Resilience: Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals’ Lived Experiences

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This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to explore resilience in mid-level student affairs professionals. This study described the day-to-day experiences with the phenomenon of resilience, as well as identified how resilience influences professional practice, how it is demonstrated in the professional setting, and how it is challenged and cultivated in the work environment. Data was collected through a series of journal reflections and in-depth interviews from 20 participants. Data analysis revealed participant experiences aligned with six conceptual framework categories: belief, behavior, emotion, environment, cause of stress, and outcome. Three distinct themes emerged from the research: 1) Identity matters: The impact of belief on behavior, 2) Upward and downward spirals: How environment and emotions intertwine, and 3) We are all in this together: The role of coworker connection. These findings indicate that beliefs shape behavior related to resilience, the environment influences emotion – particularly negative environments and negative emotion, and coworkers are essential to the resilience process. Additionally, through the interviews, a population-specific definition of resilience emerged. For mid-level student affairs professionals, resilience is the ability to maintain a positive attitude and to focus on learning and growth while facing challenges head on. The primary risk factor was a negative environment with unrealistic workloads and an organizational culture that did not support staff. The primary protective factor was strong coworker connection.
DEDICATION

For my mom and dad.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.
-Winston Churchill

College administrators have always been concerned with students’ academic preparedness when entering an institution, but they now also worry about students’ emotional preparedness; their resilience to be able to overcome obstacles and persevere to graduation. The development of resilience is critical to students’ personal growth and success, and student affairs professionals have traditionally placed an equal emphasis on students’ personal and intellectual growth (ACPA, 2008; American Council on Education, 1949). Hence, they work to assist students in developing competency, cultivating emotional skills, developing meaningful relationships, and establishing identity and purpose, all while connecting classroom education to real-world engagement (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Student affairs professionals serve as educators and role models for the psychological development that occurs while students are in college (Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory, 2005). Students learn through observation, and as role models, student affairs professionals provide an example for students to follow (Gibson, 2004). Thus, it is imperative that student affairs professionals demonstrate resilience in their professional lives, because they cannot effectively teach traits that they do not demonstrate (Gu & Day, 2007).
To create an environment that fosters student development, professional competencies have been established to define the professional knowledge and skills for student affairs professionals for all functional areas (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). ACPA: College Student Educators International (ACPA) and NASPA: Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education (NASPA), the two largest and most comprehensive student affairs professional associations in the United States, collaborated to develop these competencies. The 10 competencies include: personal and ethical foundations; values, philosophy, and history; assessment, evaluation, and research; advising and helping; assessment, evaluation, and research; law, policy, and governance; organizational and human resources; leadership; social justice and inclusion; student learning and development; technology; and advising and supporting. While the specific skills associated with each competency area vary, the fundamental belief is that the competencies support practitioners, whose work pertains primarily to the development of college students. Furthermore, a recent change in the competencies increased the focus on student affairs professionals as educators, distinct from other helping professions such as counselors and psychologists (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

Among the 10 competency areas for student affairs professionals, personal and ethical foundations is the area that addresses resilience. This area involves “the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to develop and maintain integrity in one’s life and work” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 12). It specifically states that professionals should “bolster one’s psychological resiliency, including participating in stress-management activities, engaging in personal or spiritual exploration, and building healthier relationships in and out of the workplace” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p 17). Further it
states that they need to “serve as a role model and mentor sharing personal experiences and nurturing others’ competency in this area” (ACPA & NASPA, 2010, p. 17).

Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines resilience as the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. It is a critical skill for navigating the missteps that are bound to happen in college and in life. Though resilience is only one of several psychological constructs related to emotional wellbeing, it has been linked with numerous positive outcomes, which explains the reason it has been a significant focus of educational research. Resilience has been linked to increased optimism, being open to new experiences, cultivating positive emotions that can act as a buffer against stress, and even improved physical wellbeing (Block & Kremen, 1996; Fredrickson, 2004; Kumpfer, 1999; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

Additionally, while supporting student learning and development, student affairs professionals face their own increasing stressors making work life balance difficult, which intensifies the need for resilience (Guthrie, et al., 2005). First, students are showing up as generally less resilient. Recent research has indicated a sharp change in the emotional wellbeing of college students. Data from the 2013 National Collegiate Health Assessment Executive Summary indicated that 45% of college students reported feeling hopeless, 83.7% felt overwhelmed by “all they had to do,” and 31.3% reported feeling so depressed that they could not function on three or more occasions during the academic year. Benton and Benton (2005) stated that 85% of counseling center directors reported more serious mental health problems than in the previous five years, and indicated that anxiety disorders have doubled and that both depression and serious suicidal ideation have tripled.
In addition to dealing with the ever-changing and generally less resilient student population, student affairs professionals are facing other work stressors, such as an increase in military student enrollment, increased accountability, and heavy workloads. Enrollment of military connected students has increased with the post 9-11 GI Bill. These students face added stress of possible physical injuries and increased mental health issues to the already daunting task of completing college (Schuh et al., 2010). Student affairs professionals also face increased accountability and a demand for numbers-driven performance. “Congress wants accountability from educators about the value institutions provided in terms of the quality of student learning” (Schuh et al., 2010, p. 72). Additionally, federal legislation, such as the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and the Clery Act, as well as new guidance on Title IX and the Campus SaVE Act creates unfunded mandates with which colleges must comply (Gardener, 2015; Kelderman, 2012). Finally, student affairs professionals often face heavy workloads and put in long hours to complete their duties (Guthrie, et al., 2005). These stressors often are compounded by tight budget constraints, as many states are experiencing a decline in higher education funding (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, & Morrell, 2000).

Consequently, an understanding of resilience is crucial in student affairs professional practice, yet research does not exist that discusses resilience as a process from the student affairs professionals’ perspectives. There is research that explores professional burnout, leaving the profession, and finding balance, but not specifically resilience (Anderson, et al., 2000; Guthrie, et al., 2005; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Additionally, research has emphasized the benefits and methods for cultivating resilience
in students, and in teachers in the K-12 environment (Ackerman, 2007; Masten, Cutluni, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Gu & Day, 2007). Therefore, this study addresses that gap and explored professional resilience in the higher education setting. The purpose was to describe the phenomenon of resilience from student affairs professionals’ perspectives to better inform professional practice, ultimately leading to enhanced student experiences.

**Problem Statement**

While broad research is available on the benefits of resilience for individuals, and more specifically students, there is not research that specifically explores resilience as a process for student affairs professionals. This is problematic given the expectation created by professional competencies that student affairs professionals serve as role models of resilience. Current college students appear to be less resilient than previous cohorts (Benton & Benton, 2005); therefore, it becomes even more important for student affairs practitioners to serve as guides for navigating changes and challenges faced by students, as well as role models for resilient practices. Finally, the increasing demand on student affairs professionals intensifies the need for resilience.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to describe professional resilience for mid-level student affairs professionals in the state of Colorado through phenomenological research methods. A real-life snapshot of professionals’ actions and choices can provide valuable information on ways to be successful in this field (Schuh et al., 2010). Qualitative research also has the ability to explain the way in which the “macro” is translated into the “micro” (Barbour, 2008, p. 11). In this case, it explained the manner in which resilience guides the everyday practices of student affairs professionals. Mid-level professionals
were chosen because they make up a large portion of the working population, yet are under researched. This study did not seek to objectively determine levels of resilience in student affairs professionals; rather, it described day-to-day experiences with the phenomenon. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the phenomenon of resilience influence professional practice?
2. How do student affairs professionals demonstrate resilience?
3. How is resilience cultivated in the professional setting?
4. How is resilience challenged in the professional setting?

**Study Population**

Campus staff are critical to the functioning of a college or university, but not all staff are considered student affairs professionals. Student affairs professionals are distinguished by their commitment to the growth and development of students outside of the formal curriculum (Schuh et al., 2011). They interact directly with students to support their out-of-class experiences. “Student affairs professionals are educators who share responsibility with faculty, academic administrators, other staff, and students themselves for creating the conditions under which students are likely to expend time and energy in educationally-purposeful activities” (ACPA, 2008, p. 1). The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2015) recognized 44 functional areas in which these professionals are likely to be employed. Functional areas include academic advising, student activities and leadership programs, residence life, career services, multicultural services, veterans’ affairs, and orientation programs. While not an exclusive list, it demonstrates the wide variety of areas in which student affairs professionals that may be present on a college campus.
Mid-level managers comprise the largest portion of the working population of student affairs professionals; they are the strongest staff resource for institutions (Young, 2007). However, a lack of research exists on this professional group, as much of the professional development focuses on new professionals, specific skill area development, or transitioning to senior leadership (Young, 2007). A precise definition of mid-level managers is elusive (Mills, 1993), although there is general agreement “that it is anyone not in his or her first, entry-level position and also not a chief student affairs officer” (Young, Jr. 2007, p. 33). Additionally, Young, Jr. (2007) described them as “educators who directly affect student learning” (p. 34) and “have the ability to allocate resources to support student learning or development” (p. 36).

Mid-level managers bridge the gap between chief student affairs officers and students on campus (Taylor, 2007). Mid-level managers face numerous challenges of implementing the institutional mission and vision and navigating ongoing campus change. One particular challenge is they often have no direct authority over the people they depend on to be able to do their job (Boomgaarden, 2008). They should be prepared to face those challenges and provide voice and direction to the students and staff they supervise (Lovell & Kosten, 2000). They must stay focused and translate strategy to action in order to produce results (Boomgaarden, 2008).

Finally, mid-level managers are in the unique position of communicating across institutional levels. Their work involves interacting with students, front-line professionals, and senior campus leadership. Due to their unique position, they tend to be more knowledgeable about activities across campus and have the greatest potential to affect change in an institution (Taylor, 2007). Mid-level professionals have been referred
to as the unsung professionals, as few understand or appreciate their work (Young, 2007); thus, professional associations, such as ACPA, are placing an increasing importance on the mid-level role and creating mid-level community of practice resources. Therefore, it is critical that their experiences be understood.

**Study Context**

Higher education is a broad field, with over 4,500 degree-granting institutions across the United States (Schuh, et al., 2010). In order to gain a deep understanding of participants’ experiences, it was important to define an appropriate scope. For the purpose of this study, the scope was narrowed by geographic area. Geographic locations often influence social customs, political views, and access to resources; thus, it is a common method for narrowing a study population (Lamont, Schmalzbauer, Waller, & Weber, 1996).

The state of Colorado was chosen for this study; it is a prime area because of its range of institutional types and sizes. Colorado has 31 degree-granting institutions managed by the Department of Higher Education, varying in size from under 1,000 to over 30,000 students (Colorado Department of Education, 2015). Additionally, Colorado continues to have a high level of college student enrollment and is ranked third in the nation for percentage of citizens who hold a degree (Colorado Commission on Higher Education, 2012), despite continually low funding levels from the state legislature (Kuta, 2015). Finally, Colorado is adopting a new base-funding model for higher education that focuses on transparency and graduation rates, thus increasing accountability for institutions – and in turn student affairs professionals (Colorado Department of Education, 2015).
Construct Definitions

There is not a consistent definition for resilience used in research; it has varied by study purpose. However, three consistent components are evident across resilience research: adversity (or risk factors), positive adaptation, and protective factors (Glatz & Johnson, 1999; Masten et al., 2009). For the purpose of this study resilience was defined as positive adaptation to stress. It was viewed as a complex phenomenon constructed by an individual’s behaviors, beliefs, and emotions, and shaped by environmental factors.

As a part of the resilience process an individual must face risk, challenge, or adversity (Glatz & Johnson, 1999; Masten et al., 2009). In this study, adversity was defined as stress rather than as trauma, due to a lack of research on low-risk events such as everyday hassles (Masten, 2001). As Aldwin (2007) explained, hassles can compound to produce significant stress over time, and this stress can have a significant impact on individuals’ wellbeing. Identifying causes of stress in student affairs professionals was not a primary focus of this study, rather it was to understand how individuals respond to stress and display resilience.

Second, positive adaptation to stress must be present (Glatz & Johnson, 1999). Positive adaptation is defined by the outcome of a situation based on societal expectations (Masten et al., 2009). Since resilience research of this nature does not exist with this population, positive adaptation was not firmly predefined. Rather determining positive adaptation was drawn from the personal foundations competency area, where resilience is stated to be a critical component. Maintaining wellness, being self-directive, self-reflective and self-aware, maintaining integrity, and having a passion for work are characteristics associated with that competency and were viewed as indicators of positive
adaptation (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Research question two of this study also provides
guidance for definitions of positive adaptation for future studies.

Finally, protective factors influence the phenomenon, which are factors generally
classified as environmental or personal. Protective factors are characteristics of an
individual or the environment that moderate the negative impact of stressful events
(Luther & Cicchetti, 2000). Environmental factors include work environments,
relationships with coworkers, and institutional politics (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price,
2011). Personal factors include individuals’ personality traits, thoughts, feeling,
emotions, and actions. (Masten et al., 2009). Each of the research questions shed light on
the personal and environmental factors that contributed to resilience in student affairs
professionals.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was driven by the work on resilience and
coping processes presented within the literature review. Both the construct of resilience
and the influencing factors were viewed on a continuum (Masten et al., 2009; Rutter,
1985). Furthermore, it was assumed that response to challenge will vary and that
resilience was not a fixed phenomenon in an individual’s life. As Rutter (1985) stated,
“resilience cannot be seen as a fixed attribute of the individual. Those people who cope
successfully with difficulties at one point in their life may react adversely to other
stressors when their situation is different. If circumstances change, resilience alters” (p.
317).

The phenomenon of resilience is comprised of both personal and environmental
factors. The environmental factors include any surrounding or conditions in which an
individual works. The personal factors are comprised of behaviors, beliefs, and emotions. Behavior requires effort, planning, some form of action (or intentional inaction), and includes the coping process (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). It is primarily, though not exclusively, defined by what can be observed.

Belief is having trust and faith in something, and it is the mental representations that comprise conscious thought. Belief includes the thoughts and ideas individuals have that they believe to be true (Nespor, 1987). It encompasses values, morals, self-perceived personality traits, and the active thought process (Nespor, 1987). Self-efficacy is an example of a personal trait that would fall under belief. Belief is driven by the cognitive process and often motivates behavior (Klinke, 2007).

Emotion is separate from belief, and is the instinctive or intuitive feeling disguised from thought. It often is intertwined with mood, temperament, and motivation (Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayer, & Nesselroade, 2000). Belief and emotion often influence one another, although they can be separate. An individual can have different logical thoughts and feelings on a subject. Continued interaction occurs between the three constructs. For instance, the emotional reaction to how a situation is cognitively appraised (the belief) affects the response (the behavior). Figure 1 below shows the phenomenon of resilience at the heart of the personal and environmental factors.
Figure 1. The relationship between the personal characteristics, the environment, and the phenomenon of resilience, which is defined as positive adaptation to stress. Resilience lives at the heart of the interactions between the personal characteristics of belief, behavior, and emotion, and the environmental factors that both cause stress and support personal characteristics.

