rules were known and that our RAs -- we told them that we wanted them to write up pretty much everything, and I understand that that kind of breaks their autonomy a little bit. But in the same respect, with such a large staff and such a large building, we can't deal with the inconsistencies that I've seen in the past. So that was our major goal. We really had to tell our staff, this is what we want, and our staff -- the people that we chose, we all discussed it. I mean, we were like this what we want, what do you guys want? And everyone pretty much agreed. I mean, there were some varying opinions on, you know, how extreme we should be or how strict or how lenient. But for the most part it's been working really well.

This HR described the tension supervisors may feel when dealing with compromise and the decision making process. He explained:

It's just a necessity and both parties have to be receptive to finding common goals. I think a lot of times -- I don't know if it's just the beginning and, you know, you try to maybe get along too much or maybe they just, you know, don't -- think I'm the easiest person to approach or whatever. Its important to have that because without a common idea about what you want for the staff and the dorm the two supervisors will always run into problems with everything they face...how to discipline, how to treat nights out, how to do paperwork, whatever.

Division of Labor: "...so it's like I'm dealing with two staffs and it's just crazy."

The division of labor between the HR and the AHR is vague at best. The RLO does not specify clearly who is in charge of what. The AHR is contracted to "assist" the HR in the supervising duties. The AHR's direct supervisor is the HR. However, it is very common for the HR and the AHR to run the dorm as a team effort. The HR does usually have the final say, yet, at times the AHR is the only supervisor in the dorm and needs to make final calls. The reader can see why this issue is an important one for working relations between the dorm supervisors. This AHR explains her struggle:

I've heard it from a lot of people, but I think it is one of the harder jobs because you do have a floor and you have all the administrative and disciplinary duties as well. I mean, I report to (my HR) if I don't know something or if I think I need to run something by him but he supports my decisions on things and told me that I have the say when he's out. Also I kinda have my own stuff, like the nightwatch. That's kind of -- but my biggest thing is night watch. I'm in charge of night watch. And I have a staff of I think eleven of them right now and that's pretty much the same size as my RA staff, and so it's like I'm dealing with two staffs and it's just crazy. It takes up a lot of time, way more time than I ever thought it would. I've still been working on trying to balance with school and the job together. It seems to go week by week, on and off. Like one week it will be completely the job focus and I'll forget about all my classes pretty much for the week, and then it'll switch and I'll do all my classes and forget about the job for a week. So I'm working on balancing that.

Productive HR and AHR relationships have a clear, yet maybe not set, division of duties. When one partner needs some assistance the other will, ideally, jump in and so on. Because the dorm supervisors are also students, they will benefit from helping each other out from time to time. This AHR describes this by saying:

We've done some things where we split up duties really well, like I handle all the night watch things and she handles mostly the like executive decisions like things going on with the fire system or, you know, things the Head Resident knows about. She does a lot of that. We share some discipline duties. She runs the discipline meetings and the staff meetings and I have a pretty equal part in it. She gives me a lot of leeway as to how much involvement I have in stuff like that. I think we're probably one of the best teams on campus.

Another supervisor adds:

I think that it would be the job of whoever felt they were being overloaded to go to that person. I don't think that this is working out really good. We need to do this part of the job together. I think -- I mean, I've heard so many stories about that happening, the supervisors clashing and I guess if it gets really bad, and they have to tough it out and try to compromise, try to find some kind of middle ground with communications, etc.

The Balance of Natural Abilities: “She's a real go-getter and that's the thing that probably complements me. I'm a little bit more reserved.”

The HR and the AHR talked about how they work so closely together that a benefit is a balance of natural abilities. This balance made for a more organized dorm. If one supervisor is more inclined to listen to staff issues and problem solve and the other is more apt to organized files than neither will feel useless or overextended. In the following quote, an AHR described the supervisory relationship that he witnessed as a RA. He explained why he thought they were successful.

They just complimented one another very well. They were both -- they're both very organized folks and they were just really on the ball. They didn't divulge a whole lot of what they did a lot of the times for consistency and confidentiality's sake. But it appeared to me that they -- the reason that it was so fluid as far as getting everything on line and getting people into see the folks that they needed as far as counseling and things like that was just because they both cared about what happened, and I think that showed.

When I asked this AHR what she thought about balance she replied:

I think -- well, if we look at him and I in the building, I'm the person that -- I'm the supervisor that brings the staff together to do things and jokes around a lot but get things done as much as I can. And he's more or a fatherish type person. He's -- he tries to -- well, he keeps track of the discipline in the office and all of the stuff that I don't want to deal with. So we balance each other really well. I think I'm a pretty good supervisor. I'm fairly lenient but strict at the same time. But I joke around a lot, but when it comes to getting the job done when it needs to be done, I'm pretty good at that, especially with this type of situation when I need to be serious and get the point across, I do.

Another responded by explaining that a successful team does not have to be best friends, instead, they need mutual respect. He stated:

Well, she and I come from the same home town and we never really knew each other, but we seem to have a lot in common, just pretty laid back. We're not really -- I've seen some upper staffs that are really, really tight like right off the bat, and I think we've worked really well together in a crisis situation, like

backing for each other. But as far as having our own personal lives and stuff, we definitely do our own thing. I was on the staff my second year and it was just 24 hours a day 7 days a week, you were with those people and it's not like that this year. And it's not like we don't get along. We have a professional relationship and we also have an understanding that as far as support there is a mutual understanding. And I think we kind of balance each other out as far as our staff sees us, which is kind of unfortunate for her, cause sometimes she has to play the role of the disciplinarian with our staff and I kind of do a lot of the positive reinforcement. And I'm glad that she took that role because I have some problems doing that, and it's something that needs to be done and something that takes a lot of skill and tact.

Again, this HR reports that he and his AHR are different but that is a benefit for the RA staff in some ways. He explains:

Well, personally between my assistant and myself, we're -- in a lot of way we're two very different people. She tends to be a little bit more scatterbrained about a few things. She's a real go-getter and that's the thing that probably complements me. I'm a little bit more reserved. I try to be as organized as I can, whereas she goes out and does things that would be something that may take me a little while to do just because she's a little bit more of a go-getter. As far as our personal relationship, I think that we both respect each other and the jobs that we do. I know that she puts up with a lot of busy work that I maybe delegate to her. But along the lines, that's her job as well. Handling night watch is a very busy position. It has been in our dorm anyway. We have an incredible amount of people quitting and hiring and the turnover rate is incredible, but -- and so I credit her for all the time that she spends dealing with that. She has really done an outstanding job.

Getting Along: “we don't always see eye to eye on things”

The idea of getting along is a gray issue in this case. Throughout the thesis “getting along” is at the heart of the argument. Dorm supervisors have a lot to deal with in their work environment and they need to get along with their partner in order to function. The extent of which they get along is the issue. As the reader now knows, some supervisors need only to respect each other while others feel they need to try to be close friends with their partner. While the balance of natural abilities is good for the organization of the dorm functions it sometimes can effect the relationship between the

HR and the AHR. For example, if one supervisor is by the book and the other feels out each situation, then how do they agree? Sometimes a personality difference can cause tension and confusion. According to the supervisors, the ideal supervisory staff will communicate and compromise with common sense and no hard feelings. However, as human beings this ideal is sometimes a challenge to achieve. The following quote illustrates this issue:

Well once my assistant took me outside after the meeting and asked if he was doing a good job. I said “why?” and “you are doing fine” and he than told me I was snapping at him too much. I asked what he meant and told him he was interpreting me wrong. I also said I would tone it down. This is partly true. He was driving me a little nuts so maybe I was snapping. I try to remember what I said and did and I have come up with the blame the other guy method. He drives me mad when he is insecure and whiny. He says he is kidding but it happens too often. I don't see this as a big problem because I bargained for annoyances between us as the supervisors. I know it will work itself out and I'll probably talk to him about again soon. Communication is key.

She added later:

Well things are good overall. The secretary doesn't feel left out and we all get the job done BUT, my assistant and I are not the greatest of friends. I think we tolerate each other and respect getting the job done. As far as any real relationship there is none. I think that's okay but I do feel a split of opinions and staff. I think some members of the staff go to him and some come to me for everything – which is ok because its kind of set up that way. I see some staffs have a bitter split where the one group doesn't get along with the other group but so far that hasn't happened. Instead we all get along, I really enjoy pretty much everyone of the staff members-some of them I spend more time with but I try to be fair and consistent with the job related stuff. The only member of the staff that I seem to have daily differences of opinion is my assistant but usually its about everything but the job. When it comes to the job we agree 90% of the time and have the ability to compromise the rest of the time but we are so different with everything else. He frustrates me because he deals with disagreements poorly. He pouts, and says everything is ok when its not so sometimes I feel like he's not telling me things he needs or if he wants me to do something differently. Anyway, yesterday I heard from one of the RAs that he told another RA that he was pissed off at me for something I said. He actually had spoke to me about it too. I'm glad that he did but I'm annoyed that he is confiding in RAs on our staff about the stuff that is between us. If we start that, then the staff will start to take

sides and I don't think that's going to be a good situation. So I called him and asked him to come talk to me. He did. It went ok because we were polite and reasonable but I still think he avoids conflict like the plague so he won't really tell me when somethings up. Instead he'd rather pout and make things feel weird. He did say he was sorry for confiding in that RA and that when he needs to vent he'll try to go to someone on the outside and I said I was sorry I hurt his feelings. I also told him he was hard to trust and that I have a difficult time with his moods and sensitivities. I don't know how things are going to be know but I feel better for trying to get things straight instead of letting them fester.

This HR felt she did do the right thing by talking with her AHR openly. Their working relationship is intact because they do communicate and agree on how to deal with the job. "When it comes to the job we agree 90% of the time and have the ability to compromise the rest of the time but we are so different with everything else." Yet, the relationship needed some work when it came to levels of frustration and feeling like they were from different perspectives. Their personalities were different. Later that year I talked with her again and she reported:

Things are much better. I think we just need to accept that we were so different and respect each other more. I think I've learned a lot from him, particularly how to be more sensitive. And I hope he has benefited too. We still aren't the closest of friends but I like how he deals with the staff and he works really hard. I like how we run the dorm together. People always tell me that our staff seems close and that it's obvious we have fun and I think that's really true. My AHR and I don't really spend all that much time together outside of the job but we both spend a lot of time with our RAs and we all get along. I'm glad- I guess I'm glad I'm not with someone that I wouldn't agree with about policy and strictness.

Sometimes the HR and AHR just need time to discover each other's personalities in order to feel more comfortable. This AHR's quote describes this by saying:

I think he's really hard to read. He seems like straightlaced. I mean, when you first meet him, honestly, I just thought that I wasn't going to get away with anything. I just was like, oh my God, this is going to be really weird. And, I mean, because I very rarely see him joke around even because I don't really hang out with him in a social aspect. I, you know, see him for work stuff. Pretty much that's about it. And so I don't know. Like the other day, he said something about two of our members

of our staff dating and we were talking about that. And he's like, I think we should just pull them in and say that we've heard about some extracurricular activity going on and it's not acceptable and stuff like that. And then he started giggling. And at first when he started talking to me I thought he was serious. And then I realized that he was joking and it's just like, I don't know. I mean, he really -- I mean, he's a great guy, but at first I was so nervous that he was going to be the strictest person I've ever worked for, you know.

Another responded by stating:

You know, we don't always see eye to eye on things, you know, whether it be discipline sometimes, or maybe it's just the way we--the way we want to handle the RAs, you know. Sometimes she might feel that sometimes she wants to --how do I want to say it? Treat them as more high school students, whereas I want to try to hopefully try to give them as much responsibility and hopefully they'll take that responsibility. Obviously there's just a conflict of interest in how we want to do things, you know. But the thing is, I think that's good because if you don't have that and you have only a one-sided staff--or supervisory staff, then what you tend to do is become very authoritarian and you start trying to sway everyone over to that side, whereas if you have two people in a different spectrum you kind of balance that out. RAs can kind of flow in between that.