Methodology

Due to the lack of research on resilience with student affairs professionals, this study utilized a qualitative approach in order to gain a better understanding of how resilience manifests in the higher education setting. Qualitative analysis was chosen since the phenomenon is highly subjective, the context is critical, and understanding meaning to participants is the primary objective. Qualitative analysis provided a way to explore the phenomenon in depth, and provided sensitivity to the context and understanding of why and how resilience matters in the profession (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, Ungar (2003) points to the need for more qualitative studies on the topic, citing the general lack
of qualitative studies on resilience and the ability for qualitative methods to overcome current shortcomings noted by resilience researchers.

Seeking to explore, not explain, the study utilized a phenomenological approach to understand participants’ lived experiences and to describe the phenomenon from their perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Data was collected through journal responses and in-depth interviews from 20 mid-level student affairs professionals. Prompts for the journals and interviews were adapted from Stone and Neale’s (1984) work on stress and coping and Block and Kreman’s (1993) work on ego-resilience. Data was analyzed through the application of multiple coding schemas, after which rich descriptions of participants’ beliefs, behaviors, and emotions, as well as environmental factors were utilized to describe the construct of resilience. A look at the rich, in-depth stories of day-to-day resilience of professionals is needed, as these individuals serve as educators and role models to students who are developing skills and strategies for navigating challenge. Figure 2 below highlights the key components of this study.
**Goal**
Describe mid-level student affairs professionals day-to-day experiences with resilience to enhance practice

**Conceptual Framework**
Resilience (positive adaptation to stress) is a phenomenon comprised of behavior, belief, emotion, and environmental factors

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| **Data Analysis** |
| Open coding, thematic coding, and Loflands coding scheme |

| **Qualitative Methods** |
| Journal responses and in-person interviews based on resilience and coping literature |

*Figure 2. Key components of the research design. Adapted from the interactive research design model by Maxwell (2012).*

**Study Significance**

This study added several contributions to the body of literature on resilience and the population of mid-level professionals. First, little research has been conducted on resilience in the adult population in general. The majority of research has focused on children, due to the long held belief that adults are “fixed” in their emotional temperaments and response strategies. However, emerging research has indicated this is not the case (Carstensen et al., 2000). Thus, information on resilience in adults may fill the gaps on the types of environments and traits that can be cultivated to promote resilience in adults. Additionally, by examining lower-level risk factors, such as stress in adults, an additional gap in the literature may be filled. All individuals experience stress, whereas only some experience trauma; therefore, previous resilience research has been less transferable to the general population (Aldwin, 2007; Masten, 2001).
Finally, the research provided new information on two areas of student affairs literature. Related research on student affairs professionals primarily focuses on burnout, leaving the profession, and finding balance, research focusing on the processes of resilience in this population did not exist. Given their role as educators and role model in cultivating development and resilience in students, it was critical to understand the ways in which resilience manifests in this group. This study provided much needed information on the personal and environmental factors that promote resilience and suggests positive adaptation measures for this population. Additionally, it provided information on mid-level managers, which is timely as professional association interest in this over-looked population is growing.

**Summary**

Student affairs professionals are responsible for assisting with student emotional development and must act as role models of resilience. Even though it is an established competency for the profession, no research was available that described the manner by which student affairs professionals practice resilience. This study discussed how mid-level professionals utilize resilience in professional practice. This study also explored the way that resilience is displayed, and ways in which professionals respond to common stressors. It also identified practices that promote and challenge resilience in the professional setting. This information provided a better understanding of resilience to enhance educational practice for both new and existing professionals. It also added to the understanding of mid-level managers’ professional experiences, providing much needed information to fill this gap in student affairs literature. Information can be used to drive
policy creation, advance professional practice, and improve work environments in order to enhance student learning.

In Chapter II, the existing information around resilience and stress will be explored. A review of the literature that guided the study development will be presented. The methodology will be reviewed in detail in Chapter III, and the procedures and data analysis plan will be described. Finally, Chapters IV and V will synthesize the research, describe the findings, and discuss future implications.
The concept of resilience has been an educational hot topic for decades in K-12 literature, and it has now become a greater concern within the higher education landscape. Resilience is commonly known as the ability to “bounce back” from stress and struggle, but no universally applied definition exists in research. The definition is generally derived from the study purpose (Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Windle, 1999). Resilience is a broad topic with emphasis in many areas. The Chronicle of Higher Education (2013) published an article highlighting selected works on resilience in the last decade to bring attention to the most relevant works for higher education professionals, and scholarly work also continues to examine this topic in depth. In order to determine its application to student affairs professionals, this chapter provides a historical overview of resilience, an examination of the components of the resilience process, and a discussion on the application of resilience to adults in the educational setting.

Evolving Nature of Resilience

Research on resilience emerged during the 1970s. During this time, a deficit model primarily drove psychological research design. Research focused on what was wrong and how to fix it, and it rarely considered strengths or success and finding ways to duplicate them. Research on resilience began in much the same way, as a means to address maladaptive behavior (Masten et al., 1999). For years, studies focused on longitudinal research of high-risk children and sought to identify factors that contributed to positive outcomes (Masten et al., 2009). Children were primarily the focus of early
resilience research because of the long held belief that personality traits were fixed at a young age (Carstensen et al., 2000). Early resilience research utilized a variable focused approach; it utilized statistical analysis to discover links between the degree of risk, outcome, and protective factors (Masten, 2001). Parents, teachers, and school systems used this data to improve environments, particularly for high-risk children.

While research explored resilience to risk in children, a parallel track focused on resiliency as a personality trait was also developing. Primarily driven by Jack and Jeanne Block’s work on ego-resiliency, researchers began using a similar variable-based approach to link resilient personality traits to favorable outcomes. While Block and Block were the first to develop a scale for measuring resilience as a personality trait (Block & Block, 1980), other researchers developed resilience scales as the concept increased in popularity and utilized them to explore connections between other personality traits, intelligence, and coping (Klohnen, 1996).

Moving from the trait approach, resilience research continued to evolve. Studies on situational resilience of adults became more prevalent in the late 1990s and gained momentum in the last decade. However, these studies mirrored the longitudinal research that started with high-risk children, and they tended to focus on high-risk situations in which trauma had occurred. This section provides describes the emergence of resilience in research, the way in which the construct deviated into trait assessment, and its recent application to the adult population.

**Resilience to Risk**

Masten (2001) indicated, “individuals are not considered resilient if there has never been a significant threat to their development; there must be current or past hazards
judged to have the potential to derail normative development” (p. 228). Thus, early research on resilience primarily focused on isolating and operationally defining the risk factors. Kirby and Fraser (1997) described risk factors as “any influence that increase the probability of onset, digression to more serious state, or maintenance of a problem condition” (p. 10). Essentially, they are any factor that increases the chance for an undesirable outcome (Masten, 1994). Resilience studies have examined poverty, community violence, catastrophic life events, parental mental illness, and parental abuse (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Researchers were seeking to identify and isolate the risk factors and locate assets associated with positive outcomes. However, researchers discovered that risk factors often coexist, and they are nearly impossible to isolate (Masten, 2001). Furthermore, neither risk factors nor assets occur in a dichotomous vacuum; they exist on a continuum, and do not always balance out one another (Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995).

Garmezy’s (1971) work shifted the exploration of resilience beyond the deficit model of identifying risk factors and assets. He found that despite their high-risk status, many children of mentally ill parents were thriving. Garmezy specifically stated that the majority of the children had “good peer relations, academic achievement, commitment to education, and purposive to life goals, [and] early and successful work histories” (p. 114). His research provided the foundation for the exploration of resilience beyond reducing risk. Three broad sets of variables were identified that helped children to adapt; they were personality features, family cohesion, and external support systems. In identifying these factors, Garmezy encouraged a shift from the deficit model of research that focused on isolating risk factors to the study of “the forces that move such children to survival
and to adaptation” (p. 114). Thus, researchers began to explore the reasons that some children responded more favorably than others to adverse conditions.

As researchers moved away from identifying and defining critical incidents to a focus on the way in which children successfully navigated challenge, personal and environmental influences that improve adaptation emerged (Masten, 1994). These positive influences aligned with foundational studies by Garmezy (1971) and Werner and Smith (1982) and became known as protective factors. While Garmezy’s original work suggested three types of protective factors, they were narrowed to two factors, personal and environmental, as other scholarly research emerged (Luthar et al., 2000). Personal factors initially included personal traits, such as autonomy or high self-esteem, and environmental factors included characteristics of wider social environments, such as families or schools (Luthar et al., 2000).

An alternative view of risk and resilience was presented by Rutter (1985), explaining that four main mechanisms exist for protecting individuals from the risks associated with adversity. They are: “(1) reduction of risk impact, (2) reduction of negative chain reactions, (3) establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and (4) opening up of opportunities” (p. 316). Rutter explained that this view is much broader, as it encompasses the entire protective process, rather than isolating risk and protective factors. He disagreed with researchers who focused on specific variables, rather than considering the overall process. He stated, “investigators have assumed that the vulnerability (or protection) lies in the variable rather than the process” (p. 317), and that “Protection is not a matter of pleasant happenings or socially desirable qualities of the individual. The search is not for factors that make us feel good, but for processes that
While Rutter’s work countered some of the previous work focusing on protective factors, it was not necessarily dismissive of it. Rather, it provided a starting point for exploring the whole process that promotes resilience.

**Resilience as a Trait**

While researchers focused on reducing the effects of risk in order to promote resilience, an alternative form of resilience was being explored that focused on resilience as a personality trait, rather than a process or outcome. Block and Block began using the term ego-resiliency in the 1950s to describe an individual’s ability to fluctuate between under- and over-control of the ego as circumstances warrant (Block, 1957; Block & Block, 1980). Block (1993) provided a more practical description of the construct stating “An ego-resilient person tends to be resourceful and adaptive when confronted by new situations. An individual who is not ego-resilient tends to become inflexible when confronted by new situations, and is slow to recoup after stress” (p. 1). Block and Block (1980) acknowledged that ego-resiliency is related to competence, coping, and intelligence; however, they maintained it is a separate construct delineated by its function of sequence of organization and capacity. The construct focused heavily on adaptability and adjustment (Block, 1957; Block & Kremen, 1996).

Block and Block (1980) believed it to be a separate construct, thus worked to develop a scale to measure ego-resiliency, which became known as the ego-resiliency scale. As with any scale development, multiple iterations were developed, and tracing its development through the literature is difficult (Block & Kremen, 1996). The most recent scale in use is the ER89 (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003; Tugade &
Fredrickson, 2004); which consists of 14 items, each responding to on a 4-point scale (Block & Kremen, 1996). This scale has been used in multiple studies to examine resilience, and it consistently has been shown to be both valid and reliable (Block & Kremen, 1996; Fredrickson et al., 2003; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). However, it is important to note that this scale is not intended to be a stand-alone item; it should be intermixed with other measures to be most effective (Block & Kremen, 1996). A list of the 14 items, as presented by Block and Kremen (1996), follows.

1. I am generous with my friends.
2. I quickly get over and recover from being startled.
3. I enjoy dealing with new and unusual situations.
4. I usually succeed in making a favorable impression on people.
5. I enjoy trying new foods I have never tasted before.
6. I am regarded as a very energetic person.
7. I like to take different paths to familiar places.
8. I am more curious than most people.
9. Most of the people I meet are likeable.
10. I usually think carefully about something before acting.
11. I like to do new and different things.
12. My daily life is full of things that keep me interested.
13. I would be willing to describe myself as a pretty "strong" personality.

The work on the ego-resiliency scale was heavily grounded in the early traditions of psychology, as implied by the use of the term ego (Block & Kremen, 1996). However,
as psychologists moved away from the psychoanalytic paradigm to a cognitive and behavioral paradigm, the term “ego” often was dropped, and the construct was referred to as resiliency. This generally created confusion in the research, as Block and Kremen (1996) stated,

The term resilience, as now used so broadly by so many, is often nothing more than contemporary jargon for what an earlier generation of psychologists labeled ego-strength…Or the idea of resiliency refers to ‘invulnerable’ individuals or the observed phenomenon of ‘survivorship’” (p. 351).

While Block and Kremen were correct about the confusion, clinging to outdated language will not resolve the confusion nor clarify the research.

Luther et al., (2000) later described resiliency as:

Ego-resiliency encompasses a set of traits reflecting general resourcefulness and sturdiness of character, and flexibility of functioning in response to varying environmental circumstances…Ego-resiliency does not presuppose exposure to substantial adversity, whereas resilience, by definition, does. (p. 546)

The trait of ego-resiliency is an integral part of the process of resilience that serves as a protective factor for individuals facing adversity, however the terms are not interchangeable. Therefore, a clear delineation between trait and process is needed (Luther et al., 2000). Understanding that both trait and process were important components to resilience research, and accepting that the term ego was not likely to be revived as a way of distinguishing between trait and processes, Masten (1994) suggested that the term resilience be used exclusively with the process or phenomenon, and the term resiliency be used exclusively to describe personal attributes or personality traits. Many
researchers, though not all, have adopted this model, which has increased the confusion. Caution continues to be advised when examining the research to clarify the meanings of the terms resilience and resiliency.

The scale created by Block and Block is not the only one that measures the personality trait of resiliency, but it has been foundational to the field and is the most widely used (Luther et al., 2000). Regardless of the scale used, the trait of resiliency is consistently connected with optimism, openness, and curiosity (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). It is related to a more positive demeanor (Wolin & Wolin, 1993), and it is positively correlated with intelligence (Block and Kremen, 1996). It also is related to more positive behaviors, such as the practice of meditation, use of humor, and the infusion of positive meaning to life experiences (Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

Resilience to Trauma

The latest iteration of resilience research is resilience to trauma and disasters, and generally focuses only on single events (Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010). The American Psychological Association (2015) defines trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster.” Any number of incidents can produce trauma, and include personal illness or injury, loved one’s illness or injury; violence, such a physical or sexual assault; loss of a loved one; or community disaster (Seery et al., 2010). Disasters have been described as events that cause sweeping damage, hardship, or loss of life; they typically strike swiftly, but take a significant amount of time to recover from them (Bonanno, Brewin, Kaniasty & Greca, 2010).
The majority of the research on resilience to trauma and disaster has indicated that risk and protective factors exist and are similar to those that have been found in children. Protective factors include social connection with others, real and perceived support, and self-efficacy (Bonanno et al., 2010; Seery et al. 2010). Self-efficacy has been associated with improved psychological adjustment, both immediately and in the months after natural disasters. Social connection and support have been connected with the development of more meaningful relationships after the disaster and are instrumental in helping with the immediate tasks of daily living (Kaniasty & Norris, 2009). Risk factors include low socioeconomic status, which is consistently identified as a predictor of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and tendency to ruminate appears to be connected to increased vulnerability to distress and depression (Bonanno et al., 2010).

Components of Resilience

Through the various iterations of resilience research, a singular definition has not been developed. Benard (1995) stated that resilience is “the term used to describe a set of qualities that foster a process of successful adaptation and transformation despite risk and adversity” (p. 2); whereas, Luther et al. (2000) described resilience as “a construct connoting the maintenance of positive adaptation by individuals despite experiences of significant adversity” (p. 543). Moreover, Wagnild and Young (1993) defined resilience as the ability to successfully cope with change or misfortune. While definitions vary and no universally accepted definition exists, they generally have three characteristics in common. First, some form of adversity occurs. Second, the outcome is viewed as positive or successful. Third, resilience is considered a process or phenomenon comprised of risk and protective factors that interact on a continuum to promote healthy adaptation (Glatz
& Johnson, 1999; Masten et al., 2009; Windle, 1999). The following sections will discuss the three common assumptions about resilience.

**Adversity and Stress**

As previously discussed, research on resilience has focused almost exclusively on severe incidents or high-risk populations. Within the adult population, research has focused on traumatic events such as death of a loved one, divorce, social/environmental stress, or community disaster. Relative to children, it focused on mental illness of parent, community violence, and abuses. However, adversities often co-occur, making isolation of impact difficult, particularly when viewed over a lifespan (Serry et al., 2010). Additionally, events that fall outside of these parameters can have a major impact on an individual’s wellbeing. Research has documented that, while major life events are certainly challenging, daily stress has a cumulative effect “by piling up over a series of days to create persistent irritations, frustrations, and overloads that may result in more serious stress reactions such as anxiety and depression” (Almeida, 2005, p. 64).

Hans Selye is generally credited with bringing the role of stressful life events to the forefront of research (Cooper & Dewe, 2007; Harrington, 2013). Selye (1956) introduced a three-stage model of chronic stress; the three stages were alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. If stress was not managed, it would increase over time and individuals would move through the stages suffering the physical effects (Harrington, 2013). Selye (1956) did not believe all stress was negative and introduced the terms distress and eustress. Distress referred to negative stress; whereas eustress referred to positive stress that challenges and motivates an individual (Cooper & Dewe, 2007; Harrington, 2013).
Ultimately, Seyle (1956) defined stress as the response the body makes to environmental and personal demands.

Since Seyle’s introduction to the concept of stress, the definition has continued to evolve. Currently, stress is viewed as a psychological and physiological state that occurs when the environment is appraised as taxing, when wellbeing is endangered, or when a situation requires more resources than are available (Harington, 2013; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Warr, 2007). Situations or events that lead to this state are referred to as stressors (Cooper & Dewe, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). “Stressors are defined as routine challenges of day-to-day living, such as the everyday concerns of work, caring for other people, and commuting between work and home” (Almeida, 2005, p. 64). These types of routine challenges that involve the irritants and pressures experienced in daily life are also sometimes also referred to as hassles within research (Cooper & Dewe, 2007). Exposure to stressors affects daily wellbeing (Cohen, Kessler, & Gordon, 1997). Stressors produce varying amounts of stress, depending upon circumstances. “Individuals appraise stressors in terms of their perceived severity and in terms of how much they are perceived as disrupting daily goals and commitments” (Almeida, 2005 p. 64).

Work is a common stressor for many individuals and is often produced in environments in which demands are high, and control or perceived control over the environment is low. Common stressors include “workload, speed of work, dangerous or toxic working conditions, poorly designed environments, interpersonal discord with supervisors, employees, colleagues, or clientele; discrimination based on ethnicity or sex; and frustrations related to social organization of the work place” (Aldwin, 2007, p. 72). Additionally, according to Warr (2007) role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload
contribute to workplace stress. Role conflict happens when demands are incompatible; role ambiguity happens when duties are not clearly defined; and role overload occurs when the workload is too great or there are insufficient resources to do the job (Warr, 2007).

Finally, the negative physical effects of stress are plentiful and well documented. The American Psychological Association (2015) has linked chronic stress to increased chance of heart attack or heart disease, respiratory illness, and chronic pain. However, some positive findings have been associated with stress. First, moderate amounts of stress have been shown to increase attention and focus, improve memory, and improve physical performance (Aldwin, 2007). Second, exposure to moderate amounts of stress has been shown to help individuals develop psychological and social resources that assist in tolerating future adversity. This concept is known as stress inoculation (Seery et al., 2010). Furthermore, even extreme stress as a result of a trauma can produce positive benefits over time. Increased self-esteem and confidence, changes in values, increased empathy and closeness to others, and having a better perspective are a few of the positive outcomes of extreme stress (Bonanno et al. 2010; Seery, et al., 2010; Troy & Mauss, 2011). Of importance to note is that awareness or perception of these benefits can help to ward off the negative long-term health consequences (Aldwin, Sutton, & Lachman, 1996).

Positive Adaptation

Positive adaptation is the second characteristic associated with resilience, which is the outcome of the resilience process. No set definition exists for positive adaptation; it is defined by the circumstances of the study. It is “defined in terms of behaviorally
manifested social competence, or success at meeting stage-salient developmental task” (Luther & Ciccatti 2000, p. 858). In some cases positive adaptation is characterized by a return to normal functioning after a stressful or traumatic event; however, this characterization aligns more with the concept of recovery. In resilience, on the other hand, positive adaptation is more commonly characterized by a higher than normal or higher than expected functioning following the adversity.

Furthermore, some researchers argue that to qualify for the label of resilient, individuals must excel in multiple adjustment domains, not just a single factor (Luther et al., 2000). That is to say research should include multiple measures of positive adaptation. Additionally, there is some debate as to if positive adaptation should include measures of internal factors, such as emotional health and wellbeing, in addition to the observed external factors (Masten et al., 2009). External measures that have been used to measure positive adaptation include academic achievement, pro-social behaviors, peer acceptance, and life satisfactions, as well as a lack of mental illness and absence of criminal behavior (Masten et al., 2009). Variability in the definition of positive adaptation based on study purpose and population is common place in resilience research, and is critical expanding the understanding of resilience for specific populations (Masten et al., 2009).

**Protective Factors**

Protective factors are characteristics of an individual or the environment that moderate the negative impact of stressful events. Environmental protective factors have consistently included caring and supportive environments, supportive relationships, promotion of high standards, positive role models, and opportunities for meaningful
engagement (Benard, 1995; Henderson & Milestein 1996; Lutter et al. 2000; Masten, 2001; Masten et al., 2009; Werner & Smith, 1982). Henderson and Milstein (1996) reported that the use of a high-warmth, low-criticism style of interaction and the appreciation of individual’s unique talents bolsters supportive relationships. Benard (1995) described a positive role model as someone “who conveys an attitude of compassion” (p. 3); and Werner and Smith (1992) found that teachers who were viewed as more than an academic instructor, but also as a confident and positive model for personal identification, bolstered striving for higher standards and meaningful engagement. What is important to note about environmental factors is their proximal nature. Research has shown the closer to the environment a person feels the more impact it has.

These certainly could be adapted to apply in the professional setting as well. Recent research has shown that supportive relationships and positive role models with similar characteristics can buffer work strain (Aldwin; 2007; Benight & Cieslak, 2011). Masten (2001) stressed that opportunities for meaningful engagement also are critical to the demonstration of resilience. Meaningful engagement can include a multitude of activities, but service to others and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes are two key means of identifying engagement (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

Personal characteristics vary in research; however, self-efficacy, self-confidence, self-motivation, autonomy, and positive future view consistently emerge as personal influences on resilience. Benight and Cieslak (2011) explained the relationship between efficacy, confidence, and motivation; they stated,
Positive coping self-efficacy (confidence) to manage stress adaptation demands provide an internal sense of control that promotes positive cognition about the self, increases motivation to respond to ongoing demands, assist in self-management of emotions, and promotes effective decision making, in other words resilience. (p. 50)

These are the personal characteristics used to measure resiliency as a personality trait in scales such as ER89 (Block & Kremen, 1996) ego-resiliency scale. Additionally, the use of life skills, such as positive coping practices, plays a large role in the resilience process. Coping is its own sub-process that incorporates many of these internalized factors and will be explored in depth in the following section.

**Coping.** Coping is a critical part of the resilience process, and is not merely a synonym for resilience. It is the effort to manage the situations judged to be harmful. It is the behavior or action taken to resolve a stressful situation and is influenced by both emotion and thought. Coping is its own process that unfolds over time, requires effort and planning, and does not assume a positive outcome (Aldwin, 2007; Klinke, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It occurs primarily in the internal domain, but, as all personal characteristics, is influenced by the environment. Positive coping practices are part of the network of personal protective factors and are influenced by other personal protective factors.

Coping begins with appraisal; the primary appraisal determines whether the event that has occurred is something about which to be stressed, whether an individual’s wellbeing is in jeopardy (Klinke, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). If the appraisal process determines that the situation is benign or positive, coping strategies are not
deployed. Neutral or positive thoughts and feelings are experienced, which can support the development of resiliency traits to be utilized in the future. However, if the situation is appraised as stressful, individuals usually categorize it in terms of a threat or challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Threat appraisals are characterized by the possibility of harm or loss and negative implications for the future; whereas, challenge appraisals may immediately result in negative circumstances, but an opportunity for gain exists (Carver, 1998; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These types of stress appraisals are not mutually exclusive and should not be viewed as opposite ends of the same continuum. Rather, they are their own continuum, and a situation can be appraised as having characteristics of both (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However, as the appraisal influences coping strategies, individuals tend to first respond to one type of appraisal.

After categorizing the threat, secondary appraisal occurs, i.e., individuals determine what to do about the stress. This is a “complex evaluative process that takes into account which coping options are available the likelihood that one can apply a particular strategy or set of strategies” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 35). The secondary appraisal determines the steps an individual will take to manage the stress. Klinke (2007) pointed out that, because the secondary appraisal is dependent on the primary appraisal, it is in the individual’s best interest to make an accurate primary appraisal. Incorrectly appraising a situation can lead to poor secondary appraisal and a poor outcome. A correct appraisal is the first step of positive coping as a part of the resilience process and involves an individual’s beliefs and emotions about a situation.

Upon assessing the situation and determining steps to take, an individual deploys a coping strategy, or possibly a set of strategies. A variety of coping strategies exist.
Stone and Neale (1984) outlined eight common strategies that include distraction, direct action, situation redefinition, acceptance, catharsis, brooding, religion, relaxation, and seeking social support. Other researchers have added to that list, confrontation, self-control, positive reappraisal, and planful problem solving (Klinke, 2007); and coping studies continue to grow and redefine specific strategies depending upon the context (Aldwin, 2007). Specific coping strategies are not inherently deemed positive or negative; rather, positive coping involves selecting an appropriate strategy and applying it in such a way as to produce a desired outcome. Some inherent value is assigned to the styles. For instance, seeking social support is generally regarded more positively than brooding, although some context may occur in which brooding is the best strategy to be deployed.

Coping strategies can be divided into two categories: problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping, also known as active coping, involves problem solving or taking action to alter the source of the stress (Carver et al., 1989). Emotion-focused coping involves reducing or managing the emotional distress that is associated with (or cued by) the situation. This is usually accomplished through attention control or cognitive reappraisal (Troy & Mauss, 2011). Attention control involves “selectively attending to or away from certain stimuli (either internal or external) in order to change emotional impact.” Conversely, “cognitive reappraisal involves reframing an emotion in order to change its emotional impact” (Troy & Mauss, 2011, p. 32). Both provide means for dealing with unpleasant emotions.

Although most stressors elicit both types of coping, problem-focused coping dominates when individuals feel that something constructive can be done, whereas
emotion-focused coping dominates when individuals feel that the stressor is something that must be endured (Carver et al., 1989; Kleinke, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). While coping strategies are not fixed, individuals do not approach each coping context anew. Rather, they draw from past experiences and draw on preferred coping strategies (Carver et al., 1989). In order to examine this concept researchers needed a tool for assessing coping practices.

Building on previous research on coping, Stone and Neale (1984) developed an assessment to measure daily coping. At the time of development, it was one of the only scales that showed internal consistency. Stone and Neale concluded that their scale was appropriate for daily use and provided the detailed assessment needed for a complex construct. It has since been used in a multitude of studies to assess coping and connection with personality traits and other positive outcomes (David & Suls, 1999). The following is an excerpt from the study describing the assessment and questions asked.

First, the subject was asked to describe ‘the most bothersome event or issue of the day’; it could be something that had happened in the past (e.g., death of a loved one), happened that day, or was anticipated as happening in the future (e.g., a future job interview) (p. 897).

Next participants were asked eight questions pertaining to the problem and response:

1. How much control did you have over its occurrence? (Quite a lot/Complete; Some; No control)

2. How desirable or undesirable was it? (Extremely Desirable; Moderately Desirable; Slightly Desirable; Slightly Undesirable; Moderately Undesirable; Extremely Undesirable)
3. How much did it change or stabilize your life-style, home situation, work, etc.? (Extremely Changing; Moderately Changing; Slightly Changing; Slightly Stabilizing; Moderately Stabilizing; Extremely Stabilizing)

4. Was it an anticipated problem or situation? (Completely Unexpected; Somewhat Unexpected; Somewhat Anticipated; Completely Anticipated)

5. How meaningful was it? (Extremely Meaningful; Somewhat Meaningful; Slightly Meaningful)

6. Was the problem or situation a single event or a more long-lasting chronic situation? (Single Event; Long Lasting)

7. Has this problem or situation happened before? (No; Yes and How Many Times)

8. On a scale from 1 to 100 (where 100 is the death of a friend or family member and 1 is a minor annoyance), how stressful would you rate this problem or situation? These questions were intended to index subjects' psychological appraisal of the problem. (p. 897)

Finally, participants were asked about how the situation was resolved. The word “coping” was intentionally not used due to the connotation that may be associated with it. Instead the word “handled” was used (Stone & Neale, 1984).

**Resilience as a Process**

Coping clearly is a complex component of resilience, but it is merely one factor in the overall resilience process. Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer (1990) stated resilience is “the process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior
to the disruption that results from the event” (p. 34). Each factor – stress, environment, and personal characteristics – interacts to promote positive adaptation. Resilience is a process that allows individuals to shape their environment, and they, in turn, are shaped by it.

Resilience is not a fixed phenomenon; it flexes over time as individuals encounter new stress, learn new skills, and enter new environments. The factors consistently interact and change one another. As individuals encounter stress, they deploy the resources at their disposal and adapt; regardless of the outcome, something is learned, which can be used in the future. They learn a new skill or ability, or they gain knowledge of being able to cope, which can help when they face adversity again. Masten (1994) explained that resilience is the relationship between personal characteristics the broader environment. While these components can be isolated to some extent, they are stronger when viewed holistically in the process, which is the direction current educational research on resilience is moving (Luthar et al., 2000).