The supervisors pointed out the necessity of having a working relationship between the HR and AHR. However, it is not enough for the supervisors to merely get along. It was also pointed out that the Head Resident and Assistant Head Resident must also face struggles with compromise in areas of rule enforcement and issues surrounding living at work. These two sources of conflict or areas of agreement will be presented in the next two chapters. The dorm supervisors I interviewed told how they dealt with the challenges of these issues. Their description of their work environment and particular struggles support my thesis statement. Rules and rule enforcement will be described in the following chapter. Together the dorm supervisors' working relationship sets the tone for how the dorm residents will behave in the dorm.

CHAPTER THREE: Living at Work; a Source of Conflict and Compromise

Living at work is a demanding and practical problem of the student staff. The dorm supervisors who work for Residence Life must become skillful at organizing their lives by prioritizing and scheduling work with school. Personal problems of stress related to time management, and general “burnout” often arise; all of which are related to living at work. In addition to these stresses, the dorm supervisors must work closely with their HR or AHR to balance their work time fairly. One dorm supervisor must always be on call after seven at night until the next day. The HR and AHR need to plan the schedules around each other and this can often become either a source of conflict. If conflict ensues, then the HR and AHR relationship will be weakened. One can begin to resent the other for work and schedule burdens, which will lead to poor leadership and lack of direction for their staff.

Specifically in this chapter, I will describe the dorm supervisor because they live where they work. The problems they talked about were role blurring, scheduling, privacy, “burn-out” and “feeling responsible.”

“Role Blurring”: *“... you're required to do so many different little things within the dorm to help everything run so smoothly.”*

Age and Authority: *“creating...harsh feelings”*

I found discipline of residents as well as staff members is difficult when the dorm supervisor must live in the same place. One Assistant Head Resident expressed this concern by saying:

It is very difficult to make a resident understand what he or she did wrong and why it was wrong in a disciplinary meeting without creating...harsh feelings that could make living around here pretty tough.

The student supervisors are often the same age or younger than the residents that live in the dorm. At times, it is difficult to be in a position of authority when surrounded by peers. One AHR commented:

Well, I don't really care about that (the age difference), but sometimes the staff look to me for answers because I've been here longer and, ya know, maybe that makes my HR feel a little strange. I'm just guessing. It would make me feel a little put out if people didn't see me as the leader just because of age. I don't think it bothers people too much. I hope that I don't have a problem with (the HR's) age even though she's as young as me. The residents don't even know (the HR's) age. I think when you get a group of students together and tell a group of them to act as the law you'll have trouble but we're not really the law. I mean we enforce the rules but it's more a service to the residents so they don't have to deal with it. The people that have a problem with authority will do so with older people as well. When I see a kid we just had a meeting with a week ago in the zoo (the cafeteria), I smile and say "Hi". I think if you got a complete asshole as a supervisor than maybe there would be more problems with peer authority. We're just doing a job.

In addition to this, another supervisors mentioned the many roles they face when running a dorm. She said:

When you're put in a position like this, I think, you know, you're required to do so many different little things within the dorm to help everything run so smoothly. You know, you have to be the leader, you have to be -- you have to be the friend to the RA to hopefully help them out in situations. You have to be the advisor, the counselor. You have to be a partner, you know, to your assistant. Someone who can't be flexible enough to do that, shouldn't be in this position.

The stress of filling the various roles is a challenge. Even more challenging, is being able to balance those roles between the HR and the AHR. One AHR explained:

I guess if he and I didn't talk as much about the job on a daily basis than we would have more problems. You can hurt feelings pretty easily and not even know it in a way. Like if I don't ask or offer help than he might be taking on a lot more than he should and start to get irritated and not even really understand why. And I might get irritated that he thinks he has to do it all without thinking I could be helpful.

Friendship and Authority of staff: “Mix it, mix it, because this part of my personal life is this job, you know.”

Another area that can be difficult to manage is how the HR and AHR relate to their RA staff. Specifically, how the HR and AHR see each other relating to the RA staff can cause some tension. For example, if one feels like the staff is closer to the other one than there can be problems. Another tension mentioned was when one feels like the other is not professional with the staff. Some dorm supervisors feel like they need to keep a small distance away from their staff to ensure their leadership is sound. This HR commented:

I try to befriend my AHR and the staff, you know, and get to know them and understand what their goal is in life and what they're trying to do. Yet, I don't spend a whole lot of time with any of them. Again, that's the way I am. I don't -- you know, I have my certain friends and that's it. That's the way I live my life. But I do try to hopefully come across as a person who takes his job seriously, who commands respect as well as gives it.

While others feel like they have a job to do yet, need to be able to include their personal life with their work because of the nature of the job. For example, this AHR said:

Mix it, mix it, because this part of my personal life is this job, you know. I get along with everybody here I think pretty well. And since I'm stuck in the building so much, I want -- I'll have friends. I don't want to be stuck in the building by myself in my room all the time, so I hang out with them. It's like they do vice versa with everybody else around here. Everybody on staff hangs out, watch movies or something like that. It's part of my personal life.

This personal philosophy is the most common among the supervisors interviewed, however, it can complicate their lines of authority. This next quote illustrates the point.

When a RA asks for all these nights out. He knows he's stepping over and just keeps pushing and pushing. I guess wherever you go in life in a management position of any sort people are going to do that and it's good experience for me, but I hate it when that happens. I don't like to have to do that. These people I consider most of them my friends because I work closely with them and I get along with them.

Friendship with the co-supervisor: “I think we had tension ever since.”

In addition to RA staff abusing their relations with their supervisors, the HR and AHR can also take advantage of friendships with each other. One HR commented:

I like to get along with all of them and I think we have a close staff, the only thing is that sometimes maybe that causes problems that staffs that decide not to hang out wouldn't have as much. Like when my AHR knows I don't go out that much so he sometimes takes advantage of that and always wants to go out. Which is okay for the most part but just because I don't go out I don't always want to be the one in charge and he's the one the staff can drink with. One time he wanted to postpone the meeting so he and the guys could go out and I got kinda fed up and snapped at him. He got really upset at me for not saying something. Instead I was condescending. I think we had tension ever since. He also talked with his friend about it, which got back to me because his friend happens to be on our staff. I talked to him about it and he apologized but it really pissed me off that he did that. I totally understood why he got mad at me but I think he was not fair in talking with someone on our staff about it. They don't need to know that stuff because they'll just start taking sides. When I heard it come back to me, it was because another one of the staff was already on my side which is ridiculous because I hadn't even talked with her about it.

This story illustrates the small details that can lead to harsh feelings between the HR and the AHR. Another mentioned the many roles a dorm supervisor faces when running a dorm. She said:

When you're put in a position like this, I think, you know, you're required to do so many different little things within the dorm to help everything run so smoothly. You know, you have to be the leader, you have to be -- you have to be the friend to the RA to hopefully help them out in situations. You have to be the advisor, the counselor. You have to be a partner, you know, to your assistant. Someone who can't be flexible enough to do that, shouldn't be in this position.

Another challenge is being able to balance the multiple roles between the HR and the AHR. One AHR explained:

I guess if he and I didn't talk as much about the job on a daily basis than we would have more problems. You can hurt feelings pretty easily and not even

know it in a way. Like if I don't ask or offer help than he might be taking on a lot more than he should and start to get irritated and not even really understand why. And I might get irritated that he thinks he has to do it all without thinking I could be helpful.

Dating Staff: "It's just another thing that the HR and AHR better be on track about."

The next topic that involves role blurring that can arise is dating staff and its effect on the other staff. Some supervisors believe that dating staff members, in the same dorm, should not be done. Dating on staff is discouraged strongly by the RLO and most supervisors agree, it makes sense not to do so. Others feel that sometimes you just can't dictate their dating lives. Here are some varying views on the pros and cons of dating staff.

I guess everyone will probably bring up staff relationships. I don't -
 - I don't have a problem with dating someone on your same staff, except when it comes to -- now that I'm a supervisor it's more difficult because -- well, I personally wouldn't -- I can't date any of my RAs. That's my own opinion. That's just uncomfortable for me to try to make -- in that supervisor role or to be a girlfriend or whatever. As far as like RAs dating, that doesn't bother me at all if the people are right for each other and it doesn't interfere with their job. I think it should be, you know, not condemned, I guess. And we run into that a lot and it seems like people have little comments to say about staff dating because we have grapevine or rumormill.

Another had this side to offer:

No, I think you work here all day and night, all week long and you like the people you work with—its going to happen. Of course it would be easier if it didn't but you can't control that. A lot of RAs end up marrying each other. Most RAs dating our on different staffs because they were dating before they got picked on staff but most of them were dating the year before on the same staff. I think it's really hard for the supervisors to date staff. If they do they should be honest with their staff and try to make an effort to still be professional and not play favorites. Don't let the boyfriend or whatever out more often etc... It's just another thing that the HR and AHR better be on track about. I even know of a HR and AHR that got together. I think its good to discourage it because of obvious reasons but its going to happen and when it does people shouldn't be forced to keep it quiet because that will cause even more problems.

The above quote alludes to the problems of privacy. Many supervisors discussed the difficulty of maintaining privacy while on the job.

Privacy: “We have enough problems with all of us living together and trying to conduct our lives somewhat personally without having to tell everybody about it.”

The issue of privacy and living at work can be problematic for some dorm supervisors. However, most of them commented on how they have grown used to their lack of privacy. Still, some choose to consciously make attempts to separate their private lives from their work lives. Needless to say, living at work can make this difficult. This HR commented on her feelings on the matter:

It takes adjusting. You definitely have to -- I don't know -- either be really good at keeping your life completely to yourself and keeping your life separate from your job, or you have to not care that people are going to know about what's going on in your life. And I would say I fall more toward not caring that people know what's going on in my life because I'm the type of person that likes to talk about, you know, talk to my friends about what's going on, get other opinions, and for the most part there's nothing in my life that I do that's so secret that nobody can know about it, you know. And I've just gotten used to over the last three years that some people are going to know what's going on with what I'm doing before I know, in a sense. But I also work with someone this year who is very good at keeping his life separate from his job. He goes over and above doing that, you know, where he will drop everything for his job and almost distance himself from his friends or his girlfriend, and I'm not saying this is a bad thing to do. This is the way he's chosen to do it and I commend him for it because I couldn't, you know -- I wouldn't be able to say, okay, I put my life on hold, here's my job, you know. I don't think that I don't do my job, but we just approach it differently.

A more private dorm supervisor explained how he chooses to make privacy a priority. He states:

It definitely tends to be at a minimum on certain occasions. But I think it's also what the individual makes of that. You can choose to be a very private person or you can choose to not be. If you choose -- you know, depending on

how you lead your life and how you handle your responsibilities within the dorm, you know, you can be a very open person. You can totally be hit with questions for you all the time. Or you can mediate that by setting aside time just for you, whether that be taking your phone off the hook or getting away from the dorms just to be by yourself by a while, or studying in the library just by yourself. Again, it goes back to taking your nights out and enjoying that time just for yourself. You know, you don't necessarily have to be doing something with your friends or going out and doing whatever. You can just take time just to be by yourself or hopefully organize things that pertain to your life and for your benefit.

Living in the same place, working together, and the fact that the supervisors are student peers, can cause the gossip and rumors can to run quickly. This AHR had this to say about being the target of gossip:

It's happened over here because I'm very -- I'm very open about my sex life and, yeah, I do have sexual encounters on a one night stand basis. I have had in the past. And one time, I broke my bed, you know. Did I tell you that? My friend got wind of it. Next thing I know Aber people are laughing at me, like next day. Oh, yeah, it was bad. It went around real quick and, you know, I mean, I sleep around. I'm not afraid to say that. I did but I don't like people judging me like that because it goes around, it piles up, you know. One person says I did this and the next thing you know I've slept with 50 women last week. And it just -- that's the bad part and I don't like that.

Another dorm supervisor summarized her frustration of gossip among the dorm staff by saying:

If I hear something through gossip or just through hearsay, I'll go directly to that person and ask them about it and a lot of people tend not to do that, or they'll do that but then they'll also tell everyone else. I don't think that's necessary. I really think that people's business should be kept their own. We have enough problems with all of us living together and trying to conduct our lives somewhat personally without having to tell everybody about it.