**Workforce Resilience**

Resilience studies are moving away from focusing exclusively on children and are now being explored outside of the context of trauma in various adult populations. Researchers are finding similar outcomes in terms of the protective factors, although a lack of studies continues to exist. One area of resilience has been applied to adults in the workforce, and the related topic of workplace burnout.

Burnout has become a more prevalent topic since the 1970s (Harington, 2013). Farber (1983) states that burnout is a process, not an event, and can be conceptualized as a function of stress. Harrington (2013) describes burnout as a long-term process that
drains energy reserves, thus leading to emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficiency. Research on burnout has looked at the environmental factors that help and hinder. Environments with little positive feedback, low in social value, high levels of bureaucracy, and high levels of personal responsibility contribute to burnout (Farber, 1983; Harrington, 2013; Warr, 2007). Additionally, physical environments that are unsafe, have poor temperature regulation, or excessive noise also contribute to burnout (Sulsky & Smith, 2007). Research has shown that social support and personal belief in abilities can act as buffers to burnout (Benight & Cieslack, 2011). These two items surface as protective factors in resilience as well. Additionally, environments that allow for personal control, positive contributions toward goals, variety of task, and physical security were less likely to produce burnout (War, 2007). Finally, supportive supervision and equity among employees is also essential (Farber, 1983; Sulsky & Smith, 2007).

Researchers have examined resilience to burnout in relation to high stress jobs, such as air traffic controllers, police, social workers, counselors, and nurses (Aldwin, 2007; Collins, 1996). Both quantitative and qualitative studies have also explored resilience in teachers. Gu and Day (2007) stated, “it is unrealistic to expect pupils to be resilient if their teachers, who constitute a primary source of their role models, do not demonstrate resilient qualities” (p. 1302). Of the work areas in which resilience has been explored teaching is the most similar to the role of a mid-level professional; both are educators who care for and work to develop students. Therefore, this section includes a closer examination of resilience in teachers.
Teachers

Resilience in teachers goes beyond teacher retention; it explores environments “where motivation and commitment are maintained as teachers are able to meet the challenges encountered in their work and lives and thrive professionally” (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011, p. 186). As with students, it is not only about personal attributes, but also the complex relationship between risk and protective factors (Benard, 2004). Teacher resilience has been investigated using both quantitative and qualitative methods (Beltman et al., 2011). The challenges and protective factors for teachers are similar to those reported in children.

Both personal and environmental challenges have been identified. Personal challenges include difficulty requesting help, negative self-view, and conflict between personal values and professional practice (Beltman et al., 2011). Challenges related to requesting help are particularly prevalent in newer teachers; whereas, conflict between personal values and professional practice was more common in long-term professionals (Gu & Day, 2007). One participant in the Gu and Day (2007) study explained his conflict between personal values and professional practice, stating that he “was happy for work to dominate at this early stage of his career;” but as he grew and had personal obligations in addition to his work, he did not feel that he could maintain the time demand expected of the field.

Environmental risks included workplace demands, class size, and behavior management problems (Beltman et al., 2011). Behavior management, particularly with violent children, is a primary environmental concern for new teachers. A lack of time due to heavy workloads and non-teaching duties, such as paperwork or meetings, are
consistently reported as an environmental stressor (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2009). An additional environmental factor is unsupportive environments. Demoralizing policy initiatives and lack of support negatively influence teachers’ commitments across all levels of experience (Day, 2008). As Gu and Day (2007) summarized the negative influence of lack of support from the school leadership, one participant stated: “He felt that he would sometimes like the management to give him more support — rather than the children” (p. 1307).

A number of individual characteristics promote resilience in teachers and are important in helping to overcome “challenging situations or recurring setbacks” (Beltman et al. 2011, p.188). They include self-efficacy, confidence, positive coping strategies, altruistic motives, and a strong intrinsic motivation for teaching (Beltman, et al., 2011, Gu & Day, 2007; Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Additionally, “the sense of vocation is an important professional asset of teachers. It fuels teachers’ personal resources with determination, courage, and flexibility, qualities that are in turn buoyed by the disposition to regard teaching as something more than a job, to which one has something significant to offer” (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 1131).

More emphasis has been placed on the environmental structures that promote resilience. Strong caring leadership has been identified as a primary source of personal support for teachers (Beltman et al., 2011; Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Supportive structures include strong, open, and well-organized leadership, and environments where resources are distributed fairly (Beltman et al., 2011). In addition to leadership, colleagues were considered to be a dominant environmental factor. They can be a source of hope and inspiration and can provide a much needed morale boost when facing
challenges (Brunetti, 2006). Finally, mentor relationships were also a critical component for resilience, especially in newer teachers. Mentors who are positive, professional, and display pro-social behaviors were found to have the strongest impact (Beltman et al., 2011).

The underlying tone of the teacher resilience research explored the connection between environmental and personal risks, as well as protective factors. Beltman et al. (2011) concluded that a toxic environment may cause teachers to change schools, but it is not likely to cause them to leave the profession if they possess strong personal protective factors. However, even a positive environment cannot overcome some personal factors; thus, teachers have chosen to leave the field. Resilience in teachers is viewed as a “process of adaptation rather than a set of individual attributes – can be learned. In this process individuals are regarded as active agents who employ strategies to overcome adversities faced in their environment.” (Beltman et al., 2011, p. 195). Benard (1995) stated that “beyond the teacher-student relationship, creating a school wide ethos of caring creates the opportunities for caring student-to-student, teacher-to-teacher, and teacher-to-parent relationships,” and continued by stating that “an ethic of caring is obviously not a ‘program’ or ‘strategy’ per se, but rather a way of being in the world” (p. 3). Research has strongly indicated that an “ethos of caring” improves environmental and personal factors.

**Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals**

The process of resilience had yet to be studied in student affairs professionals, but professional attrition, stress, burnout, and balance have been explored in mid-level managers and the broader population (Guthrie, et al., 2005; Rosser & Javinar, 2003;
Toma & Grady, 2002). As was the case with teachers, choosing to stay in the field is not synonymous with the demonstration of resilience, but continuing to work in the field is an important component. Attrition studies have looked at work satisfaction, work life balance, intent to leave, and morale (Rosser & Javinar, 2003).

Job stress is a primary component leading to professional burnout among student affairs professionals. Researchers found that too much work, lack of time, and changes in work environment are primary stressors for student affairs professionals (Anderson, Guido-DiBrito, & Schober-Morrell, 2000). A closer look at mid-level professionals found that the primary stressors and frustrations for this subpopulation included lack of recognition for competence, limited career growth, and role confusion (i.e. unclear job expectations) (Johnsrud, 1996). Personal factors have also been connected to stress for mid-level professionals, research has shown that low levels of self-efficacy in a professional is correlated with increased stress levels (Lovell & Kosten, 2000).

Research has also found positive influences connected with morale, satisfaction, and retention. Environmental factors, which promote job satisfaction, include access to career development opportunities, quality of the work environment, opportunity to participate in campus governance, clear performance criteria, and equal workloads (Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Lorden, 1998). Additionally, a level of decision-making and autonomy that met professionals’ expectations was linked with satisfaction (Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Interpersonal relationships are the strongest factor related to professional retention. Research has consistently shown that the ability to connect with and rely on colleagues is critical to job satisfaction (Anderson et al., 2000). In working long hours in high stress environments, coworkers both in department and across campus are
invaluable for maintaining motivation and morale (Anderson et al., 2000; Lorden, 1998). Personal characteristics have also been linked with satisfaction and morale. As Rosser and Javinar (2003) pointed out, an internal locus of control is linked with job satisfaction, and skills such as understanding student development theory, problem solving, and personnel management are critical for feeling a level of competence that leads to satisfaction and retention (Anderson et al., 2000).

**Summary**

The underlying premise of resilience is that adversity does not automatically lead to dysfunction; with the correct mechanism individuals can return to higher than normal functioning. Resilience research has sought to identify those mechanisms (Masten et al., 2009). The common components of adversity, positive adaptation, and protective factors are present in nearly all research related to resilience. Protective factors include environmental influences and personal characteristics — including the coping process. Multiple strategies for cultivating resilience have been presented; however, it essentially involves promoting protective factors and mitigating risk factors (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

Studies have focused almost exclusively on identifying, defining, and measuring the variables involved. Furthermore, a heavy focus has been placed on the environmental variables, and less focus on the internal process. This is a result of research on the overlap of resiliency as a personality trait, as well as the concern relative to the implication that “someone just doesn’t have what it takes to be resilient.” Additionally, environmental variables are easier to isolate, control, and manipulate. Resilience research has failed to organize variables in a meaningful way and to thoroughly explore their interaction.
beyond indicating that environmental factors influence personal factors, and vice versa. Chapter III will present the methodology for this study. As no single unifying theoretical framework for resilience existed, the conceptual framework drew heavily on the common concepts of resilience and coping in order to explore resilience in mid-level student affairs professionals (Windle, 1999). It will include the organization of known personal protective factors – self-efficacy, confidence, positive coping practices, and positive emotional outlook, in the context of behaviors, beliefs, and emotion. This personal construct will be explored relative to the way in which it interacts in the environment of higher education to promote positive adaptation to stress.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe professional resilience in mid-level student affairs professionals in the state of Colorado through phenomenological research methods. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the phenomenon of resilience influence professional practice?
2. How do student affairs professionals demonstrate resilience?
3. How is resilience cultivated in the professional setting?
4. How is resilience challenged in the professional setting?

The utilization of qualitative data collection methods of journal responses and in-depth interviews to gather rich descriptions of mid-level managers’ day-to-day practices shed light on the phenomenon of resilience in student affairs professionals.

This study described the way in which resilience manifests in mid-level student affairs professionals, identified positive coping practices utilized for common stressors, and explored factors that cultivate resilience. For the purposes of the study, resilience was defined as positive adaptation to stress, and was analyzed through participants’ behaviors, beliefs, and emotions, as well as environmental factors. This chapter presents the research approach, study design, and data analysis. The population, sample, and data collection methods are explained, and personal bias and study limitations are presented.
Research Approach

As shown in the literature review, the concept of resilience has been examined at length; yet, minimal data existed on the phenomenon in relation to student affairs professionals. The majority of data on resilience in the educational environment has focused on the students, and some have considered teachers. No information was available on student affairs professionals’ abilities to continue to guide, coach, and mentor students and other professionals in times of stress or challenge, and little information exists on that which sustains professionals in times of stress. Furthermore, the general research on resilience has focused heavily on quantitative methods. Previous research utilized surveys and personality tests to factor and itemize traits considered critical to resilience, or it has examined specific responses to life events and quantified it into a binary positive or negative response. This type of research does not consider the complexity of the phenomenon; it fails to explore the interaction of how beliefs, behaviors, emotions, and environment generate the phenomenon of resilience.

Qualitative research views participants as whole and complex beings (Creswell, 2013). Given that much of the scholarly research on student success and development has emphasized the importance of viewing the whole student (Schuh, et al., 2010), studies on student affairs professionals undoubtedly should share the same view. A qualitative approach recognizes that complex characteristics cannot be isolated from an individual. In qualitative research, “influences of the local contexts are not stripped away, but taken into account” and there is “richness and holeishm” that provides strong potential for revealing the complexity of the issue. (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña 2014, p. 10)
Qualitative research allowed for a detailed understanding of this complex issue (Creswell, 2013).

**Methodology**

As this study focused on the role of resilience in student affairs professionals, phenomenology was a natural choice for the theoretical orientation to guide this study. First introduced by Edmund Husserl, phenomenology was a method for separating science from philosophy (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (1931) stated, “the pure essence, can be exemplified intuitively in the data of experiences” (p. 57). He believed that meaning could be made of experiences often taken for granted through the phenomenological method. As Giorgi (1997) explained, “phenomenology thematizes the phenomenon of consciousness, and, in its most comprehensive sense, it refers to the totality of lived experiences that belong to a single person” (p. 235). Furthermore, “from the phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live in” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 5).

The phenomenological approach sought to capture the essence of a shared lived experience, and described the meaning of this concept for several individuals who lived the experience (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological approach also focuses “on exploring how human beings make sense of the experience and transform experience into consciousness both individually and as shared meaning” (Patton, 2015 p. 115). It is the “study of things as they are perceived, without regard for whether they are objectively real, to understand people perceptions and experiences and the meanings they give to them” (Bamberger et al., 2011, p. 289-290). Therefore, this study did not seek to
objectively determine levels of resilience in student affairs professionals; rather, it 
explored the perceptions of this phenomenon in day-to-day experiences.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was drawn from the previous research 
on resilience and coping, as positive coping is an integral component of resilience. 
Historically, resilience is a process comprised of three components: adversity, positive 
adaptation, and protective factors (Glatz & Johnson, 1999; Masten et al., 2009). In this 
study, the challenge and adversity was defined as stress rather than as trauma, due to a 
lack of research on low-risk events such as everyday hassles (Masten, 2001). Positive 
adaptation generally is defined by the outcome of a situation based on societal 
expectations (Masten et al., 2009). This study drew from the personal foundations ACPA 
and NASPA (2015) professional competencies to define positive adaptation. Maintaining 
wellness, being self-directive, self-reflective and self-aware, maintaining integrity, and 
having a passion for work are characteristics associated with that competency and were 
viewed as indicators of positive adaptation (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Additionally, the 
results of this study may be used to define positive adaptation for future studies.

The personal factors were comprised of behavior, belief, and emotion. Behavior 
requires effort, planning, and some form of action (or intentional inaction); it also 
involves the coping process (Troy & Mauss, 2011). Beliefs are driven by the cognitive 
process and involve the thoughts and ideas of individuals about themselves or a situation 
(Nespor, 1987). Emotion is the instinctive or intuitive feeling that can be distinguished 
from thought. (Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselroade, 2000). Environment is an
external factor and is the surroundings or conditions an individual works. Continuous interaction occurs between the three personal factors and the environmental factors.

Data was collected on each sub-construct. Figure 1 depicts the constructs. Data regarding behavior focused on positive coping practices. Research questions were adapted from Stone and Neale’s (1984) work on the topic. Information around beliefs was drawn from the body of literature that focused on resiliency as a personality trait. Questions were driven primarily by the work of Block and Kreman (1996), whose questions really explored beliefs in their own abilities. Data collected on emotion focused on overall feelings of wellbeing. Questions were also driven by Block and Block’s work, as well as by known protective factors related to resilience.

*Figure 1.* The relationship between the personal characteristics, the environment, and the phenomenon of resilience, which is defined as positive adaptation to stress. Resilience lives at the heart of the interactions between the personal characteristics of belief,
behavior, and emotion, and the environmental factors that both cause stress and support personal characteristics.

**Study Design**

A phenomenological study requires thoroughly “capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon – how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2015, p. 115). It is less concerned with objectivity and fact, and more concerned with how participants experience something (Van Manen, 1990). Therefore, this study combined two qualitative data collection techniques, personal interviews and narrative journaling in order to gather a thorough and well-rounded perspective of resilience from mid-level student affairs professionals. The next section will explain the population and sample, as well as data collection techniques. Figure 2 depicts the key components of the study.

**Figure 2.** Key components of the research design. Adapted from the interactive research design model by Maxwell (2012).
Population

The population for this study was mid-level student affairs professionals in the state of Colorado. This subgroup of professionals was selected due to the lack of research and increasing importance given in professional development and engagement with this sub-population (Ackerman, 2007). Mid-level management within student affairs included a broad definition within higher education professional associations, although essentially it included any professional who was not in their first entry-level position and not serving as a chief student affairs officer (Young Jr, 2007). Mid-level management was not determined by the amount of years an individual has worked; rather, it was defined by their job duties and role within the institution. As stated in the introduction, mid-level managers directly affect student learning and have the ability to allocate resources to support student learning or development (Young Jr, 2007).

Sample

Consistent with phenomenological research methods, purposive sampling was utilized (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Creswell (2013) recommended a range of 5-25 participants for a study of this nature; thus, the study included 20 participants in the sample. The sample was selected in order to explore the subgroup and phenomenon in depth (Patton, 2015). A combination of sampling methods was utilized to gather a sample that would provide a thorough understanding of the research problem.

Maximum variation was sought so that patterns could be identified across a broad range of cases (Patton, 2015). Maximum variation in this population encompassed participants from a broad range of functional areas, years in the field, professional backgrounds, age, and gender. Additionally, to gather information-rich cases, snowball
sampling was used to seek potential contacts (Patton, 2015). With snowball sampling, key informants were used to refer possible participants. However, it was important to ensure that the participants fit the study population; so criterion-based sampling was incorporated to verify eligibility.

Participation criteria were developed to ensure participants fit the population. Participants needed to be mid-level student affairs professionals working full-time within the state of Colorado, whose primary duties directly impact student experiences. Participants must also be employed full-time in a higher education institution for a minimum of three years, and their responsibilities should include the allocation of resources toward student learning and/or supervision of staff that do so. This criterion was based on the core competencies for mid-level managers provided by NASPA, a leading professional association in the field of student affairs. Participants were further limited to the state of Colorado and full-time employment in order to account for political factors and work-life balance stressors, which previous research had shown to be common stressors for education professionals (Gu & Day, 2006).

Participants were required to answer a series of questions to determine eligibility prior to confirming their participation in the study. The complete intake interview protocol is available in Appendix A. Participants were asked the following questions:

- Are you currently employed full-time at an institution of higher education?
- Have you been working professionally for at least three years? (Not including time employed as a student).
- If so, how many years have you been employed in a full-time capacity in higher education?
• In your current position, are you responsible for allocating resources to serve student learning/development/engagement, OR do you supervise someone that does?

• What is your current position title and how many years have you been in that position?

• Can you please briefly summarize your primary duties?

Participant Recruitment

Participants were solicited through three email list-serves, two statewide professional associations, and a university’s alumni list serve for higher education professionals. See Appendix B for recruitment emails. Participants were also recruited through referral. Any interested participants were asked to complete a brief intake interview by phone lasting approximately 10 minutes to verify their eligibility for the study.

Initially, 36 professionals expressed interest in participating in the study. Six professionals did not meet study participant eligibility, and two professionals could not complete the requirements in the time frame requested. Of the remaining 28 professionals completing the intake and meeting participant qualifications, six professionals never began their journal prompts (and ultimately opted out due to timing), and two other professionals completed the prompts, but never responded to requests for an interview. A total of 20 participants completed the entire study protocol, which comprised the sample for this study.

Site

Study data were collected electronically, in person, and via phone calls. Email and an online data collection tool (Survey Monkey) were utilized to communicate and
collect information on the journal prompts. Interviews were primarily completed in person. Special attention was paid to selecting an environment that created conditions to promote quality conversation (Evers & De Boer, 2012). The location was a quiet place to eliminate distractions and interruptions, but not so remote as to create unease. Privacy was also needed for the purpose of data collection. The researcher and participants mutually agreed upon the site selected for the interviews. Six interviews occurred over the phone due to time and location restraints. Location and method of interview did not impact the quality of data collected.

Data Collection

A person cannot reflect on an experience while actually living through it; therefore, phenomenological studies must be retrospective in nature (Van Manen, 1990). For this study, retrospective data was collected through journal prompts and personal interviews. By combining these two collection techniques, a broader range of data were collected.

It was critical to ensure that useful data was gathered at each stage. The conceptual framework guided the development of the journal and interview questions. The journal reflections focused on behavior reflections designed to draw to mind the most critical incidents over the last year; whereas, the interview questions focused on collecting information on beliefs and feelings on resilience overall. Patton’s (2015) question categories of behavior, opinion and values, and feeling, were selected to provide a framework for questions’ wording. This question framework directly aligned with the characteristic constructs of resilience – behavior, belief, emotion, and environment – and
ensured that each of the three construct areas were covered. As Patton (2015) describes them:

- Experience and behavior questions are designed to gather information on specific behaviors or activities. The language of the questions tends to focus on what was done. These questions will also provide insight on environment.

- Opinions and values questions tend to focus on the cognitive process and include values, opinions, judgments, or beliefs. Questions are often framed from a “what do you think” or “what do you believe” perspective.

- Feeling questions focus in on emotion. Emotion is different from the cognitive process. Questions in this area often include the word feel, such as “how do you feel about that?” (p. 444).

**Journals.** Narrative journals bring many advantages to a study. “Personal narratives can convey a complexity not easily attained through other data collection methods” and can be very effective in promoting the application of study findings (Bamberger et al., 2011, p. 293). Hatch (2002) best summarized the advantages of journal responses in qualitative research. First, participants are able to recall at their leisure, and some individuals feel more comfortable expressing ideas in writing. Given the generally busy schedules of student affairs professionals, this flexibility will allow participation to be more manageable. Second, individuals process through writing differently than they process through conversation. Insights that come to mind through writing may not have presented themselves in an interview. Third, this method of data collection provides a direct path to participant insights. The words flow directly from the participant without
passing through a filter. This is incredibly impactful, as meaning and inference are not diluted as when spoken word is translated to writing.

There are drawbacks to this method, however. The flexibility in response time may allow participants to revise and review their entries to present themselves in the best light. Participants also may attempt to meet the researcher’s expectations and not be fully authentic to themselves (Hatch, 2002). Additionally, while there is flexibility, the overall time commitment may be problematic with professionals’ busy schedules. Finally, some individuals do not enjoy writing or are simply not good at it. While this can be difficult to overcome, Hatch (2002) suggested some strategies for dealing with the drawbacks of this data collection method. Initially stating expectations and giving clear directions up front can be very helpful; this eliminates confusion over what is supposed to be written about and eases the participants’ burden for meeting expectations. Additionally, acknowledging progress can maintain participant interest.

Journals for this study were different from daily diaries that participants may keep on their own; rather, they engaged in directed writing for the purpose of the research study (Hatch, 2002). Prompts were commonly used to direct narrative writing to help participants stay focused (Silverman, 1994). Prompts were best utilized when they were open enough to allow the participants to explore subjects relevant to them, but framed to help with recall and focus. Hatch (2002) suggested focusing the prompt on a time, topic, or incident.

The prompts utilized for this study were adapted from Stone and Neale’s (1984) measures of daily coping. In their work, participants were asked about their most bothersome event of the day and methods of coping. Stone and Neale suggested
collecting real-time data in order to avoid memory bias. However, this suggestion ran
counter to the theoretical approach chosen for this study. Therefore, the prompts were
modified to elicit deeper reflection. Questions included Stone and Neale’s language
regarding “most bothersome event,” but were framed as Hatch (2002) suggested with a
specific time and topic to help promote recollection for participants, and to draw to mind
as much detail as possible.

The journal prompts also included follow-up questions regarding the event. These
questions were also based on the work of Stone and Neale (1984). Participants were
asked whether the bothersome event described was anticipated, how bothersome the
event was on a scale of 1-10; if it was a repeat event; and, if so, how many times it had
occurred during the 2014-2015 academic year.

Participants received an email containing five links to secure surveys with the
various subject matter prompts. Survey Monkey, an online survey software providing
data encryption, was utilized to collect the daily journal responses. Each prompt took
approximately 20 minutes to complete. Upon completion of all five prompts, the data was
downloaded from the database and deleted from the hosting service. Participants were
allowed to complete prompts at their leisure over a 10-day period. The five journal
prompts are listed below. The full protocol for journal data collection can be found in
Appendix C.

1. Describe the most bothersome event or issue form the 2014-2015 academic
   year that involved a coworker or supervisor.

2. Describe the most bothersome event or issue in the 2014-2015 academic year
   that involved a student or group of students.
3. Describe the most bothersome event or issue from the 2014-2015 academic year that involved institutional policy, protocols, or politics.

4. Describe an ongoing bothersome event or issues faced during the 2014-2015 academic year.

5. Describe any bothersome event or issue from the 2014-2015 academic year that you have not yet described in your journals. This particular event can be personal or professional.

**Interviews.** The other data collection method that was utilized is personal interviews; it is the most common method of data collection in qualitative studies (Evers & De Boer, 2012). They provide rich insights into participants’ perceptions. Due to the limited time for the interview and the more conversational style of them, participants have less time to think about and best phrase a response; therefore, they are often more candid and statements are not revised. Additionally, the researcher can ask follow-up questions to topics that are relevant to the research to identify emphasis that could not be captured in writing. The drawback of interviews is the limited time frame. Participants may draw blanks on examples or may not be able to clearly articulate a point (Evers & De Boer, 2012).

The interviews utilized a semi-structured format, which allowed for variation in interview questions in order to obtain information-rich data from each interviewee (Bamberger et al., 2011, p 307). This approach allowed for greater flexibility to discuss specific events and allow for follow-up questions. It also aided in developing a relationship with participants, allowing them to open up and explore the role of resilience
in their work-world. The interview process began with general questions to help build rapport (Evers & De Boer, 2012).

The personal interviews served two purposes. First, they were an opportunity to obtain clarification on any journal data. Second, they were utilized to collect data on resilience beyond the guided journal topics. Participants were asked a series of questions on the role of resilience in their professional experience. The questions were based on Block and Kreman’s (1996) study on ego-resilience and a life satisfaction survey designed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin (1985). Both were adapted for an open-ended format. Additionally, more broad questions on the concept of resilience were asked. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by a third party service. Prior to beginning analysis, all data was reviewed and any personal identifiers removed. All recordings will be destroyed upon study publication. Full interview protocol can be found in Appendix D.

**Pilot Testing**

Prior to beginning participant recruitment, pilot testing was completed with three colleagues. These individuals were specifically selected due to their roles in the university. They met the mid-level professional requirements; except two had been employed less than three years. Additionally, due to my familiarity with the participants, I trusted I would obtain honest feedback about the wording of the questions, and I would be able to verify authenticity in the journal responses.

As a result of pilot testing and participant feedback, changes were made to the journal prompts. They were consolidated into the five prompts presented in the previous section. Originally, six prompts broke questions down into semesters versus academic
year. However, participants reported that the questions felt redundant and they experienced difficulty distinguishing between semesters. They also reported that they focused on the time period much more than their response related to how they handled the situation. Thus, the number of prompts was consolidated and time period broadened. Pilot participants were consulted on the change; all stated that they preferred the wording to the revised five questions to the original six.

Interview protocol remained relatively stable from piloting to study execution. Based on pilot participant feedback, one question was dropped as redundant, two were reworded for clarification, and slight reorganization for flow was completed. Finally, pilot data were examined to determine if sufficient data would be gathered to answer the research questions. Preliminary analysis on pilot participants indicated that data were collected on all conceptual framework categories and would be sufficient in answering the research questions. Following pilot testing and slight protocol revisions, the study proceeded as detailed in the data collection section.

Data Analysis

Data analysis utilized an emergent design to explore the phenomenon of resilience. It was purposefully open to allow for flexible strategic adjustments as information was gathered, maximizing opportunity to learn about critical aspects (Miles et al., 2014). Phenomenological analysis began with the process of bracketing, in which essential structures were uncovered, defined, and analyzed (Denzin, 1989). “The philosophical phenomenological method encompasses three interlocking steps: (1) the phenomenological reduction, (2) description, and (3) search for essences.” (Giorgi, 1997,
These data were then organized into meaning clusters in order to eliminate repetitiveness and to allow the essence of the experience to be explained.

Data collection yielded over 400 pages of text to be analyzed. In order to manage and organize the large amounts of data gathered, NVivo was utilized, which is a computer software program designed to organize qualitative data. This software allowed data to be stored, sorted, and retrieved more easily (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). All transcripts, journal response, and contact summary memos were loaded into NVivo 10 software. Each type of data was assigned a participant code and a source code (i.e. interview, journal prompt one, journal prompt two, contact summary, etc.). Demographic data was also entered as an attribute for each participant. This included gender, years in the field, area of work, and departmental authority level. Coding and data analysis were completed manually grounded in the phenomenological approach described above. NVivo’s node tool was used to organize codes that were developed through the data analysis process, and NVivo data analysis tools were used to verify findings and connections between themes.

The data analysis process began with the contact summaries, as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). As data were collected, contact summaries were created to identify the main concepts of a journal entry and interview, as well as potential themes, issues, and questions from the contact. These contact summaries were used to adjust interview protocol and to develop themes later in the analytic process. Some argue against this method, but doing so denies the emergent nature of a qualitative design (Miles et al., 2014). A structured contact summary was utilized to track any adjustments (see Appendix F).
Thematic analysis was undertaken to identify the phrases and statements relevant to the phenomenon, and meaning was assigned to them. This allowed a significant amount of material to be gathered for analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Thematic analysis involved “macro- and micro-examination of the data and identification of emergent patterns and themes both broad-brush and fine grained” (Bamberger et al., 2011, p. 315). This analysis “involves reading and rereading the entire data set several times, each time marking points of interest and gradually grouping them into themes” (Bamberger et al., 2011, p. 315).

Thematic coding involved three rounds. Open coding was initially performed. A pre-set list of themes or concepts was not used. All interviews and journal responses were read, and concepts and themes were documented as they emerged from the data. The NVivo node tool was used to document and organize the codes as they were identified, and the NVivo annotation tool was used to make notes about ideas connected to the codes as research progressed. The first round of coding produced 59 codes. That included both descriptive and pattern codes. Descriptive codes were categorized data into basic codes that required little interpretation. Conversely, pattern codes were inferential and explanatory – they notated a pattern discerned about the phenomenon (Miles et al., 2014). During this first round of coding, codes were primarily derived from participants’ own language.