Overall, however, the issue of privacy did not bother many of the dorm supervisors. However, if one supervisor felt they had problems of maintaining some private time, they would look to their partner for some relief. For example, this HR said:

I don't really get all that bothered that I don't have privacy with a lot of things like, my boyfriend and what's happening with my hard classes and etc... I think that most everyone on staff knows when I've had a bad day because I have to go in the office about fifty times a day for this or that, so they're going to pick up on things.... I'm just an open person so it doesn't get to me and (my AHR) will help out. If I have a bad day then he'll step in and hopefully vice-versa. I'm lucky to have that kind of relationship with him.

If this type of helping relationship did not exist, the supervisors reported the HR would feel overwhelmed from time to time. A working component of their team is that they recognize the potential to need some privacy.

Another issue with privacy is confidentiality between partners. The HR and AHR talked about how they can confide in their partner and talk about how they think they need to handle situations in their dorm and staff related issues. Without this type of confidential conversation, the partnership would suffer. This AHR had this to say about confidential meetings with her HR:

I guess when I hear you ask about privacy, instead of personal privacy, I think of how I trust my HR to value my opinion and respect my ideas... so like, I never feel like he would go to another person on staff and blab about what I did wrong or what I suggested for a situation. Do you know what I mean? Like, if we have to talk about a staff member because they are doing something wrong, then I feel like even if he disagrees with me, he won't go and tell so and so about how wacky I am.

Schedules and Availability: “When you knock on their door, does it seem like an imposition?”

Another area that dorm supervisors talked about was how their schedules of personal and work life need to balance. The HR and AHR have to decide each day, who will be available. The staff has to rely on one of the supervisors to assist with dorm situations at all times. One student supervisor must be in the dorm each night starting at

seven p.m. A student supervisor is expected to be ready to take on a task at any hour of the day. When asked what qualities made for a good supervisor, one replied:

I think availability, role modeling, openness, and that's probably the three main qualities. I would say you can tell a bad supervisor right off the bat because they pretty much only want to do the job for the title and for the money. They're not really in it because they like the work, and that means that in order to like this job you have to be a pretty sociable person. You have to enjoy interacting with people, almost enjoy solving problems and conflict resolution, and knowing a ton of people. And it's the supervisor, which I had, who stays in their room, does the minimum requirements, you know, is only around when they have to be, is not very approachable when you want to go talk to them. When you knock on their door, does it seem like an imposition? They -- I had bare minimum training from a poor supervisor and they didn't really do a whole lot to get the staff interacting, and if you don't get the staff interacting they don't feel like they have backup support, therefore they're less likely to step forward, make a move, do their job, you know, whatever, because they don't think they have anybody to back them up.

Another supervisor summarized her scheduling process:

So I'm the type of person who works better with the more I have to do. So I just get sort of in a schedule and I know that eight, nine, 10:00, I have to go to a class, 11:00 I have to eat lunch, 12:00 I have to be at this meeting, you know, whatever it is. 4:00 I have to go here, schedule my fun. I mean, it's gotten to be where my entire life is a schedule, but I work better that way. And some days I look at it and wonder if I enjoy my life, you know, because I'm always knowing what I have to do next and what's going to follow this and what I have to do tomorrow and next week. But I think that I do take time to enjoy my life and I definitely take time for my personal life because, like I said, I schedule it in.

Nights In: "on duty"

Because of such tight scheduling, the tendency is for the personal aspects of supervisors' lives are to be scheduled in last. When the two dorm supervisors have both scheduled in their time away from the dorm for the same night, then problems can occur. However, sometimes both supervisors feel the need to get away. These issues have to be worked out between the two supervisors day after day. These are typical responses of feelings on "being in:"

It was weird adjusting to not being able to run to the store or run out and do whatever you want any night of the week. But you get sort of -- I've gotten into a routine and I would say that I've made my circle of friends, whether it's a good thing or not, to be in residence life. And I've found that my off campus friends and outside friends, I really don't -- I'm not in touch with as much anymore. You know, they don't call or I don't call them because I just don't have time.

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Being in the building four nights a week by 7:00 at night till 7:00 in the morning, it doesn't bother me too much. It's good for me because I'll get more studying done, spend less money. At the same time I do, like every once in a while, somebody says, hey, let's go out, it's 6:30, it's not my night out and I'm in the building. Sometimes I'll try to ask if I can switch my night out with my HR but sometimes she wants it out. It doesn't bother me too much when I do it. It's my third year now so I'm pretty used to it.

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I think, speaking for myself, I think I've been pretty available to the students for a couple of reasons. I'm perfectly okay to stay at home. I don't need to be out all the time. I don't, you know, even on my nights out because I feel comfortable being in and being available. And there's times when I just do just want to leave, not so much because, you know, I have so much to do outside the building. It's just that it's good to not be in all the time. But I'm kind of a homebody, being a homebody just that in itself makes you a bit more available, I think. And so it's not a huge sacrifice for me to stay in and be available. The sacrifice comes sometimes to myself when I'm not taking care of myself and don't make time for myself. Those are times when I, you know, people will remind me that I need to take a break and do something for myself, you know, just get away from it for a while.

Nights Out/ Weekends Out

Most of the supervisors said that they did not mind being in and watching over the dorm. The thing that bothered them was when they needed or wanted to be out and they could not because their partner had taken the night out. In addition, most reported that they did think that the amount of time they had away from the dorm was fair in relation to the amount that their partner had. However, there were a few that admitted to difficulty

with communicating what nights out they wanted. For example, this HR explained her week regarding her struggle with her AHR over nights out:

He needs Sunday night out. He gets Saturday night out because he's in on Friday. So he has Saturday night out, Sunday night out, and then he needs Monday night out for this Mansfield concert, and Wednesday he had a movie to go to for a class and he'll be back at 9:00, so he has to be two hours late. And I was like, okay, three nights out in a row and Wednesday he has to be in late. I just rolled my eyes and went, well, sounds like you don't have a choice doesn't it? And I walked out. And I heard him say, Just asking. I felt terrible after that. But, I mean, I'm just like, you know, and that's the real-- that's how I react and it's not very good. I mean, I admit it. I wasn't a very good reaction. But every once in a while that's how I react.

For this AHR, he late night hours help him compromise with his HR:

It really kind of dictates what goes on. If you want to do something it isn't just kind of like, hey, let's go do this or that, but more of a planned thing, you really have to plan it down to the last detail and really stay with it, because otherwise it's just never going to happen. It's planned --those little planned events -- unless you're really strict with your schedule all day long. You have to -- at least for me, I find that it's easier to be very flexible about what goes on and try not make too many planned events. I get a lot of what I want to do social-wise done late at night. Usually after the hours of 10:00 or 11:00 because I stay out till 3:00 or 4:00 at night.

Another AHR commented on how being far away from home sometimes hinders where he can go. He reported checking into a motel as a method of escape:

People from time to go home and be by themselves. Very often that's why I take nights out, regularly get off campus, but not everybody has the facilities to do that. Sally can go home but I can't, you know. Justin can go home for a weekend in Butte, but Stan lives in Oregon, you know. And some of us don't have the opportunity to get out and leave. Last year I even got a motel room for a weekend to take a weekend off because I was so fed up with the staff. So, yeah, the fact that we live and work together makes it hard.

In addition to the struggle to escape from the dorm, supervisors have to schedule time for both school and specific job duties. Not only do they have to keep up their grades to be eligible for the position; they need to be on top of payroll, discipline, and

other dorm paperwork. Most reported organization and teamwork were the tools for success.

School load

One AHR said:

If you're organized, hopefully you tend to minimize the opportunities to overload, or the opportunities of overload that just by studying continuously, keeping up on your studies, and hopefully keeping up on what you need to do within the dorm as far as your work.

Work load

A HR commented on work ethic by saying:

Whoever is around the office seems to get caught more often and gets more work. But being around is your job...you can't just go and hide, if you did you wouldn't get along with anybody because you weren't pulling your weight.

Burn-out: "There's a lot of times when I just want to say, screw everybody, lock my doors, turn off my lights, and ignore everyone."

Most of the dorm supervisors reported that if they did not get enough time away to deal with their private lives then they would tend to experience "burn-out." Both HRs and AHRs said that they needed to tell their partners if they started to get burned out on the job. To describe what they defined as burn-out, here are some quotes to illustrate their experience:

I got burned out because my sole purpose that year really was discipline, like that's the only thing my residents were letting me do, and I got really burned on that. I was just like enough already. It was like drug bust after drug bust and it just got really -- I got really down on it. But the following year I was able to kind of put it all in perspective and to re-motivate myself.

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I definitely get burnout with it. There's a lot of times when I just want to say, screw everybody, lock my doors, turn off my lights, and ignore everyone. I don't usually do that. A lot of people I've heard do. I don't usually.

Occasionally when I do need time to myself, if I absolutely cannot get out of the dorm, and that's very rarely, I will. I'll -- like when I need to study, I cannot study in my room, I can't study in our study lounges, I just get distracted. And if I'm in the building, I can't go the library or whatever to study, so I go down into our boiler room. Down in the basement there's a desk down there and a chair. It's like in our storage room area. It's so hot down there, but there's no distractions. That's where I go to get away from everybody else.

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But there's times in the semester when I feel a little burned out, when it seems like, for me, there's days where it's -- you know, it'll be going great. It goes great for a month and a half, and then all of a sudden you come home for lunch and you pick up the phone, you have three voice mail messages, and each one of them is worse than the first, you know, the next, you know, and you just like, you know -- actually, you're feeling pretty good by the, you know, when you start answering -- when you answer your voice mail. And by the time, you know, ten minutes later, it's like a nightmare and you're thinking, why the hell am I even doing this? You know, and it's like -- so then -- kind of then for the next few days until things get squared away, resolved and stuff, I guess you can say it's burned out mode. That's kind of -- I guess the way I define burnout.

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I get burn-out, especially during a week where, for example, you have one or two large exams plus homework assignments that are due Friday. Because the job entails so much responsibility and so much time, to have to deal with that as well as your academic workload, it is really quite -- it's really quite an enormous responsibility. And if you tend to try to do too many things at once you just get bogged down and it gets, like you say, you overload on what you're doing and then you become stressed and the job becomes less fun, your academics may suffer. There's just so many things to do.

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For those times that it does seem to be a problem, it usually occurs when I do have a certain number of tests in a given week amongst other assignments, and it seems that on those particular weeks everyone has a question. And being in a supervisory position, you are definitely the one to turn to in most cases, whether you're in the building or not, you know. They're always looking to you for answers to certain things.

When one supervisor feels “burnt,” occasionally the other supervisor attempts to find out how to take off some pressure. If they both feel “burnt” then they talked of the need to discuss how to get through it. They might go to the RLO and ask for suggestions or turn to their staff to help with some smaller tasks. The issue of burn-out can provide tension for the supervisory staff. For example, this HR recalled:

I think we were both having a tough week so we just got fed up. Neither one of us wanted to deal with the crap of the job and neither one of us wanted to even deal with it enough to talk with the other one. I was hoping that he would see how much I had to do. We both just sat down one day and started to try and outdo each other with sob stories. But we got through the week and went on to the next one. If it had continued we probably would have either drove each other crazy or started to make fun of each other... see that’s what we do... we just are really goofy and make jabs at each other. It’s a good thing we both have the same type of humor. I think we did struggle a little that week and our paperwork to (the RLO) showed it and the secretary knew how much we had to get done but eventually it worked itself out. You just do what you can till you have more time. If you get overworked up and start listening to all the people demanding this and that then you’ll go nuts.

This brings us to the discussion of responsibility. In this next section, I will cover how feelings of responsibility of the dorm supervisors were seen as a burden.

Responsibility: “...you always feel responsible for what goes on in your dorm whether you’re on duty, off duty, in the house out of the house.

Definitions of responsibility can vary from supervisor to supervisor. Each one has a different view on what lines they need to draw. Some may say that they need to call and check in on the night away from the dorm and others find that idea insane. The conflict arises when two supervisors working together have opposing perspectives of what their responsibilities entail.