Next, contact summaries were reread and existing codes checked against the concepts created during the data collection process. The second round of coding drew from the predetermined codes and Loflands coding scheme, which identified acts, activities, meanings, participation, relationships, and settings (Miles et al., 2014). Again,
the use of the nodes featured in NVivo 10 kept the codes organized and documented, but it was not used to generate codes automatically. In this round of coding, data were organized into predetermined categories to ensure that significant items were not overlooked in the first round of coding. It also complemented the theories that served as the foundation for data collection. During this round of coding, codes were derived from the conceptual framework. An additional six codes were added during this round of coding. After the first two rounds of coding, all uncoded data were reviewed one final time to ensure relevant information regarding resilience was not excluded. After this review, data irrelevant to the phenomenon was not considered during further analysis.

The final round of coding focused on theory connection. Data were reviewed and coded into patterns and categories based on the theories utilized to develop the questions. Specifically, coping strategies were created and defined based on previous research. At this stage, 65 codes existed. After the three rounds of coding, all data were reviewed for redundancy; 11 codes were eliminated or collapsed as redundant. A total of 54 codes remained, covering over 1,200 segments of data. The remaining 54 codes included descriptors from the participants, previous research, and the conceptual framework. Appendix G provides the codebook for this study, and includes a final list of codes, code definition, number of participants who were assigned the code, and total number of times the code was assigned.

After the codes were finalized, NVivo query tools were used to verify findings. Seven word frequency tables were generated; one for all data and one for each conceptual framework category. This revealed that the most frequent words used by participants were accounted for by a code. Furthermore, it confirmed the conceptual framework
categories were accurate; “feeling” words had been coded into emotion, “thinking” words coded into belief, and “action” words coded into behavior. Finally, data were organized into meaning clusters, or the conceptual framework categories and themes solidified. These findings were verified through the use of NVivo’s code matrix query tool. Every conceptual framework category was compared to each other, with the most significant overlap occurring between the three themes that will be presented as a part of the findings in Chapter IV.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study was approved by the University of Colorado Colorado Springs Institutional Review Board (# 15-165 See Appendix E). Every precaution to protect participants’ rights and privacy was taken. This study did not explore any vulnerable population, all participants were over the age of 18, and the researcher did not have real or perceived authority over any participants. Participants were offered a $25 gift card for their time; this was not a substantial enough incentive to produce a sense of coercion.

Consent was obtained from all participants before collecting any data. The researcher gathered consent in two phases. First, verbal consent was obtained for questions determining eligibility and for collecting contact information during the intake interview. Electronic consent was received prior to collecting any further information through interviews or journal prompts. Participants were allowed to ask questions about consent at any point during the research process.

Risk to participants was minimal. Some mild emotional discomfort might have occurred in recounting stressful events, but it was minimal, as participants were not asked to identify or recount extremely traumatic personal events. Rather, they were asked to
recount professional events that were bothersome. Participants were in full control of their disclosure and could have opted out of disclosing particular events, omit names or damaging details, or withdraw their participation at any time.

In order to protect privacy, all participants selected and used a pseudonym throughout the study. Only one list that connects the pseudonyms to the informed consent exists. This list does not include last names of participants and is not stored in the same location as the informed consent documents. All other research data, excluding the pseudonym list, is stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer accessible to only the primary researcher. A back-up copy of data is stored on a password-protected external hard drive, which is locked in a file cabinet.

**Limitations**

All research studies have inherent limitations. Silverman (2004) stated, “There are no right or wrong methods. There are only methods appropriate to your research topic” (p. 125). With qualitative research, an important component of creating trustworthiness is acknowledging the limitations, in order that the reader can make appropriate determinations about transferability and application of the study findings.

The limitations of this study were consistent with the limitations often cited in qualitative research. A small, non-randomized sample made it difficult to generalize findings, although transferability was possible. This limitation is unavoidable with qualitative research, and is generally accepted as part of the trade-off for collecting the deep, rich data available through qualitative methods. Additionally, the lack of observations may be perceived as problematic. Observations are incredibly commonplace in qualitative research and would have contributed to the triangulation of data. However,
they were not deemed necessary based on the theoretical approach chosen.

Phenomenology seeks to understand and describe the meaning of an experience for a population from their own perspective; it does not seek to find truth or an “objective” explanation. Observations often are used to either corroborate interview information or drive the development of interview questions. Due to of the selected approach, neither were needed. Rather, journal prompts and interview questions were guided by theory and previous research to gather participant perspectives. Phenomenology is a matter of studying everyday experience from the point of view of the subject, and it rejects critical evolution (Van Manen, 1990). Therefore, it is not necessary to observe the participants in action to validate their thoughts and feelings on the subject.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative data is presented in such a way “to allow the reader to make analytic or case–to–case generalizations,” known as transferability (Bamberger et al., 2011, p. 296). It is most important that the findings are well warranted and that trustworthiness and credibility have been established (Miles et al., 2014). This research study utilized multiple methods to establish the accuracy of the findings and the credibility of the researcher.

Data collection was strategically designed to ensure triangulation, which is “based on the premise that no single method ever adequately solves the problem” (Patton, 2015 p. 316). Therefore, data were collected through multiple sources to counterbalance the limitations of using a single source. By combining the interviews with the journal response, each method’s weakness is offset by the other’s strength, which will allow for more robust data collection. Data collection was also designed around multiple theories,
thus allowing the findings to be compared and contrasted to those theories in the analysis. This is known as theoretical triangulation of data. The point of theoretical triangulation is to understand how differing assumptions and premises affect findings and interpretations” (Patton, 2015 p. 316). Evaluation of the data through multiple theory lenses enabled the presentation of a clear picture of the phenomenon.

Another method for ensuring accuracy is member checking, which involves working with selected participants to determine accuracy of the data and the conclusions drawn by the researcher regarding their individual stories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, six participants expressed interest in participating in the member checking process. These participants were contacted after analysis was complete; themes were shared, and they confirmed that the findings were consistent with their experience. Thick rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting. “Good descriptions take the reader into the setting,” (Patton, 2015, p. 437) allowing them to reach conclusions about the validity of their findings. These descriptions can be found in Chapter IV. Finally, data was collected to the point of saturation, where no new examples of the conceptual framework categories were being presented in the interview or journaling process (Patton, 2015).

**Personal Bias**

Subjectivity cannot be ruled out. However, examining and reporting personal bias throughout the process becomes an open component of the study to be examined by the reader. By being open about said bias, readers will be aware of the lens through which all data was viewed and can judge whether conclusions were drawn accurately. As Ludwing Binswanger (1963) states, we cannot truly understand something unless we care. This is a
topic I care about deeply. As a student affairs professional who has been employed full-
time within higher education for over three years, I have seen the challenges mid-level
professionals face in navigating complex campus politics. Additionally, as a member of
the student response team for my campus, I collaborate broadly across campus to respond
to student needs. In this role, I have observed the toll helping students takes on
professional staff, and I have also seen the rejuvenating effect it has when it goes well.

However, I know that there are other areas that challenge and sustain student
affairs professionals. I will attempt to remove any preconceived notions from my analysis
on this topic, and explore the phenomenon from the participants’ perspectives. My role
within higher education does provide me some advantages in understanding participant
perspectives. As an “insider,” I am aware of the culture, and had access to connections to
recruit participants.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provided a detailed description of the research
methodology. A phenomenological approach and qualitative design using journals and
interviews was chosen to explore the phenomenon of resilience in mid-level
professionals. Resilience was defined as positive adaptation to stress, and was viewed as
a complex construct influenced by a person’s behaviors, beliefs, and emotions, as well as
the environment. The conceptual framework for the study was guided by previous work
on resilience and coping, and all data collection practices were designed using the
conceptual framework. There were 20 participants who completed the full study protocol.
Trustworthiness was accounted for through the use of multiple data collection methods,
theory triangulation, and the participant descriptions presented in the following chapter.
The phenomenological approach provides for a “structural analysis of what is most common, most familiar, and most self-evident to us” (Van Masen, 1990, p. 19). A multi-tiered coding strategy was utilized to identify categories and themes, and compared with the literature to draw conclusions. The intent of the study was to learn how resilience manifests for mid-level student affairs professionals, identify behavior, belief, and emotion patterns, as well as environmental factors that challenge and cultivate resiliency in the professional setting, and describe how resilience influences professional practice. The findings, which will be presented in Chapter IV will provide information on the role of mid-level professionals to enhance the educational environment.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore and describe professional resilience for mid-level student affairs professionals in the state of Colorado. It identified patterns in their daily experiences with the phenomenon. Resilience was defined as positive adaptation to adversity, with adversity being defined as common causes of stress. This chapter presents the findings obtained from 100 journal entries and individual interviews from 20 mid-level student affairs professionals. Highlights of participant experiences are presented in the participant narratives, the conceptual categories for findings are explained, study themes are described, and the data were synthesized to answer the research questions.

Participants

Participants were from nine Colorado public universities, twelve identified as female and 8 identified as male, ranging in age from 26-55. Participants possessed 3-22 years of work experience, with eight having five or less, eight having 6-15, and four having 15+. Participants worked in a variety of student services areas including academic advising, residence life and housing, student conduct, student engagement, career services, academic support services, orientation, recreation, and veteran’s affairs. See Appendix H for participant demographics and characteristics.
Participant Narratives

Participant narratives are provided below to provide background on each participant in order to contextualize the findings. To protect participant identity, pseudonyms were selected and titles and institutions were not disclosed. Participants were categorized into positions of authority based on job duties. Mid-department leaders generally held mid-level roles in large departments; they oversaw staff, resources, and budgets that contribute to student learning, but did not serve as the senior decision maker for their department and did not report to chief student affairs officers. Senior-department leaders were the primary decision makers for the departments, and generally had significant autonomy over departmental decisions regarding resources for student learning. Depending upon institution size, they either reported directly to chief student affairs officers, or a layer of supervision may have existed. Executive-department leaders held the highest role of a mid-level professional; they oversaw multiple senior department leaders and reported directly to chief student affairs officers. Descriptions are limited in detail on demographic characteristics and participants’ specific job duties as a means to protect participant privacy. Area of employment, years in the field, level of authority, core values, and personal insights on resilience are also shared.

Adam. Adam had held his current position in student support services for only four months at the time of the interview, but had been employed at the institution for 10 years. His previous role was similar, but he received added responsibilities following a recent restructure. His current position was a senior-department leadership role. Adam described himself as hard working and a resource for his staff. He believed that trust is
one of the most important factors in a working relationship and humor helps to ease the tensions of the stressful environment. In providing an example of resilience, Adam said:

It’s meeting with that student that has yelled at you, made you cry, or you've been in the office for an hour and a half trying to fix the tiniest little detail that that student has, taking a deep breath and then working with the next student, being able to let that moment go and be that moment, and move on to whatever the next project might be.

**Alex.** A mid-department leader in residence life and housing, Alex had worked professionally in this area throughout her nine-year career in higher education. As a first generation college student, she received assistance from mentors that was instrumental in her career choice. Alex was very focused on her family and balancing her family status with her work priorities. She described herself as a very confident person who tries to have humility in her interactions with others. She stated, “I feel like you learn from each experience and each individual you cross paths with.” In describing resilience, Alex said, “I think [it] is a mix between being adaptive as well as fighting through adversity.”

**Aspen.** Currently working as senior-department leader in student engagement, Aspen’s previous work experience involved self-funded auxiliary areas of higher education, such as food service and the bookstore. As such, she tended to have a greater business focus than some of her colleagues. Additionally, she credited her family and early jobs as shaping her work ethic. Having worked in higher education for nine years, she described herself as a hard worker dedicated to which she was doing. On the subject of resilience, she said:
To me, resiliency is an ability to take situations that are challenging, or you don't like, or are not ideal, and to turn it into something that's useful for you, and to not get stuck. I think more than anything, it’s not getting stuck.

**Brett.** Brett was a senior-department leader in student conduct and had been working in higher education for five years. Prior to working in the area of conduct, Brett worked in residence life, which was important in shaping his view on community development and the role of conduct in that process. In regards to his current role, Brett asserted that compliance was one of his biggest challenges. On that subject, he said, “Often I think that we're so focused on compliance we forget about each individual student, and the success of the students.” He described himself as firm and fair, and he described resilience as follows:

Resilience to me is thinking through it. Getting through the mud. Getting through the tough days, getting through anything and continuing on without dropping out. You know, resiliency to me is very much like a race, an endurance race. Having endurance to make it through. Making commitments, sticking to it. Commitment to your employer, commitment to your students.

**Chris.** A mid-department leader within veteran’s affairs, Chris had worked in higher education for five years. He began in higher education as a non-traditional student and credited his mentors for shaping his current practice. He added that helping students kept him going in his job despite numerous issues with his supervisor. Chris defined resilience as, “Not giving up, keeping your focus on where you're going.”

**Dave.** Having a background in residence life, Dave currently worked as a mid-department leader in academic advising. He had worked within higher education for four
years and worked in the private sector previous to that. Dave explained that his work in the private sector brought him to the realization that he wanted to return to college and work with students. He said, “I was realizing that students were coming out of college with unrealistic expectations of what the work world would be like, and that college is a good place to help shape that.” Dave also connected his upbringing to his work ethic, focus on his family, and his view of resilience. In defining resilience, he said, “Keep on keepin' on. It really is as simple as that. I identify what needs done and do it. Do it to the best of your ability. And to come back and do it again the next day.”

Disney. Disney worked in the area of student engagement as a senior-department leader. She had previous employment experiences outside of higher education, and credited those experiences as being very influential in her professional development. She explained that her previous environment was hostile and helped her to develop a thick skin, making current challenges easier to manage. Disney described herself as very empowering to her students and staff; she allowed them to take ownership of their tasks and did not micro-manage. Disney defined resilience by saying:

I think just being able to bounce back, and just to keep getting up every day, and going at it, and doing what you got to do to get your job done even when you're tired or you have those bad days. You just got to keep going.

Gram. An executive-department leader in campus recreation, Gram had worked in higher education for over 20 years, much of which was spent in campus recreation. Regarding his job, Gram said, “I have the best job in higher ed as far as I'm concerned.” Gram described himself as an easy going servant leader. He noted that family was his
priority, and he allowed his staff to make it theirs as well. Gram had a simple definition of resilience; he defined it as “Just being able to work through any of the hard situations.”