This HR feels an obligation to HIS dorm all of the time. He feels like what goes on in the dorm is a reflection on his performance as a supervisor. He states:

Living where you work is obviously kind of -- I guess it's a drawback in some respects, but it's very beneficial as well. The drawbacks being you are here 24-7 -- well, almost 24-7, you know. When you get done with the day you go to your room and you're still there on campus, and it's very tough to get away from the job because it is always there. And you always feel responsible for what goes on in your dorm whether you're on duty, off duty, in the house, out of the house. And that's very tough, you know. At times I find myself now, being in my fifth year, that at some, you know, some times of the day I just want to leave and I don't want to worry about 340 people in my hall, and I don't want to worry about eleven other RAs and one assistant head resident. And there are times where that's just -- you know, I'd love to go off and do my own thing, not be responsible for those people, worry about my academics and that's it. And that is very tough to get away from, because it's tough to leave for an extended period on the campus.

Another has an opposing view, she comments:

When I leave the dorm, I have done all I can. I have faith in the rest of the staff to do the job they are being paid to do. I don't think I would function as well as I do if this dorm was my life. But when I'm here, I really am as available as I can be.

The data suggest that the two dorm supervisors of a dorm needed to discuss what they felt was an appropriate level of responsibility. In the next situation, the two cannot agree on the terms of their responsibility and encountered obstacles. This story shows the difficulty that can occur:

I got a call from my HR who wanted the dorm watched while he went to a movie. It was his night in but he needed to get away and I was studying anyway so it wasn't a big deal. We do that all the time. I told the RA on duty that he could call me in my room if he needed anything and he said okay. We were also covering the dorm connected to us because they went on a staff night out. The person at the desk over there knew to call me. I thought my duty RA was going on rounds of the building over there but he didn't understand that he needed to so anyway, the next day I get a call from the HR who said that the other dorm we were watching was crazy last night and I did a bad job of covering for him. I just said, well, I'm sorry but it was a last minute call you made and I told everyone who was in that I was in this room if something happened. I was in my room all night and did not get one call. So I think I did my job. He said he understood that and agreed that the RAs should have called if they needed help but that he felt bad about the whole situation because he didn't control HIS dorm. I think he feels way to responsible for things that were out of control and blamed me for it. That's just getting to wrapped up in stuff that should be that big of a deal. He also made me feel like I wasn't a responsible supervisor because I had failed him

somehow, which is ridiculous because the RAs never let me know that they were dealing with loud residents. If they did, and they knew I was in my room, then there would have been no problem.

In this incident, the AHR felt she had done what she could while the HR felt his AHR had failed. The AHR and HR had different views of responsibility. The RA on duty was clearly caught in the middle and confused as to what was expected from him. As a result, the dorm was disorderly and the AHR was unaware because she was not notified.

This next section reveals what the supervisors had to say about how they constantly need to play a supervisory role. For example, here are two accounts:

I know that some days I walk across campus and wish that I didn't know someone within every ten feet that I step, you know, and have to stop and say hello and talk to them. But then there are other days that I feel like I've gotten the most out of my college experience by knowing so many people and having done so many things.

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It's hard because we're in here so much and when we go out together as a group we want to have our own personal time and not worry about following student conduct and stuff. But I think it's important for the most part that we do that because as a staff member you're constantly observed whether you're at Finnegans or bowling or whatever. I think that's a pretty big mistake, just not holding your staff to the standards that you would hold the residents to at least, if not higher.

Another supervisor said this:

My HR and I agree that it's important to be a good role-model for residents but I think part of that is showing that all RAs aren't complete nerds or do-gooders. I think it's good for the residents to see us as students that have fun too. I go downtown and I don't worry about running into underage residents, that's their deal, I'm not about to go up to them and write them up but I'm not going to buy them a drink either. I drink and have fun and I happen to be a AHR of a dorm but I'm also a college student. I think it's important to be able to be both.

In conclusion, the struggles of living where you work for dorm supervisors can potentially provide some tensions for the HR and AHR. However, most were willing to work through with compromise and fairness and reported that living at work was not an impossible burden. The supervisors who did not work together to reach agreements on these issues had difficulty throughout the year. As shown, this difficulty led to staff confusions. The next chapter will deal with the various types of supervision. Ideal types of supervisors will be described and I will begin to show how these types work together.

CHAPTER FOUR: Types of Styles of Supervision

In the previous chapters, I have described in detail the work of a dorm supervisor in their own words. I will now categorize the dorm supervisors into types of styles of supervision. These categories are based on the interviews of the supervisors. To do this, I followed Weber's use of the "ideal type"¹¹ (Martindale, 1960: 381-383). Martindale explained that Weber defined "ideal types" as "hypothetically concrete individuals, constructed out of their relevant components by the researcher for the purpose of instituting precise comparisons (Martindale, 1960: 381-382)." Therefore, I began to use typology to compare and contrast styles of dorm supervisors, specifically in the area of rule enforcement. I found that rule enforcement was a device for finding conflicting types of styles of supervision. This conflict is the main cause of relationship breakdown between the HR and AHR. If the two supervisors had different styles then they would disagree on how to enforce rules in the dorm. According to the supervisors, disagreements on rule enforcement are some of the most common conflicts that arise. As indicated by the interviews, the issue of rule enforcement is crucial for the order of the dorm community. This AHR explained:

For the most part, we agree on how to handle things that come up. The hard thing is when I think we should handle something one way and he feels like maybe that's too harsh or something. Sometimes he gets his personal feelings about some resident in the way and treats people differently and I think no matter what they all should get the same punishment or whatever. Like, one time he got mad at some kid for giving him attitude and later on in the year, that same kid did something, I don't even remember what, and he (the HR) wanted to write him up. If it were someone else, he wouldn't have had a problem with just giving a verbal warning or something like that. So sometimes we have a hard time over discipline and that frustrates me a little because then we turn to the RA staff and talk with them to see what they think and it all gets confusing. I think we should just be able to make a decision sometimes. Does that make me sound like a jerk, I don't know.

Ideal types are used to open analysis¹². Martindale states that “the ideal type is a strategy in empirical explanation (1960: 382). The ideal types of styles of supervisor organized the data I collected in the interviews. By using this typology, I can better explain the conflicts of the supervisors. This, in turn, will reinforce my argument that if the HR and AHR do not agree on rule enforcement, then the RA staff will not have guidance and the dorm will lack order.

Another important thing that I learned when I examined the ideal types of supervision is that these types overlap. One supervisor can go about his or her job and assess a situation using a practice that a different type would use. However, the main tendency of any type of supervisor was react to rule enforcement most often in a certain way. As Martindale explains, “Ideal types are not general or abstract concepts, but hypothetical individuals; as hypothetical individuals, ideal types consist of a selection of items that could appear in reality.” The “parent” most often would use moral guidelines and a situational approach to supervise. The “authoritarian” would usually inform the other staff members of their decisions and so on. These tendencies are outlined in the following chapter.

Parent: “I get parental”

The first type I found was the parent. This supervisor loves to be involved with the residents on a personal level. They take pride in knowing the majority, if not all, of the students in their building. This HR said:

I think I’m overly protective at times...I can’t believe it when another dorm supervisor calls and says that one of my residents got written up (discipline)...not my resident.

The parent has a good relationship with the residents, but is often criticized by other staff members for being too nosey. This type tends to make the RA staff feel like they have little autonomy. The “parent” does, however, provide predictability when they supervise.

One RA of the “parent’s” staff said:

He’s a good guy and I liked them (both supervisors) both but I’ve been doing this job longer and I think at times I knew more then they did. It annoyed me that they didn’t seem to listen to my suggestions but they did have a certain way of running the dorm.

The parent type of leader has the perspective that they are there to provide the residents with the best living environment possible. However, the parent does not stop there. They invest their time in the dorm to make sure that all of the residents are cared for and reached. According to the parent type, this ensures a sense of “family.” They want to make sure that all the staff are on the same page about how to obtain this goal. The parent is not satisfied with merely maintaining the dorm order, they wish to provide a place for growth for the resident. One supervisor that tends to fit this type said:

I guess I want to make sure that the RAs know all their residents because I know how hard it would be for someone to not know anybody, maybe be from a small town, and just want to go back home. I think the greatest satisfaction I get is knowing I helped someone through a tough time and I think the RAs would benefit from gaining that kind of experience.

When explaining her overall approach to supervising one said:

...do it with some heart, the more they (RAs) think that you’re one of them, the more likely they will be to approach you and come to you... people will know if you’re genuine or not.

Later she expressed how she explains the goals for her R.A. staff by stating:

...and so we are here to provide some sort of guidance because supposedly we’ve been through some of it, and encourage people to get involved or help people out when they’re having a problem because they’re used to Mom and Dad solving the

problems, you know, or give them resources to make it fun place to live, as well as a healthy, safe place to live.

She is focused on the thoughts and feelings of her staff and the residents of her building. Her motto is “do it with some heart” and she is ideally striving for her staff to be bonded together like a family.

Democratic: “I try to make sure they all feel like they’re a part of it”

This type of supervisor calls on the RA staff to be a major part in the running of the dorm. The majority wins if a problem arises within the staff. According to the interviews, democratics want to build community among the students by giving them a voice on how the dorm should be run. They do this by giving the RAs some leeway on rule enforcement on their individual floors. The RA staff is expected to talk with the residents on their floors about the policies of the University. This informational meeting should also include talk about why the rules exist and how they will be enforced. In addition to this, democratics feel like they need to be a friend to each RA. For example, this AHR stated:

I made an attempt in the first week or so that my staff was here to try to get them to know me and my personality, as well as try to be, you know, a leader and go through the manual and go through the policies and procedures with them. But we also would meet all day, do the kind of scheduled events, but then we would always do something social that night or, you know, that afternoon. And it's kind of like letting people see you in a supervisor position and then letting people see you with your hair down and, you know, just as a friend, a person you hang out with. And I think people realizing and respecting that you have both a capability to be both people makes you more approachable and more like a friend. I try to make they all feel like they’re a part of it. A part of the staff and are equally valued.

Another supervisor explained her approach by saying:

I think that I can talk to most anyone on my staff about a lot of different things. I think it’s important to know you staff well and treat them as equals because they

are. We're all just here to do the same thing I just have to make sure it gets done but I need support and suggestions on how to do it. I like the people I work with and tend to think that we all have a better time because we are friends. I can tell them that they are messing up but ask them how I can help and they can tell me when I'm being stupid—and they have. I hope that I take that well because they are just helping me out. I think some supervisors get power trippy but that's not gonna get anybody anywhere and I hope that I avoid that as much as possible.

They tackle discipline with situational reasoning. They feel each incident is different and each resident is in a different situation. This type of supervisor feels more comfortable asking other staff members for advice before making final decisions. Therefore, consistency can sometimes be lacking in rule enforcement. The RA staffs under this type of supervision have more leeway on the job, yet sometimes this can cause confusion among the residents.

Authoritative: “he just told me what to do, he didn't ask”

The authoritative type of supervisor tends to think, “if you want something done right you do it yourself.” However, they also seem to think their assistant should follow their instructions and carry out them to the tee. The authoritative type has worked hard to get a to the top and therefore, they see themselves as the most qualified. Many see this type and complain of his or her inability to ask instead of demand. For example, when I interviewed this AHR, they described the authoritative style:

I could not believe my situation. I would have quit if things didn't get taken care of. He would do things like hand me a piece of paper with a list of duties to do for him telling me that I was his assistant and he made the decisions. I would constantly be clearing up things with the staff because they couldn't understand him. Like he would make proclamations and tell everybody that they couldn't do this or that anymore. He would write people up for the stupidest things and literally yell at residents for having their stereo up too loud. The staff was constantly coming to me and telling me that they were unhappy with this or that and in the mean time I was pretty much running the whole dorm by myself, which would be fine if I didn't have to explain myself all the time.

This AHR had difficulty working out a relationship with her Head Resident. The two had different definitions of the job. Their individual expectations were clearly in conflict.

The authoritative type wants the building run a certain way. They have a vision about the dorm. The authoritative type tends to think that they know what is best for the dorm. Based on my observations, the RAs under this type of supervisor complained that the residents felt alienated from each other. Some RAs commented that even though the rules were clear, the residents felt like “they hadn’t left home.” Informal conversations with certain RAs under an authoritative type said that the dorm was orderly but resentful of the dorm staff.