**Hudson.** Hudson was a mid-department leader in student engagement, whose previous background was in residence life. He had been employed full time in higher education for five years. Hudson discussed his graduate program and internship experience as important in shaping his current practice and providing him with a well-rounded skill set. Hudson described himself as the office jester and discussed the importance of having a sense of humor in the office. He added that he tried to look on the bright side and lighten the mood, which was important when dealing with his biggest frustrations, the lack of resources for his department within the institution. He also described himself as proactive. In discussing resilience, he said:

> I think that it's looking at how can you learn from something and you can take that experience, no matter how negative, or impactful it was in not the best of ways, and how can you frame it into a learning experience and learning opportunity

**Jennifer.** New to her mid-department leader role in admissions, Jennifer had worked in higher education for five years. Her previous experience had an administrative focus. Jennifer described herself as a caretaker, always willing to help her coworkers when needed. She expressed that she was very happy with her position and coworkers, but worked in an unhealthy environment with a hostile supervisor. One of her biggest challenges had been the lack of training as she transitioned into her new role. In describing resilience, Jennifer said:
I think resiliency is not just getting through stressful times, but not giving up through those stressful times, and finding a way to be positive about it and to be constructive and grow from it. It's not just burying your head in the sand and waiting for it to be over, it's kind of facing the challenge head on... But, the fact that you're going to learn and grow from this is something that needs to happen

**Kathryn.** A mid-department leader in academic advising, Kathryn had a background working with student engagement initiatives. Her previous experience exposed her to working with several first-generation students. Kathryn described herself as patient, supportive, and a bit of a transition junkie, which made it easier to work with undecided students. Kathryn discussed one of her biggest challenges, which was not receiving a departmental promotion and how she came to terms with that decision. She said:

Part of that resilience was sitting down with colleagues and asking for honest feedback, and part of it was wholeheartedly supporting my colleague in the decision that was made, but also just coming to realize that the fact that it was the next step in a departmental progression doesn’t mean that it’s a meaningful step for me.

**Kathy.** Kathy had held her executive-department leadership role in financial aid for over three years, and had been in higher education for over 20 years. Her previous experience was in residence life, student engagement, and crisis management, although the majority of her career had been in financial aid. She believed that hard work pays off and should be rewarded, one must always be teaching or learning, and a sense of humor is critical. On the topic of resilience Kathy stated:
It’s the ability to get knocked down multiple times and still get up. It is a combination of faith in whatever you want faith to be, so faith in either a higher power, or yourself, or the greater good.

**McKenzie.** McKenzie was a senior-department leader in academic support services. She had worked in higher education for five years. Her passion stemmed from her experience as a first-generation college student and the academic support she received through tutoring services. She said, “I pour my heart and soul into what I do.” McKenzie valued research and evidence-based practices. She explained, “I spend all my free time reading research.” On the topic of resilience, McKenzie said, “I take a view [of] resiliency as being able to overcome. Overcome any challenges or obstacles. Maintaining that positivity and the hope that things will improve.”

**Ray.** A newer mid-department professional, Ray had been in his current role for only a few months at the time of the interview. He had worked full time in higher education for nearly four years. He had many of the same duties prior to his promotion, but had gained additional responsibilities. Ray had an overall very positive demeanor and optimistic outlook. In discussing what he enjoyed most about his job, he stated, “I really love advising the student groups, the energy of the student leaders as they are planning new events.” One of his great passions was running, and it was the primary way in which he handles his stress. When asked to define resilience, Ray stated:

I think that's the ability to get back up. Something happens and whether that's in your personal life or in career and you're just like, you know, that's okay. I'm going to come back and I'm going to do something different or I'm going to try again.
Robin. Robin held an executive-department leadership role in academic affairs. He had been in this role for only a few months, prior to which he served as a faculty member and program coordinator for his department. Robin had worked in higher education for 10 years; however, he credited his prior military experience as having a strong influence on his background. Robin described himself as upbeat, focused on the big picture, caring, and very involved and aware of the activities across various levels of his institution. Robin viewed resilience as very important to success, he stated:

It's just your ability to not be overwhelmed when you're faced with a particular challenge or whole bunch of different challenges. Being able to mentally kind of come up for air, have perspective, this too shall pass and yet still function under pressure.

Sally. A senior-department leader in student conduct, Sally had worked in higher education as a full-time professional for five years. She worked in residence life in graduate school, which is when she developed her passion for student conduct. She described herself as hard working, task oriented, and compassionate. She valued the educational opportunities that came from student conduct interactions, and desired that students become successful. She was very career driven and had a strong interest in professional development. Sally described resilience by saying:

If everything is fine, you don't even think about resiliency. I think resiliency for me would surround just getting through. Putting one foot in front of the other, like I said, tackling each day's problems and coming the next day for more knowing that you may not be able to solve every single problem but you're going to try, and you're going to show up and keep trying.
Sarah. Sarah was a senior-department leader in orientation. She had served in her current role for four years, and had been in higher education for eight. She was primarily involved with orientations, but had some previous student engagement and residence life experience. Sarah credited strong mentors in shaping her current practice. She explained that she continued to use the curriculum writing techniques she had learned in her graduate program when training her current student employees, and had great success with it. She expressed that her biggest professional challenge was the perception of orientation on campus, and creating a culture to support it. On the topic of resilience, she said, “To me it's your ability to bounce back after setbacks or struggles.”

Sue. Having worked in higher education for 14 years, Sue served as a mid-department leader in admissions. She has held this position for 10 years, prior to which she worked with advising. She loved her current position and the opportunities to interact with students. Sue explained that her husband’s poor health was one of the biggest challenges she faced in her career, as opposed to her work environment. Other than balancing her workload, Sue does not discuss having a lot of stress in her environment. She explained it was mostly positive, with good leadership and good coworkers. Sue described resilience as “the ability to bounce back and not let things drag you down permanently or for a long time.”

Veronica. Veronica was a mid-department residence life professional who had been in her role for over three years. Her background was primarily in residence life, though she briefly worked at a community college. Prior to returning to graduate school, Veronica held a job in the private sector which was a bad experience for her. This helped her determine her career path and the type of environment she wanted to work in. She
described herself as calm, flexible, and forgiving; she generally assumed that people had good intentions. On the subject of resilience, Veronica said, “Just keeping going, keeping on. Challenges come, frustrations come; being able to deal with those and not wanting to get to the point where I'm overwhelmed or consumed by it.”

**Vivian.** A senior-level leader in career services, Vivian had been in her job for nearly five years. Her previous background included residence life and student engagement. Vivian described her graduate program as being very impactful due to the instructors and mentors she had, and she still frequently draws on that background. She also stated that she specifically chose to move to career services in an effort to gain more balance in her life, since there generally are not career-related emergencies. She described herself as mindful, adaptable, and strategic. On the topic of resilience, Vivian said, “You develop strategies that enable you to go back in versus running away.”

**Conceptual Framework Categories**

The study design was grounded in the theoretical framework of resilience; therefore, the codes from the journal entries and interview transcripts aligned with categories associated with the framework: belief, behavior, emotion, environment, cause of stress, and outcome. The original framework accounted for the overlap in categories, with the process of resilience occurring at the heart of one’s behavior, belief, and emotions, which are influenced by the environment. Figure 3 reconceptualizes the original framework by adding the participant codes to their respective categories. The nuances of each category provided practical examples of how the phenomenon of resilience manifested in mid-level student affairs professionals. The following sections
briefly summarize the conceptual framework categories. Table 1 on page 84 provides an overview of the categories.

*Figure 3.* The relationship between conceptual framework categories shows the cause of stress interacting with the environment and personal characteristics with resilience at the heart of the process. Prominent codes are listed in their respective framework categories.

**Belief**

Belief was defined as the mental representations that comprise an individual’s conscious thought. It involved the thoughts, ideas, or opinions of individuals about themselves, situations, or the environment. A total of 278 statements were coded into the belief category. Many belief statements began with “I think” or “I am.” Codes grouped under the belief category included personal identity, core values, positive outlook,
purpose, and choice. All participants made statements related to their personal identity, which was the most prominent code within this category. Maintaining a positive attitude, valuing education and growth, and being a hard worker were three characteristics frequently discussed by participants. Furthermore, this category was strongly tied to behavior.

**Emotion**

Emotion was defined as separate from belief and characterized primarily by one’s feeling about something. It was disguisable from thought, although they often overlapped. Emotion encompassed mood, temperament, and motivation. Statements coded into the emotion category often contained the word “feel” or other feeling words, such as joy, frustration, happiness, responsibility, burnout, supported, or excitement. As the smallest category with 142 statements coded into the emotion theme. Within this category, the codes included motivation, content, frustration, lack of respect, valued, and trust. All participants spoke of their motivations or desire to do something. For nearly all participants noted student growth as their primary motivation. Other positive and negative emotions were grouped and strongly related to environmental factors.

**Behavior**

Behavior was the largest category, with 752 segments of data being coded into this category. This section was significantly larger due to the study design. Behavior required some form of action or intentional inaction. Four codes and 14 sub-codes were listed in the category of behavior. The codes included coping, connecting, giving, and leading. Connecting, leading, and giving were cited by 10, 12, and 18 participants respectively.
Coping was by far the largest code, again due to study design, and was a sub-category for behavior. Coping strategies were based on the theoretical framework and drawn from the participants’ language. Interviewees readily provided examples of the way in which they handled bothersome events, failure, change, and disappointment. However, when asked, “How do you cope?,” 18 of the 20 participants struggled with their answers. Long pauses, nervous laughter, and some jokes were made about happy hour. Coping strategies were problem focused or emotion focused strategies, although participants sometimes reported using multiple strategies to handle problems. These included acceptance, catharsis, direct action, changing jobs, distraction, change of scene, problem solving, proactive, processing, reappraisal, relaxation, self-care, and seeking social support. The codebook in Appendix G provides definitions and frequency of use for coping strategies.

**Environment**

Items coded into environment included the surroundings or conditions in which the participants worked. There were 303 segments of data coded into this category. Codes included physical environment, coworker connection, organizational culture, supervision, and mentors, codes were also placed as a positive or negative influence. Due to the nature of the questions, negative environmental aspects were more prevalent than positive aspects. Negative aspects included an organizational culture that did not value staff, not having adequate support or resources, conflict with coworkers or supervisors, excessive workloads, and poor physical environments. Conversely, positive environments included a culture of support and encouragement, trust in coworkers and supervisors, open communication, adequate resources, and a sense of teamwork. Also discussed in this
category was external support from family and mentors. Environment was seen as a major influence on emotions.

**Cause of Stress**

Through journals and interviews, participants discussed their primary causes of stress, which were coded into five overarching concepts: institutional change, lack of control, values disagreement, workload, and personal trauma. Examples of causes of stress are not provided in detail as a means to protect participant privacy. All participants discussed excessive workloads or unrealistic expectations as a cause or contributing factor to stress. Lack of control and values disagreement were frequently intertwined with institutional change, but not always. Seventeen participants reported values disagreement as a cause of stress; 19 reported lack of control. Finally, over half reported on a personal trauma that interfered with their work. These included their health and family members’ health, as well as traumatic events such as the loss of a family member and a home being burglarized. Participants pointed out that while not work related, the occurrence of extremely traumatic events interfered with one’s work life.

**Outcome**

The outcome category was participants’ views of the outcome of the situation, their positive adaptation to the negative event. Only two codes appeared within the outcome category: (1) learning and growth and (2) keep trying. Participants repeatedly discussed learning from and becoming better as a result of adversity. They also discussed their responsibility to continue to try to keep showing up, and to continue to do their best.
Table 1

**Conceptual Framework Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Total Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Participants’ actions or intentional inaction.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>The mental representations that comprise of participants’ conscious thoughts, including their thoughts, ideas, or opinions individuals have about themselves, situations, or the environment.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause of stress</td>
<td>Situations or circumstances that cause distress.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>Participants’ feelings about something, including their mood, temperament, and motivation.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>The surroundings or conditions in which the participants worked.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>The outcome of difficult circumstances.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Themes**

In analyzing the relationship of the conceptual framework categories, three themes emerged that revealed how resilience manifested in the day-to-day life of mid-level student affairs professionals. Those themes were: (1) Identity matters: The impact of personal beliefs on behavior, (2) Upward and downward spirals: How environment and emotion intertwine, and (3) We are all in this together: The role of coworker connection. Each theme will be explored in detail in the following sections.
Identity Matters: The Impact of Personal Beliefs on Behavior

All participants made multiple remarks regarding their identity. They discussed their values, purpose, priorities, and outlooks. They described themselves as hard workers, introverts, extroverts, leaders, caretakers, and parents. They talked about their backgrounds, where they were from, the graduate programs they attended, and their upbringing. These remarks occasionally were stand-alone comments; i.e, Aspen said, “I am an introvert in an extrovert world.” Their beliefs most often were used as an explanation, such as Mackenzie’s statement, “I'm an introvert, so I have to kind of step away for a few minutes to re-energize.”

In some cases identity was a justification for emotions and other beliefs; e.g., Alex discussed her identity in relation to her priorities by saying:

I am a parent. I have a partner. My bottom line [my supervisor] needs to be able to understand my family status and trust that the job will get done, but I may not be here until eleven at night like some of the other hall directors who are single.

In another example, Adam explained the relationship between his values were emotions stating, “I value growth. I want to keep growing, growing, growing, that is why it was frustrating when I was not able to attend the symposium.” However, beliefs primarily were related to behaviors. In some cases they were used as a direct explanation, as in the previous McKenzie example; in other cases it was an association prevalent in the journals and interviews. A variety of beliefs were connected to behavior, but the three most common were hard worker, positive outlook, and core values.

**Hard worker.** A common thread among participants was being a hard worker. Fourteen participants discussed this identity in some form; the identity of being a hard
worker was not only connected with long hours, taking on extra projects, and being a team player, it was directly related to their coping strategies. Hard work was frequently connected with problem-focused coping styles, particularly with direct action.

Dave provided an example of the overlap between the hard worker statements and his coping behaviors. He stated early in his interview, “I think my protestant work ethic shapes the way I do things. I am the child of a farmer; I am a hard worker. I just get things done.” In discussing how he handled with a student crisis, he stated:

My response was simply, “well this is what needs to happen. I can take care of myself later; right now all you can do is fix the problem.” I worked hard to take care of my students, my fellow staff. I just did what had to be done. It was a 16-hour day. Lots of checking in, lots of talking. My students where like, “How are you doing this?” I just did it.

Aspen, who also described herself as a hard worker, provided another example related to her identity, her family background, her coping style, and other work behaviors. She said:

I know I am a hard worker. I think it comes from my family, not the work environment or previous jobs. My parents were hard workers. They didn’t have an easy life. They didn’t let me wallow. My mom always said, “you can wallow for a day, you get 24 hours, and then you better suck it up and move on. No one wants listen to you.” I think that’s where my work ethic, my ability to bounce back, really how I handle everything, comes from. I take a day, and then I move on.
In her journals, Aspen discussed an uncomfortable conversation with her boss regarding her advancement. Her response to that conversation was, “I took a day. I really stewed. I was mad... Ultimately, I had the conversation with him. I also began looking for director level jobs.” This example aligned closely with her description of her upbringing. She took time to process her feelings and then took direct action to remedy the situation. She also discussed taking initiative when needed. She said, “[it’s] not in my job description, but it needed to be done, so I am doing it. I can now add software implementation to my resume.” Finally, she discussed a time in which her hard worker identity went too far: “There was a time I was injured, [injury redacted]... I still came to work. That was stupid.”