They do not always consult the RA staff. Even though this type often makes good decisions, their problem lies in the arena of working with a group. The other staff involved can usually understand the authoritative’s ideas about the dorm but most do not like his tendency to leave them out of his or her decision making. Compromise is not easy for this type. One supervisor that tends to fits the authoritative explained:

I was involved in that situation and if I would have listened to my little inner voice, and which I often hear but don't obey, I could have probably for that -- at that moment, at that point in time, I probably could have headed it off the situation. But I didn't and it happened. But I'm thinking that it probably would have happened again, popped up in some other way, you know, now that I think about it. But I had a part in that. I mean, my part was that I wasn't involved enough in the situation. I mean, I kind of turned to my other, you know -- I just didn't want to be a part of it so I didn't even -- well, that was my mistake in that situation, I wasn't involved. I should have been involved. If I would have been involved then I would have put a stop to it

Bureaucratic: “being very professional”

This type of supervisor has a pragmatic style and describes themselves as a “goal-oriented.” They focus on meeting deadlines and accomplishing paperwork in a timely

manner. When asked what this individual feels is most important in their job they answer:

I make sure I take time for myself, if I don't...I get stressed out and can't do this job. The most important thing about this job is the residents and making sure I can be there for them.

Bureaucrats go by the book. Another bureaucrat responded:

I would probably admit that I am a little brash in my style. I like things very organized, I like things done right, I like people to be professional. I expect that each RA, as well as myself and my assistant head resident, have a responsibility and we should owe up to that responsibility. I demand a lot from myself and therefore I think I demand a lot from the RAs, and I think that's probably across the board. Every head resident, you know, assumes that position. Myself, you know, I take a lot of pride in this position. I think we have a tremendous impact on students' lives. No, residents' lives, I'll say that. And I believe that if we're not seen in a correct light or people are not respecting what we're doing, then that takes away from the job, the position, our intent. Some residents may not be happy with what we do, but what I try to do hopefully is explain to them that, yeah, we're doing this because we feel it's appropriate, we feel it's in the best interest of the residents, you know, and that's why we do things. I'm probably more reserved. I don't get all excited about programming. I don't go out and try to expose the residents to new things but my AHR tries to do all that stuff.

He went on to explain how he treats his RA staff:

What I try to do is hopefully give them the knowledge that I have concerning the dorm and how it should be run, how to hopefully interact with people if they have questions, I get them. I also try to lead by example as far as being very professional, being very courteous, making it known to the residents that we are there for them. We are not there to punish them, we're not there to be their mother or grandmother and keep tabs on them all the time. That's not our purpose. Our purpose is there to hopefully provide with them the best environment possible and we try to do that in any situation.

When asked how they handle disciplining the staff the bureaucrat responds:

When either the RAs or the night watch, the night watch being the people who we hire to cover the desk during the hours of the night. When they do not fill out all the forms properly or they take the job for granted and do not perform the duties that are expected of them, because what it does is it reflects back on us as supervisors and how we run the building, as well as it makes it more difficult for us to hopefully keep the dorm running

smoothly and just handling all the correct paperwork, because at times we find out that we can't do certain things like charge people for a late movie, for example, or keeping track of the board keys that we check out to residents if they happen to lose their keys. They're little things but they add up and they become very important to the dorm running smoothly.

This type believes in professionalism as a practice, for example, this supervisor states:

I think if you're put in a role where people look up to you and you're in a supervisory position, you should be required to abide by the rules of the dorm like everyone else. You should be as professional as possible. You should handle your job with the seriousness that it involves because it is a very serious job and we need to make sure that people see you in that light, that they can respect you for what you do. I believe that supervisors, that if they tend to think that they can fudge on the rules, so to speak, and they can get by because they're the ones running the dorm, I think that is probably a non-appropriate way to act. If they ask something of someone and they do not perform that duty themselves, then obviously you have a discrepancy because no one will really respect you for that. That's where people have problems because they don't think that the supervisor really thinks it's very important because they don't follow the rules. That I think is the main thing. It's just obeying the rules of the dorm, acting professional, and again being there for the residents. A supervisor also tends to get lost in the shuffle, so to speak. They're not as visible as an RA oftentimes so a lot of the residents will tend not to know who the head resident is a male if that may be the case. And I think that a good supervisor would do all of his or her part to make themselves present to the residents of the dorm in hopes that they build some kind of communication with the residents and they build some kind of understanding so the residents know who they are as supervisors. I just believe that that's part of the communication of the supervisors as far as making the things run smoothly as possible, making the best possible environment.

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And I think that I catch myself every now and then trying to be -- trying to make everyone like me. And you do it this way because this is what I think is the proper way to do it. And I catch myself doing that, and that's something that I'm trying to correct, and that's something that I don't feel I do well. So that's part of me that, you know, hopefully I can -- being in this job has helped me realize that a little bit more, and so I am trying to correct that. But what, you know, what I am trying to do is hopefully set an example for what I think is right. You know, I try to be efficient and all of the above that I've mentioned several times before.

The “bureaucrat” tends to make sure they are on task. They strive to do things in a manner that no one could question his or her decision being the right one for the dorm. They take great pride in having a good communication with their staff and residents. This type does not always have the most creative and relaxed environment in their dorm but the staff and residents always know what is expected of them. Sometimes this type is criticized for their tendency to see the world in black and white or in other words not being able to loosen up. Overall they seek to gain the respect of his or her staff in order that the dorm falls in line with order and community.

The “bureaucrat” believes their work ethic should include constantly trying to help everyone get things done so the whole staff can obtain goals for the dorm. This type tends to not seek praise but wants to know if they are doing the job in a manner in which the other staff would respect. This supervisor explained his philosophy:

I think one of the biggest things is to constantly reevaluate how you're doing in the job rather than just going through the motions, setting up a system where you, you know, you do something and it seems to work and then just keep going with that. But to constantly say, well, what else can I be doing. I think that's a pretty good way. And then also just to ask other people that you work with. I know I constantly ask what else I can be doing or if I handled something correctly, things like that. And I ask my Head Resident the same. And with those two especially, I know I can get honest feedback and I really value both their opinions. And then I also ask the RAs too, but sometimes I wonder whether I'm getting the same sort of feedback that I can get from my Head Resident or secretary. We both know that I don't take offense if somebody says, you know, you really should do this instead, or more of this or something like that.

They tend to enjoy the satisfaction of helping people on staff and gain confidence through productive projects. This type also is disappointed to have to discipline residents or staff, yet feel it's just part of the job. This supervisor explained:

They (the administration) always emphasize that we're not police, we're not here to do that, that's not our main job. But it's probably half of our job. Keep an eye on residents as far as how they're doing, if they're making it. If they're getting in trouble with school, alcohol, that kind of thing. As an assistant head, I think I'm supposed to help the head resident out with supervisory duties as far as paperwork and managing the other RAs in the dorm. It's not a job one person could do by themselves otherwise they'd be in every night at 7:00, and that's part of it.

Overall, the “bureaucratic” type is a valued staff member. They supervise by example and correct by necessity. This type of supervisor tends to ask what they can do to help and constantly offers assistance. Occasionally, this type can get burnt out if they do not take care of themselves first.

Thus far in the study, I argue that the HR and AHR must work well together to achieve a RA staff that is focused on keeping the dorm in order with a sense of community. I will now describe the main cause for a relationship breakdown between supervisors. Looking at how they enforce rules in their dorms can differentiate the four types of supervisors.

To describe the differences among these four ideal types, I will use a common incident that occurs in the dorms. The reader will see how each type of supervisor reacts to discovering a freshman resident drinking a beer in their room while studying for a test. The student was being quiet and had their door closed. The supervisor came to the resident's room to inform them about a dorm program. The resident opened the door. The table shows how each supervisor differs in their individual approach to enforcing rules in the dorm by illustrating the various degrees of the continuum among the types.

Table 2. A Typology of Types of Style of Supervisors Involving Rule Enforcement

	Parental	Authoritative	Bureaucratic	Democratic
Initial Reaction of Supervisor	Told the student they were disappointed to see them breaking a rule	Told the student that they were going to be written up immediately	Asked if the student was aware of the dorm rules	Told student they would get back to them about the beer
Meeting w/ other staff	Met with staff to see if they understood why the disciplinary action was taken	No Meeting	Informal meeting with whatever staff was avail. to discuss sanctions	Meeting with student's RA and other supervisor to discuss if discipline would happen
	Parental	Authoritative	Bureaucratic	Democratic
Verbal warning from supervisor	"I can't believe you did that"	"You're written up"	"It's sucks you got caught, but you can't drink"	"Don't worry about it, I'll get back to you if necessary"
Informal write-up in log	YES	YES	YES	Not Necessary
Formal write-up¹³	YES	YES	YES	Only if the student has been caught before
S.O.S. sanction¹⁴	If suspects the student of a drinking problem	YES	Only if student was disruptive to others	If other staff think we should

In conclusion, the supervisors described are ideal types in styles of supervision in the dorms. These types of styles will change from year to year depending on the employees hired, however, the supervisors I interviewed all fit into one of these types. That is not to say that at certain times a supervisor could not react out of character of their

particular type or that they could not possess tendencies of a few different types. The main purpose for this typology is to show the reader the types of styles of supervision in order to provide a foundation for making my argument. The insight of the types will give the reader some idea of the challenges that different supervisors have in coping with dorm situations, their staff, and their co-supervisor.

The next chapter will show how supervisors enforce rules in the dorms together. The reader will see the difficulty the various types of supervisors have reaching agreement on how to enforce rules in the dorm.

CHAPTER FIVE: Dorm Supervision of Rules and Rule Enforcement

In this chapter, I will show how rules and rule enforcement in the dorms can be a source of conflict between the HR and the AHR. To explain the process of keeping the peace in the dorms, it is necessary to describe the various types of rules in the dorms. These types include; the written rules, the “stupid” rules, and the common sense rules. Although these types of rules are easily found in all the dorms on this campus, I discovered that the rule enforcement and definition of types of rules varied depending on the supervisory staff of a particular dorm. To continue, I will define the three types of rules and provide examples by using quotes of the supervisors. Later on, I will describe rule enforcement and disciplinary action used by the different types of supervisors in the dorms. The reader will discover how the issue of “dorm order” provides major conflict that the HR and AHR face while co-supervising a dorm.

Types of Rules in the Dorm

Written Rules (Student Conduct Code)

The Student Conduct Code is the set of written rules for University of Montana students. These rules are given to the residents at the beginning of the school year. Each RA is told to inform the residents that these rules should be followed. If a student is in violation of these written rules, ideally, they should be “written-up.”¹⁵ This process will be explained in greater detail later in the chapter. The written rules were established by the University administration. The entire student body falls under these rules. Like all the University students, dorm residents are expected to follow these rules to insure safety

for themselves and their dorm. The student conduct code provides the dorm staff a framework to follow to enforce rules that keep order in the dorms.

The following are some examples of how rules are written in the Student Conduct Code. I have included the alcohol and quiet hour rules as written. The guest policy is not found in the Student Conduct Code, however, it is included in the Residence Life calendar¹⁶. In addition, the dorm staff has policies in their training manuals. The RA staff is expected to inform the residents of the policies. Residents are expected to know and follow this information. These three rules will be discussed in further detail later on in the chapter as they relate to rule enforcement.

The Guest Policy

The Residence Life Calendar states:

You may have overnight guests of the same sex stay in your room, not to exceed three days. Guests must be registered at the front desk for reasons of building security and contact in case of emergency. By registering a guest, the resident verifies that an empty bed has been located for the night(s) and that permission has been granted by the resident that normally occupies that bed. The resident is completely responsible for the activities and behavior of the guest and will be subject to disciplinary action should the guest violate University regulations. Sleeping bags are prohibited in the residence halls.

Visitation is defined as the privilege of having members of the opposite sex present in residence hall rooms. Coed halls and halls with unlimited visitation shall have open or 24-hour visitation privileges.

Alcohol Use

The written rule on alcohol use is as follows in the Student Conduct Code:

Use, possession, or distribution of alcoholic beverages on University premises or at University-sponsored activities except as permitted in University policies (SCC 1998: 15).

The Residence Life calendar states the policy on alcohol use:

...all keggers and parties involving large amounts of alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the students' rooms in the residence halls. The use and possession of alcohol is permitted in the privacy of a student's room providing all occupants are of legal age (21 years old).

Quiet Hours

The Residence Life calendar states the policy:

This is the most important residence hall rule and the one from which most others stem. Quiet hours are from 8:00 P.M. to 8:00A.M. beginning Sunday evening through Friday morning and from 11:00P.M. to 9:00 A.M. beginning Friday evening through Sunday morning. During this period, all activities that might be disturbing to others must be suspended. Guidelines for behavior during quiet hours include:

- a. Radios and stereos quiet enough so they cannot be heard outside the room.
- b. Musical instruments played in music rooms, in music building, or outside the residence halls.
- c. Pads to be placed under typewriters when in use.
- d. The right of a roommate to study and sleep over your right to entertain guests in your room.

The Student Conduct Code gives the quiet hour policy power by stating:

Violation of published University regulations or policies. Among such regulations are those pertaining to student housing, entry and use of University facilities, use of amplifying equipment, campus demonstrations, etc (SCC 1998:14)

Next, I will explain the "stupid rules" that the informants described to me.

"Stupid Rules"

"Stupid rules" are the written rules that seem to contradict what a dorm supervisor thinks will promote respect and order in their dorm. Many times a dorm supervisor will see the necessity of the rule but feel that it is difficult to enforce.

The main "stupid rule" that dorm supervisors talked about was the guest policy. I will use the guest policy as the example of a "stupid rule."

Most said they understood the reasoning behind the policy but felt the rule was the wrong solution. The guest policy allows twenty four-hour visitation but no cohabitation. The policy is in place to avoid roommate problems of privacy and fire code issues. However, the logic of the rule is flawed according to dorm supervisors. A member of the opposite sex that is not related to the resident can visit at three a.m. if they are not asleep. A fire could occur and the roommate can be bothered. The policy does not fall in line with its reasoning. Many of the supervisors complained that if they enforced the policy they would only create a lack of respect from the residents. The residents that suffer from lack of privacy would still be subjected to visits from their roommate's significant other even if the visitor did not sleep in the room. This dorm supervisor said:

I guess I understand the problem but the guest policy does not solve it. It only pisses the residents off that they can't be treated like adults. I mean people LIVE here. No one is really going to gain respect by enforcing that rule – people will just do it anyway, we're not a religious college. Lets face it – the rule isn't there for fire codes- it's there to make parent s happy. No one checks in their overnight guest's (relatives or person of the same sex) at the desk. The policy is just fluff. In case we have a situation were we need to use it to get someone out of here. The thing is if we have a problem with someone they probably did something else that we can get them for that is more valid. Most roommates work it out and if they don't any good RA will spot it and work it out for them. They don't understand that the residents in the dorm follow the rules if they respect their RA or their roommate. The people we have problems with will break rules because they don't have respect. Residents don't follow the rules because they are written down somewhere and we have to constantly work it out with them, ya know, like common sense. If someone has a girlfriend over every night then of course, but the resident who don't have roommates, no, I don't think I'm gonna tell them to kick her out. Or if the roommate doesn't care every once in a while. Really, I'm glad I don't have to see that much I just don't see it, if I did I'd ask the roommate if he was okay with it. I don't know the whole issue is kinda stupid. They don't know how we get things done and how we have to walk lines around here. But it's amazing, we seem to do it just fine.

Another supervisor said simply said this:

I almost quit over the stupid guest policy. If they had made me live by it to a T, I probably would have. If my HR didn't feel how I did I would have had a problem. We just feel the same. Be discrete and use common sense. I just don't want to tell someone else how to live, they're not breaking the law. And the fire code is just crap because they don't mind if you have your brother over.

However, this supervisor disagrees. She states:

We work for them. We get paid to do a job and we can't just decide that were not going to enforce something just because we don't want to follow it either. I mean, there is a need for this policy and I don't know how else we can protect some residents from being walked all over by their roommate. Think about it, it would suck to have somebody's boyfriend over all the time. This is the best we can do. If they want us to do it we need to because we have a job to do. The HR can't be sleeping with her boyfriend and expect the staff to not have anyone over so I gotta follow it to.

Finally, this HR said that the problem was with enforcing the rule:

Just in the respect that when you get to college every person feels that they are considered an adult and that they should be able to handle a situation having a significant other stay overnight or having friends stay overnight. They should be able to deal with that. I do understand that sometimes people take that for granted and they impose on their roommates or they tend to house someone for an extended period of time, therefore imposing on their roommate again, and also basically they're occupying -- there are several people occupying a room for a price that they are not willing to dish out. But again, it is -- it's kind of more difficult to discipline. The thing is we have to enforce it because it's our job. I guess I just use common sense and go by the situation. That's how (my AHR) and I decided to let our RAs know how to deal with it.

Again, the importance of focusing on the guest policy was to look at different views of the supervisors on enforcing the policy. I argue that if an agreement on enforcement for the guest policy is not reached then the dorm supervisors will have a tough time giving direction for their RA staff.

Common Sense Rule

The supervisors talked about common sense rules. The idea of "common sense" varied from one individual to another. Common sense rules may be seen as rules that call

for an assessment of the situation before a blanket solution is applied. Different types of supervisors may have different views on a situation. To clarify, a common sense rule is a rule that both the HR and AHR feel is fair. For example, one HR said she and her AHR would not send an underage resident caught with one beer drinking alone in their room to the Self Over Substance (S.O.S)¹⁷ program. However, if an underage resident was making noise and had many visitors in the room drinking then they said they would send them to the program. The supervisor admitted that this causes some problems with consistent enforcement. However, the HR felt that it was a common sense rule and he wanted to avoid “black and white enforcement.” Again, the HR said he and his AHR agreed on the rule together.

Here is a comment of an AHR who did not agree with her HR and the problems it caused. She was explaining a time when her HR went over her head to handle a quiet hour situation:

Well, he just stormed in there and told them all that they were in trouble. I think he was having a bad day and he took it out on them. It made me look bad because I had just told them to quiet down and that they were warned but not one minute later after I had handle it, he went in there and wrote them up. I guess that was a warning sign to me. He just didn't care what I thought was best even if I knew more about the situation. He was in charge. I think it was a power trip. One minute he'd say this and the next he'd do this. I never knew what he would pull. He always said he wanted people to know what was expected, you know, with the rules but sometimes he just didn't make sense.

This supervisor felt that her relationship with her HR was not working. She said they did not discuss and agree on what was expected. According to most supervisors, the HR and AHR need to discuss their definitions of written, unnecessary or “stupid,” and common sense rules. Most feel that their discussion needs to be presented to the RA staff. Most dorm supervisory staff said they would insure that these discussions would

take place more than once during the year. According to the interviews, functioning staffs will informally do this throughout the year as situations arise. For example this AHR said:

I think that if someone came and approached us about anything that we've dealt with, if they disagree with us, if it's a discipline situation where they were the only party involved or maybe the whole staff, we'll sit down with them and discuss and find a happy medium. Like maybe we felt the people should go to SOS and they thought that was very strict. Maybe we felt we needed consistency and the RA felt there should be some exceptions here and this is why. We'll take that into account and sit down and talk with the person until we reach some kind of happy medium where, you know -- we're not all completely satisfied with the situation but at least it's resolved reasonably. And like if someone -- I don't know -- we make a call on something as far as the staff goes and they disagree with it kind of as a whole, like if a couple people, or even one person, it means we'll probably sit down and have a meeting and say, hey, you guys, you know, what do you think about this and what can we do. I mean, if you really disagree with this what can we do otherwise?

Next, I will provide supervisors' views on the enforcement of the dorm rules. I will present the different views on enforcement that is dependent upon the types of supervisors. Again, these are ideal types to provide some idea of the various thoughts on enforcement I encountered. However, one dorm supervisor does not fit into only one type of enforcement. The importance lies in the compromises and conflicts that arise when the HR and AHR face enforcing the rules and providing fair sanctions. The predominant trait that distinguishes types from each other is their views on rule enforcement. This next section explains the various types of enforcement I discovered among the types of supervisors.

Types of Rule Enforcement

Situational Enforcement

Situational enforcement is based on individual incidents. The factors in the incident carry weight when assessing how to proceed with discipline action. The democratic supervisor uses situational enforcement most often. This democratic HR states:

You know, I try to be professional, try to be courteous. I think one of the biggest things in this job is to think through situations and -- before you make any rash decisions.

Another democratic type responds by explaining:

I think that I try to hear people out and explain why what they did was wrong and necessary to take action, but, I try to think about their situation and talk it over with my AHR. Every situation is different but I know consistency is important so one person doesn't get a break and the guy who was being a jerk doesn't. I mean you have to be fair, its hard to decide this stuff and that's why I ask other people what they want to see happen. I think that's the most important thing to do. Be decisive but always ask the RA who is more closely involved or my AHR. Sometimes your hands are tied, like if someone is under age and they got caught because they were too loud, too drunk, they deserve to get in trouble. They were stupid. But if a RA walks knocks on the door and walks into a room were one guy is watching T.V. and drinking a beer and being quiet is it really fair to send him to SOS, yeah he broke a rule but he was being responsible. I'd rather bust a twenty-two year old for having a party, than a twenty-year old in his room being quiet with his door closed.

Supervisors indicated that situational enforcement can cause inconsistency and some issues may arise. Some said that if they needed to use caution when using situational enforcement because it may seem like the supervisors are indecisive. The hope of those that used situational enforcement was that if clear and open discussion between the dorm staff involved and the resident occurred; then this type of enforcement can be viewed as the common sense solution.

Consistent Enforcement

Consistent enforcement is focused on the violation rather than the situation in which the violation occurred. The idea is that the residents will see a set standard of which they need to follow. This standard is fair and outlined at the beginning of the semester. Consistent enforcement is clean. The complexity is removed and situations are out of the hands of the dorm supervisors. This means, there is little choice after a violation has occurred. The bureaucratic supervisor is most likely to use consistent enforcement. In order to insure fairness, some say, that consistency is called for. This AHR explains:

Those staffs that didn't seem as successful, would be those people that don't follow the rules and there's a point where, you know, you can follow the rules too much and just be too much of a stickler. But to have some -- and, in fact, a great level of consistency within the job and for each person, for each RA. Although I do believe in being fair over being just, if you recognize the distinction between the two, because I think that's - that fairness is important but also following the rules.

Another bureaucratic supervisor described her idea of consistency:

Basically we want to be consistent. We've been trying to be that way and I think it. I think that, you know -- I mean, that's even been paying off since the beginning of the year. Our first write-ups were probably the most important. The rest of them have been here and there. I mean, we had a lot of write-ups in the first, you know, three weeks, and it's kind of been calming down a little bit because people know, I think, that we'll write them up for anything. It doesn't matter if they're burning incense, being wild, or drinking, or smoking pot. It doesn't matter. We're going to write them up for everything and we're going to follow through. Anyone who's drinking goes to SOS. It doesn't matter how much they drank or when they got there, things like that. And they all know that and they don't want to do -- they don't want to express, they don't want to come to our discipline meetings, so they just -- either they're getting smarter and not getting caught, or they're going off campus. And either way, that's fine.

Power Trip

The next type of enforcement is based when dorm supervisors overstep their bounds. The authoritative type of supervisor is usually in this category of enforcement. The “power trip” is a well-known phenomenon that sometimes can happen in a position of authority. All of the informants that commented on this issue explained the power trip as a negative type of enforcement. One HR explained that any type can fall into this enforcement pattern:

One time, the campus police came to find someone I became overzealous and got on a power trip and said, I know who it is. I told them his name, I told them what room. The policemen went up to the room and accused the person of something and then I didn't hear about it for a day or so after that, at which point the resident came and blatantly accused me of -- or basically said, Why did you tell him I did it? And at that point -- I don't think I realized ahead of time, but at that point I realized I probably overstepped my bounds. I did something that I shouldn't have done. I became a stereotype in the stigma of a HR as far as having that authority, you know. I didn't know it was him. I just assumed and whether the security officer made the right call in just taking my assumption to be fact or not, that's beside the point. I should have had -- I should have taken more discretion with what I did and found out a little bit more about the situation before and after.

Role Model Enforcement

This type of enforcement calls for the dorm supervisor to be proactive. More specifically, the behavior of the dorm supervisor is a role model for their staff and then their residents. Their way of preventing negative behavior. The focus is on the behavior of the dorm staff rather in hopes that the residents will be influenced. The parental type often uses role model enforcement. For example, this parental supervisor said:

I think encouraging drinking on your staff , even if they are of age, or encouraging any sort of like things that might be something you wouldn't expect your residents to do. And that's hard because we're in here so much and when we

go out together as a group we want to have our own personal time and not worry about following student conduct and stuff. But I think it's important for the most part that we do that because as a staff member you're constantly observed whether you're at Finnigans or bowling or whatever. I think that's a pretty big mistake, just not holding your staff to the standards that you would hold the residents to at least, if not higher.

Another agreed by explaining the importance of not being above the law:

I think if you're put in a role where people look up to you and you're in a supervisory position, you should be required to abide by the rules of the dorm like everyone else. You should be as professional as possible. You should handle your job with the seriousness that it involves because it is a very serious job and we need to make sure that people see you in that light, that they can respect you for what you do. I believe that supervisors, that if they tend to think that they can fudge on the rules, so to speak, and they can get by because they're the ones running the dorm, I think that is probably a non-appropriate way to act. If they ask something of someone and they do not perform that duty themselves, then obviously you have a discrepancy because no one will really respect you for that. That's where people have problems because they don't think that the supervisor really thinks it's very important because they don't. That I think is the main thing. It's just obeying the rules of the dorm, acting professional, and again being there for the residents.

No Enforcement

Finally, from time to time even dorm supervisors get tired of enforcing the rules. According to the interviews, all types of supervisors can get burned out. However, it was more common among those who felt unsupported by their RA staff and co-supervisor. Supervisors also said that they felt burnt because they had to keep enforcing rules from day to day. This AHR offered his feelings on growing tired of enforcement:

I hate being a policeman. I hate having to tell somebody to shut up, pour their alcohol out. It drives me nuts especially when somebody gets in my face, somebody turns back around me mean and just give me a hard time. That drives me nuts. It's probably the thing I hate the most. They always emphasize that we're not police, we're not here to do that, that's not our main job. It's probably half of our job. Keep an eye on residents as far as how they're doing, if they're making it. If they're getting in trouble with school,

alcohol, that kind of thing. Sometimes I don't want to do it, but that always gets me into more of a bad situation than when I started, so I usually just suck it up. If I don't enforce the rules one time, then I look like a shithead to the guy I yelled at the night before. When I feel like I can't do the job I leave, take a night out.

Sometimes dorm supervisors have trouble with being friends with the residents or staff that they are supervising. The roles are combined and provide tensions. For example, this AHR stated:

I think my first year I walked the line a little too closely of being the nice guy. It's something that I overcome pretty easily now and I don't have a problem with writing someone up. I don't like it, but I think I have a very fat stack of discipline notes that I've done myself. I also don't like to tell the RAs when there are doing something obviously wrong, but I've gotten used to it. It gets old though.

No enforcement will win temporary favor from a few residents and maybe even staff members. However, in the long run most supervisors warned that letting things go would lead to lack of leadership. The staff will become confused and sometimes resent the lack of authority. This HR reports:

Well, once in awhile you'll get a situation where it (the incident) happens three weeks ago and the details are foggy but you have to support your RA that did the write-up. Like one time my AHR and I got into a disagreement because I honestly didn't want to deal with another disciplinary problem when we were backed up anyway but one of the RAs came to him and told him about something that he couldn't prove three weeks ago but now he has more evidence or whatever, but the thing wasn't that big of a deal anyway so I didn't want to do it but the RA and my AHR really wanted to because they don't like the guy and think he is causing other shit. Anyway, I realized that I had to go through the process because I should support the RA and my AHR was right because I should have just been right on it. I was just kinda burnt.

Finally, I will explain the logistics of disciplinary action.

Logistics of Disciplinary Action of Residents

So far, I have described how the rules and rule enforcement was a source of conflict for the HR and AHR. Now I will turn to the nuts and bolts of disciplinary action to show the reader how the details of enforcing rules in the dorms can also be a point of conflict for supervisors. Confusions and frustrations over lost paperwork, divisions of labor and roles can add to the tension.

Paperwork

First, the HR and AHR have to deal with the workload of a pile of write-ups and incidents that have occurred in the last few days. For each incident, there are letters to write to notify the resident that they were written up and need to attend a disciplinary meeting if they intend to argue their innocence. Then the RLO needs to be sent a copy of the write-up and the letter of notification. The meeting is set and based on the results, more paperwork has to be filed and the resident is notified of the sanctions imposed and their signature is required. All of the process is in the dorm computer and the RLO's records. The HR usually does the bulk of the paperwork, but it is necessary that the AHR knows what is happening and how to help with the process. Again, as one supervisor said, the HR and AHR needs to decide what they are comfortable with and communicate how they want things to get done:

Discipline probably takes up more time than anything just because of all the computer work that you type in all the information on the computer and several forms which states what they did wrong. There are letters of notice that the charge has been filed against them and then once we hold a meeting with them, then we have to submit another letter that basically states we found you either guilty of this situation and we're imposing these sanctions or we did not find you guilty, there was not enough evidence to support that, and which we'll dismiss that. That seems to take the most time just because of the little things that.

Meetings

Next, the disciplinary meeting is held in the dorm. The student accused of the violation and the supervisors are present. The student has a right to ask for their RA, the person who wrote them up, a lawyer, or any witnesses to be present. The student conduct report is read and the student has an opportunity to explain their actions. Sometimes the HR will play the role of the enforcer and tell the residents why their violation is punishable and sometimes the AHR is more comfortable with that role. Most often, the HR and AHR decide at the time of the meeting what disciplinary action will be taken. However, sometimes after the student has spoken, the supervisors need time to discuss if action will be taken or if the student's charges will be dismissed.

The HR and AHR decide what time the meeting should occur. Some staffs like to have them in the early morning to make it more of a punishment and insure that the resident will not have a class at that time. Others do not see the need for an early morning session. Both of these issues are discussed and decided. This supervisor explained:

Whenever we hold a disciplinary meeting we try to -- we pertaining to my AHR and I -- we try to let the student know that, again, we are there for their purpose, for their safety, for the concern of the residents around them as well. We try to -- we try to make it more a meeting of understanding rather than a meeting of punishment, hopefully making it understood to the resident that we do these -- we enforce the certain policies because they are the only means by which to keep the dorm running at an acceptable level for them at an academic and social environment. And we don't try to -- we don't go out looking for people and try to write them up right away. I mean, usually what happens when and RA writes up someone is write them up because they happen upon a situation or because of problems. We never go in with the idea to kick ass. Oftentimes we'll have people that still will question you beyond that and all that I believe that we can do is tell them what we know, that we're doing this in their best interests, whether they believe that at that point or not, and hopefully just try to calm them and reassure them that we are there for them.

In each step of the disciplinary process, there are decisions that the dorm supervisors make and responsibilities that they share. Each of these decisions and responsibilities can cause tension. According to the supervisors, when this tension is not relieved, then the HR and AHR will have unresolved conflict. In the final chapter, I will provide the implications of my findings. They will include the ideal type of supervisor, the ideal rule enforcement style, and a description of a functioning HR and AHR relationship. The implications will reinforce my argument. A working HR and AHR relationship will agree on rule enforcement to provide clear guidance for the RA staff resulting in an orderly dorm.

CHAPTER SIX: Implications of the Study

The topic of this study has been how supervisors keep order in the dorms. My purpose has been to describe the tensions that dorm supervisors face while attempting run an orderly dorm. In the previous chapters, I have described the details of the job of a dorm supervisor through their own words. I have provided the reader with a big picture view of the scope of the dorm supervisors' work. By using the supervisors' views on rule enforcement, I formed a typology that describes the various styles of supervision. In addition, the supervisors described how they kept order in the dorm. From this, I gathered data that supports my argument.

The HR and AHR need to agree on a type of rule enforcement and they need to be clear in their interpretations with each other. In addition to this, they need to be in agreement on how the two make decisions about discipline. Because of the sensitivity and sometimes discomfort of rule enforcement, the dorm supervisors also need to be clear about their expectations and enforcement ideas of their RA staff. Disagreements and tensions are common with this topic. If the HR and AHR can not agree on rule enforcement then conflict will arise and confusions will follow. The RA staff will not know how to enforce rules causing a lack of consistency on their individual floors. The student residents will suffer from anomie due to the inconsistent order in the dorm. To explain the need for agreement on rule enforcement between supervisors, I will use an analogy.

The HR and AHR Discipline Relationship: the Parental Analogy

According to my data, there are three relationship styles between the HR and the AHR in the matter of rule enforcement. I will use the stories of the dorm supervisors to describe how they work with their co-supervisor on the issue at hand. The first style

involves a passive role of one of the dorm supervisory staff. The following quote will provide insight on this first style:

The Passive Style: “Go ask your Mother”

People need to be taken -- residents need to be taken care of, RAs need to be taken care of, things need to get done. And a lot of times I've seen where people aren't doing their job but nobody tells them, especially their partner doesn't tell them they're not doing their job. Last year that was a big problem. The AHR was a great guy, but he was afraid to tell the HR when she was screwing up and when she wasn't doing what she was supposed to be doing, and a lot of us suffered, you know. Not doing write-ups for two months, not typing them into the computer, losing them, that kind of thing. He knew it was going on, he knew she wasn't doing them, slacking on them. He was telling me about it but he never told her. That was bad. He was afraid to tell her, afraid to hurt her feelings. Things can get ugly.

In this situation, the AHR and HR were not communicating on how to deal with discipline. The paperwork was getting lost and the RAs were feeling unsupported. Soon the rule enforcement was inconsistent and some residents were taking advantage of the loose environment. Others were frustrated and resented the dorm staff for, seemingly, not taking care of the dorm community. A RA staff member remembered:

I guess things weren't out of control but you could definitely tell things weren't as smooth as they could be. I personally lost some respect for the way they (the dorm supervisors) handled the situation.

In this case, the AHR should have gone to the HR and discussed what he thought could have been taken care of more professionally. Instead, the AHR left it in the hands of the HR and side stepped some responsibility. The HR failed at asking for help with the workload. Instead, she let the small details add up and alienated her partner. If the HR and AHR are not communicating and sharing responsibility, they will create a chaotic atmosphere.

The Conflicting Style: “Your Mother said WHAT?!?”

The next style I uncovered was when one partner disagreed with the decision of the other. These dorm supervisors had difficulty coming to a compromise or understanding about their goals for their staff.

It was a very frustrating time for me and my staff. I think he just thought he was the boss and we worked for him. There was no discussion about how to do things or what we thought was reasonable. Half the time I was running interference with the staff just so they would stick it out. I went to (the director and assistant director) for advice and so did the staff. I just couldn't continue living and working like this so I was telling them either him or me. I was that fed up. He just wouldn't see my side or ideas; he constantly compromised my authority on things and made me do things his way. I had to follow his rules and I wasn't about to.

In this situation, the AHR felt alienated and knew her staff was confused on their direction. She attempted to discuss the matters with the HR but they could not find a comfortable place to compromise. After talking with both the dorm supervisors and the RA staff, a solution on the matter was reached by the RLO director and assistant director. These two dorm supervisors ended up not working together for the rest of the year.

The Agreement Style: “Your Mother and I agree”

Finally, the successful dorm supervisory staff will talk out their frustrations and reach a point of agreement. Even if the HR and AHR do not agree on rule enforcement, they will attempt to find a solution that is suitable. As this HR recalled:

She and I sometimes disagree, especially when it comes to disciplining staff. Like one time she thought that one of our RAs should be warned about something and I thought he should have to go see (the Director) because he kept messing up. We agreed to call him in and have a meeting with him and deal with it in house but we also wrote him a letter that we put in his file and let him sign it so he could see how serious it was. I think we can get on each other's nerves and sometimes, I'll admit that my pride gets in the way at times when I want something to go how I want it to go. We talk a lot about what we think is the best thing to do. Some

people will just say, oh your right okay lets do it your way all the time, I'm not like that and I think that's good because if I were we wouldn't get anywhere and I would be pissed off all the time.

There are two different paths to take. One would be to talk the incident over and come to an agreement on future expectations. If that discussion is not successful, then the one partner can go to the residence life supervisors and discuss a solution. Most often the dorm supervisors can work it out themselves. For example, this AHR explained a recent situation he encountered:

Sometimes she might feel that sometimes she wants to -- how do I want to say it? Treat them as more high school students, whereas I want to try to hopefully try to give them as much responsibility and hopefully they'll take that responsibility. Obviously there's just a conflict of interest in how we want to do things, you know. But the thing is, is I think that's good because if you don't have that and you have only a one-sided staff -- or supervisory staff, then what you tend to do is become very authoritarian and you start trying to sway everyone over to that side, whereas if you have two people in a different spectrum you kind of balance that out. RAs can kind of flow in between that.

The AHR thought that he and his partner's differing perspectives were positive. Therefore they worked out their expectations by trying to understand the others view on rule enforcement.

Some teams just work like clockwork. They find out who does what best and work out what their expectations. This AHR said:

We share some discipline duties. She runs the discipline meetings and the staff meetings and I have a pretty equal part in it. She gives me a lot of leeway as to how much involvement I have in stuff like that. I think we're probably one of the best teams on campus

Dorm supervisory staff will not always agree on rule enforcement. There are too many issues for debate. The mere logistics of disciplinary action are areas of compromise. If lines of responsibility are foggy, one will feel overwhelmed and one will feel powerless. If the lines are too rigid, then the relationship will be a tug of war. If the

relationship allows for discussion and expects that there will be disagreement, then it will be flexible enough to last.

Dorm supervisors do not have to have the same type of supervision style. For example, a bureaucratic supervisor and a parental supervisor can work well together if compromise is reached pertaining to rule enforcement. It is necessary that the HR and AHR agree on issues related to rule enforcement in their dorm. If they agree, then the RA staff will know what is expected, regarding the discipline of their residents. In turn, the student residents will be aware of their behavior and the behavior of others in the dorm. The resulting order provides the dorm population with a sense of community.

If the dorm supervisors cannot agree on rule enforcement, the RA staff will be confused and suffer from lack of leadership. Most likely, the RA staff will split. Following the parental analogy, the RA may put one parent against the other in an attempt to make them find agreement. Some may choose to be loyal to one of the supervisors and look to him or her for guidance. Still some may not enforce rules at all due to their confusion. In any case, the resulting dorm staff will be plagued with tension and struggle. The residents of the dorm will have anomie¹⁸. They will not have a clear set of boundaries and therefore think they have the freedom to behave in any manner causing disorder. In the next section, I will describe the student population in the dorm and show their desire for consistent rule enforcement.

The Student Resident Population

The student population in the dorms is highly volatile. There are many different economic, social and cultural backgrounds of students in one place. In addition to the diversity, the student residents are compacted into close quarters in which they share

sleeping, studying, and showering space. Each student resident brings a different and unique background to the table. Each resident has different views on how to function and varying degrees of behavioral standards. Thus, this population is in need for a clear and set normative environment.

Most of the resident population is going through a transitional period in their lives. They are coming from various places across the country to enter into college. Their common denominator is the college experience. The college experience is typically identified with experimentation in many areas including academics, drugs and alcohol, sex, religion, and extra curricular activities. Each student will experiment in a different way and each will face some individual struggle. They all need to know that in their living arrangement there are boundaries and norms. It is the job of the supervisors to make those know. The supervisors do this by agreeing on how the rules will be enforced and showing the residents there will be consistency.

Consistent Supervision

Consistency is a goal. In the real world of the dorm it would be impossible for a student staff to reach a decision that always falls in line with every other decision they made concerning rule enforcement. There is one RA for each floor of a dorm. All of the dorm staff cannot react the vary way that another member of that staff would react. However, if the HR and AHR set the standard to have consistency as a goal, then the RA staff would know the norms. Confusion would be kept to a minimum and rule enforcement would be clear. The residents would know their limits. Peter Blau and W. Richard Scott state the following in Formal Organizations:

Although there are many conflicting results reported in the literature dealing with the role of a parent as it influences the development of a child, one of the most

recurrent pleas is for consistency of parental behavior, some of the authors going so far as to insist that consistently “bad” practices are preferable to erratic behavior. We are not suggesting that a supervisor is a parent-figure for his workers but only that consistency in persons occupying positions of authority may well be of generic significance. Lack of consistency in supervision and a lack of clarity in defining the duties of subordinates probably have adverse effects on leadership and on the performance of the subordinates (Blau and Scott 1962: 157).

Blau and Scott suggest that consistency may even be more important than the type of supervision. In the case of the HR and AHR, importance should be placed on mutually defined norms and clarity in rule enforcement for the dorm population. The next section will show how Durkheim would agree on this point.

Durkheim’s Anomie

In the Division of Labor in Society, Durkheim implied that all societies need some common integration by a system of common beliefs (1893: 80-82, 329-330). He argued that in societies that were built on mechanical solidarity, these common beliefs were directly correlated with their norms. In today’s more society based on organic solidarity, the norms are more distant from overall beliefs. According to Coser, today’s societies people are more spontaneous and independent. The dorms are organic due to their heterogeneous make up. A general system of overall beliefs still must exist in the dorm. The system must be known to ensure a normative environment. If the norms and beliefs are not present, the society will suffer from anomie (Coser 1977:132-136).

Anomie is normlessness or lack of regulation (Coser 1984: xx) as defined by Coser in the introduction for Durkheim’s The Division of Labor. When the social regulations are not present then the “individuals of that society are left to their own devices (Coser1977: 132-136).” Coser goes on to say:

Anomie does not refer to a state of mind, but to a property of the social structure. It characterizes a condition in which individual desires are no longer regulated by common norms and where, as a consequence, individuals are left without moral guidance in the pursuit of their goals (1977:132-136).

The student residents in the dorms will suffer from anomie if norms are not defined and rules are inconsistently enforced. It is the job of the supervisors to establish a normative environment by making the rules known and enforcing them in a consistent manner.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, the tensions and struggles that make this task of setting norms a challenge were described in detail. In Chapter Two, it was shown how the supervisors are directly in relation with various dorm staff, University professionals, residents, parents and professors. These relationships call for the supervisors to be constantly changing roles. More importantly, the need for the HR and AHR to get along with each other were described by providing their own words and stories. The stories explained the unique tensions that the HR and AHR face while they figure out how their relationship effects the dorm.

In Chapter Three, the living arrangements of the dorm staff were described. This description showed the reader how the supervisors have to negotiate their schedules to ensure work and personal time. Living at work also means living next door to the people that the supervisors have authority over. The study showed the supervisors dealt with the tension of enforcing rules among their peers. Friendships and privacy were also addressed in this Chapter. Living at work is a unique situation for the supervisors. They shared their thoughts on how this arrangement effected their work and school performance. Some mentioned the tendency for burn out to occur because of living at

work, yet, most did not mind the arrangement. They explained the various ways they dealt with “being in” and the demands of the schedule. However, the reader can see how the requirements for the job can add to the tension due to the close working environment.

In Chapter Four, types of supervisors were discussed and described by using Weber’s “ideal types.” This chapter showed the tendencies of certain types of supervisors. The reader saw the different views that the supervisors had on rule enforcement. This shows the challenge supervisors face when they need to make the rules clear yet do not agree on how to enforce them. Chapter Four describes the tension behind the differing opinions through the stories of the supervisors. When the supervisors have these struggles because of differing styles, the breakdown of their relationship begins.

Chapter Five specifically dealt with the types of rules and rule enforcement found in the dorms. In this Chapter, the effects of the various types of rule enforcement is described. Conflicts over definitions of rules and their usefulness arise. These conflicts add to the inconsistent rule enforcement, due to staff confusion, in the dorms. The reader sees the effects this has on the whole dorm population. If the HR and AHR cannot reach agreement on rule enforcement, then the RA staff will lack guidance and inconsistently enforce rules which will cause the residents to suffer from anomie.

It is clear that future studies of the dorm environment could analyze the complex outcomes of poor leadership. Ethnographic inquiries of the RA staff and dorm residents could provide more insight into the functioning of dormitories. However, this study has offered a description of the job of a dorm supervisor. In addition, it has provided a general finding that supervisors must reach agreement on rule enforcement to ensure

dorm order and a sense of community for the residents. Running an orderly dorm is based on the ability of the supervisors to provide leadership and consistent rule enforcement for the dorm population.

¹ This study began in Ethnographic Research Methods class. Spring 1997

² “Desk-flies” are the slang term that dorm staff uses to describe the residents that continuously hang out at the front desk in the dorms.

³ Driessen, Jon, “Worldly Interpretation of a Suspicious Story”, Ethnographic Studies. Issue 2 Autumn 1997. pp. 3-15.

⁴ Room inventories are forms that keep track of the condition of a room before and after a resident occupies the space. The inventories are used to assess damages. The resident is responsible for the compensation for any damages, caused by them, during their stay in the dorm.

⁵ Nightwatch are trained to exchange monies, check out equipment, go on rounds, and provide room keys. They are instructed to call the RA on duty to check out weapons, deal with disciplinary action, and fire alarms.

⁶ The compensation for the HRs and AHRs vary depending on if the supervisor lives in an apartment or has a room, the type of meal plan they sign up for, and number of years they have been a supervisor.

⁷ See Appendix for Residence Life Mission Statement

⁸ Anomie is Durkheim’s sociological term for normlessness. It is a condition of society in which there exists little consensus or lack of certainty on values or goals.

⁹ “The desk” is the front desk of the dorm lobby. The desk is open from 8a.m. to 6a.m. Dorm residents go to the desk for information, equipment, spare keys, and packages.

¹⁰ Many of the dorm supervisors told me that the Assistant Head Resident took on the tasks related to the nightwatch staff whereas the Head Resident maintained the disciplinary actions and paperwork. This was merely a common practice, not a mandated distribution of duties.

¹¹ I found the concept of Weber’s “ideal type” in Martindale’s The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory.

¹² Ideal types are not stereotypes. Martindale says stereotypes are used to close analysis where ideal types are used to open it (Martindale 1960:382).

¹³ A formal write-up is a notification that the student has been charged with violating the student conduct code. It describes, in detail, the events that took place with witness verification. The student is notified by letter and then requested to attend a disciplinary meeting with the supervisors. This meeting is the student’s defense and they have certain rights. (i.e. the right to counsel) The sanctions are discussed and the student has an opportunity to agree or disagree to the charges. If they agree, they sign a letter and accept the sanctions. If they appeal, the student goes to the Director of Housing for further debate.

¹⁴ S.O.S. is a class that is on alcohol abuse. Mandatory attendance of this class is sometimes required as a sanction for underage drinking or disorderly drinking in the dorms.

¹⁵ A write-up occurs when any student violates the Student Conduct Code and the dorm staff decides to take action. Any student can write any other student up by describing the events in detail and putting it into written form on a student conduct report. The HR enters the report into the computer. A letter of notification informs the student that they have been written-up. This letter includes the violation that the student is accused of and the time and place of the disciplinary meeting. See appendix

¹⁶ The Residence Life calendar is an informational calendar given to residents at the beginning of their stay in the dorms. This calendar highlights policies of the RLO and important dates for the students.

¹⁷ S.O.S. is the Self Over Substance program given at the Student Health Services on campus. The program is three hours long with the first alcohol violation. There is a twenty-five dollar fee. The second violation is given a nine-hour course and seventy-five dollar fee. The supervisors decide if the resident will be sent to S.O.S.

¹⁸ Durkheim’s anomie is the “state of confusion, insecurity, normlessness” (Martindale, 1960:88)

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