**Positive outlook.** Positive outlook was another belief that was strongly related to certain behavior patterns. For instance, Sally was identified as having a positive outlook due to her statement early in her interview: “You have to have a good attitude. You’ve got to look at the bigger picture. The big picture question is ‘are you happy here?’.” In her role, Sally faced numerous situations in which her “hands were tied.” In discussing that she said:

Being okay with that and picking my battles. I'm still passionate about everything. But I'm like, “Okay, you've really got to focus on what are your basic points? What's your big goal, what do you ultimately want to change?” Fighting over a letter that goes out, the decision letter or the notification letters that go out, that's not necessary. That's something we can sit and hold off on.

Sally also discussed coping in general by saying: “If I have had a bad day, getting in the car and blaring angry music will de-stress me probably quicker than anything.”
Sally was just one example of how the 13 participants who identified as having a positive outlook frequently practiced the emotion-focused coping strategies of acceptance, reappraisal, relaxation, and distraction. This is not to say that these participants did not take action. They certainly did, as many were the hard workers previously mentioned. Rather, these participants used multiple strategies to manage their stress. Furthermore, their use of those strategies was particularly common when the cause of stress was related to a lack of control stressor. Robin recounted a time when his stress was “piling up” up due to a pending job change, selling his house and buying a new one, and sending his son to college. He declared:

I was under a lot of pressure, and I was just exhausted every day. I was like, “Oh I gotta replace this toilet in the old house and we gotta paint this.” But I had to sit down periodically and just say, “Okay Robin these are first world problems…” I’d try to step back and remember what's most important.

Core values. In addition to discussing their identities, participants frequently mentioned their values and priorities. Growth and learning was a common core value, which was not surprising, as participants expressed this value frequently when engaged in problem solving, being proactive, and general processing. Hudson expressed, “I really value education, growth, and personal development… Continued professional development is so important. It’s why I volunteer.” Hudson also frequently mentioned in his journals and interviews being proactive and problem solving as coping strategies. He summed it up by explaining, “Being proactive as much as possible really helps my stress.”
Kathy embodied this theme more thoroughly than any of the others. This theme surfaced nine times in her interview. She often spoke of her values, her identity, outlook, and overall beliefs as guideposts for her behavior. First, she discussed her value of education by saying, “Part of the way I live and I work is that I believe you have to teach and learn, sometimes simultaneously.” This value was visible when discussing handling change in her department. She explained, “Everybody has to be cross-trained, everybody has to have the same knowledge…. That’s one of the first things I changed, breaking down the silos, training my staff.” The concept of teaching and learning also appeared in the way Kathy coped after a problem arose with a new initiative on her campus. She said, “I did my homework. I spent hours comparing salaries, job descriptions, our peer institutions, and then I took it to leadership.”

Additionally, Kathy’s positive attitude shaped many of her coping practices. She valued humor and said, “I either laugh or cry. I prefer to laugh.” She regularly mentioned connecting with coworkers over humor: “Yesterday it was a buttcrack, we all laughed about a buttcrack…. It’s a little sad when your high for the day is a buttcrack, but at least we were laughing.” In another example she discussed her positive attitude and said, “I really do try to, as [my husband] calls it, ‘Pollyanna Sunshine everything’.” This was reinforced when she discussed her coping practices: “I sometimes think about people worse off than me, it helps me be grateful for even the challenges I am facing.” She added, “I have the serenity prayer everywhere, even on a pillow, it reminds me to let go of the things I can’t control. To be happy with what I have.” These were a few of the ways Kathy truly embodied this theme throughout her interview.
Overall, a variety of beliefs impacted participant behavior. Over 70 direct and indirect examples of this theme emerged in all 20 participants. It expanded beyond the common examples previously provided, and at times was very nuanced to the individual. Mid-level student affairs professionals’ identity was important, they spoke with pride about the experiences that shaped them and they influenced their current positions.

**Upward and Downward Spirals: How Environment and Emotion Intertwine**

Positive and negative environmental factors strongly influenced emotions. Emotion was not a frequently mentioned conceptual framework category, but when it was it was most often related to environment. The cycles relative to environment influencing emotion, and occasionally belief or behavior, were known as upward or downward spirals.

**Downward spirals.** Negative environments, to include unsupportive organizational cultures, lack of resources, poor leadership, and coworker conflicts, fed participants’ negative emotions of frustration and lack of respect. This in turn resulted in difficulty practicing positive behaviors, thus feeding the negative environment. Nearly all participants provided examples of experiencing negative environments that affected their mood, feelings, or motivation at some point in their career.

As a part of his recent transition, Adam reported on some examples of negative events that contributed to a downward spiral. He was involved in part of the planning process for the organization’s restructure, but was excluded from some final decisions regarding his staff, which was very frustrating to him. He said

Almost doubling the staff, changing how we operated as a whole, getting new people from outside the organization, as well as inheriting people who were
already a part of an older model. It was interesting and exciting, but a little frustrating that so much of it was just handed down to me.

In addition, he explained that, as a part of the transition, he “was told one salary and title, but it ended up being something different when it finally happened… Of course I would have liked the money, but really I just didn’t feel valued when it was all done.” Finally, he mentioned working with a supervisor who did not trust or support him. He said, “One of my highest frustrations is when I don't feel that I'm trusted to do my job, and it drives me nuts.” To manage these frustrations, Adam talked about “…connecting with a director whose department is a similar size… getting out, even if it’s just walking to another water fountain… sharing with my wife.”

Of interest, seven participants spoke about hostile environments contributing to downward spirals. They reported discrimination, harassment, and outright hostility from their supervisors and discussed these environments’ impact on their moods. Alex explained that she experienced “multiple micro-aggressions at the hand of my indirect supervisor… He regularly mispronounces my name; I know it’s on purpose. And makes broad derogatory remarks about my ethnicity.” She stated,

It’s really frustrating, it impacts my work. It makes me wonder if I will be held to a different standard if I mess up… It’s not worth reporting though… There is always someone in an entry-level position looking to move up.

McKenzie also experienced micro-aggressions due to an indirect supervisor, although they focused on her age: “He has a problem with how old I am. He’s always talking about ‘your generations’ work ethic’ and it’s never nice.” Unlike Alex, McKenzie reported it to
her campus human resource office, but with no remedy. “They said they would host a
workshop to educate people. It’s been a year. I am still waiting… I don’t even bother
with them anymore. I just focus on my staff, [and] do my job.”

Ray gave the most extensive example of the downward spiral connected to
negative circumstances that included poor leadership, unrealistic workload, and negative
emotions. His downward spiral began when a fellow staff member left the department, he
noted, “That was a huge loss for our office, but also a huge loss for me because he was
my best friend.” This ultimately led to unrealistic expectations: “I was essentially tasked
with doing the job of two experienced [professionals]. I just kept being assigned tasks
even though they knew I was overloaded.”

Ray explained that the situation was compounded by organizational factors. First,
his department experienced organizational conflicts with another area. “Working with
[department redacted] has been difficult because I feel like I, and my staff, get thrown
under the bus in several situations, and that there is little I can do.” Second, some higher
level changes occurred that were frustrating. Several individuals were promoted, although
they appeared not to be based on merit, but rather on favoritism. Ray said, “Many people
who were promoted had not been in their positions long, and I felt that many good staff
members were overlooked and [the leadership] just promoted who [they] wanted.”
Finally, Ray was experiencing poor leadership within the department. In addition to his
workload issues, he commented, “I have a supervisor that is not necessarily good,
because I feel like I'm not getting anything out of our one-on-one meetings.”

The semester culminated in an incident in which Ray noted that “several staff
members spoke with my director because they were feeling like I was not doing what I
needed to be doing.” In describing the semester, he added, “The whole thing, the whole semester was really frustrating.” He elaborated: “I often felt unsupported. This impacts my work because I always feel like I am doing lots of work, and yet it seems none of my supervisors really see that… I always just got asked to do more without some point of appreciation.”

Overall, Ray was positive and loved his job; however, in his interviews and journals he described this series of events that essentially led to a semester-long downward spiral for him and for his department. He expressed that it was a struggle to deal with everything. While he attempted multiple ways to manage his stress, including running and connecting with coworkers, change did not occur until new staff members were hired. This was characteristic, though a bit more extreme, of other participants’ experiences.

Downward spirals were particularly prevalent in participant discussions, with 17 participants reporting negative environments and their accompanying negative emotions. Belief and behavior constructs occasionally mitigated the negative environment for a short period of time, but major change generally was needed to break the downward spiral. Three participants commented on changing jobs in the past as ways of breaking the spiral, and an additional two mentioned they were actively looking for new positions. In other cases, a change in leadership elsewhere on campus contributed to breaking the cycle. Both Brett and Jennifer mentioned a change in senior leadership on campus that improved their work environment. Finally, additional support or resources often were the answer. Ray, McKenzie, and Sally mentioned that the addition of staff provided a
significant change; and Hudson and Sarah reported that an office reconfiguration was helpful in changing their department culture.

**Upward spirals.** Numerous participants discussed positive environments they had experienced. However, the upward spiral was not as obvious as the downward spiral, likely due to the nature of the research questions focusing on overcoming adversity. The upward spiral was further differentiated by the added component of including intentional behavior. The downward spiral behavior often focused more on managing emotions, whereas the upward spiral included proactive coping strategies and other behaviors such as leading, connecting, and giving.

Disney was in a downward spiral; fortunately, an intervention broke the cycle. Shortly after transitioning to a new role, a new dean was hired. She noted, “I've noticed since we've had our new dean here, just having her around, she's really positive about things. I think that helped create a more positive vibe. It made a difference.” She discussed the new dean “being open” and “she wants to know about what we are doing and she wants to understand who I am.” Ultimately, the shift in leadership made a difference in Disney’s outlook. “It's something I just kind of fell into because of the changes, but I love it. I wish I would have actually started in this field sooner, so I could have been doing it longer.”

In another example, Vivian used her positive attitude to create an upward spiral in her office. She was hired to help with an overhaul of an office. She said, “I essentially had to flip an office or restore an office to new greatness.” Vivian had a very positive outlook; relative to failure, she stated, “I don’t really see failure as failure, I see it as life showing you the way is closed, and you have to take another route.” She also believed
passionately in empowering her staff: “I want them to know themselves, know their strengths and use them.” This manner of viewing failure and staff empowerment led her to “give a voice to the staff to create who we were becoming… that created a vision… that turned things around.” Vivian described the feeling of success and reward felt when achieving her goals:

I was able to restore something, meaning an office, that's pretty rewarding. In doing so, that more students have a sense of what we do and how they may benefit from connecting to us is probably the most rewarding thing.

Overall, 18 participants reported on positive environments in conjunction with positive emotions during their career. Additionally, 16 participants expressed that they were content in their positions, and made positive comments about their current environments. Relative to those dissatisfied, it was primarily due to environment rather than career choice. Not surprising, the upward spiral indicated a strong connection between positive environments and work satisfaction.

**We Are All In This Together: Role of Coworker Connection**

Coworker connection surfaced in nearly all conceptual framework categories. The term for this theme originated directly from the participants’ descriptions. Dave said, “I'd like to think that we are all in the trenches together”; and Chris stated, “too often I think people forget we are in this together.” Alex commented, “I feel like there's a big component to knowing you're not alone through the experiences you're having.” Teamwork, which involved having the same goal, taking care of one another, and not doing it alone emerged within this theme. Coworker connection appeared regardless of
participant identity or values, environment, or the level of happiness with the current position.

The first occurrence of coworker connection surfaced in participants’ values. They related the importance of having someone who understood their experiences, values, and priorities. Kathy explained:

It is important to have somebody who understands what you're going through, who understands where you're coming from. Any helping profession, it's always important to have that person to just say 'I can't make it any better, but I'm there for you if you want to talk to me'.

She further elaborated by saying, “You have to have that connection with at least one person that is kind of your ‘go-to’ that you know that you can confide in.” Others echoed Kathy’s sentiments. Alex added, “My peer colleagues are really important to me. It energized me to have colleagues when I can respect and trust them.” Additionally, Kathryn stated, “I think having folks around you who are willing to share those journeys, that is so important.”

Coworker connection also was prevalent in the environment. Relationships contributed to positive environments. Gram explained, “I've had great relationships with numerous coworkers over the years, and still very good friends with a lot of them. That’s made all the difference at the institutions I worked in.” Sue, who worked in a positive environment, stated, “We have a really good group of people as far as working together, getting along together. We’ll walk to grab coffee together or just get out of the office. That we are friendly makes things easier.” Finally, McKenzie commented that she enjoyed working in an area in which she felt “like I'm surrounded by people who care
about me, who have my back.” Others expressed that coworkers made bad environments better. Chris expressed that having shared values with his coworkers made it easier to deal with an unsupportive boss. “We'll bend over backwards to get the student what they need. My coworkers are the reason I come to work each day. They care as much as I do. It’s a good environment down there. That’s why I can put up with this.” Finally, Jennifer said:

I'm very lucky in the coworkers that I have because we're all very generous with each other. If anyone needs help, we're always there to help out…. It makes dealing with being yelled at for stupid stuff a lot easier to manage.

The final area in which coworker connection was evident was in participant behavior. They often sought coworker support as a coping mechanism; 15 participants mentioned it a total of 29 times. McKenzie reported:

I really rely on my colleagues to come and keep my feet on the ground and just to help me remember that I'm not superwoman. I can't do it all. I shouldn't have to do it all so they can help me get grounded.

Gram also said that he and another director carpooled, thus they had “the opportunity to talk through things.” Aspen added that when faced with a difficult situation, she turned to a circle of female friends she had cultivated: “I shared my frustration with a group of female coworkers that I consider to be safe, secure that they would keep my concerns confidential, and provide me with really solid advice.”

Recognizing the need to cultivate relationships with coworkers in order to feel connected, intentionally connecting and giving was another way in which coworker connection emerged in the research process. Connecting was defined as intentional
behaviors designed to facilitate connection; e.g., Adam stated, “I always make it a point to ask my staff how was your weekend?” Kathy explained that she went out of her way after a meeting to check in with her staff on a different floor. She said “At first it made them nervous, they know now, that I'm just swinging through, saying hi.” Alex gave a different example saying, “I try to do one a semester, going to something socially.”

Giving also surfaced as a form of connection. It was defined as sharing without expectation or return. When discussing giving, participants generally referred to being generous with their time. Disney was an example; she commented, “I am very generous with my time. I'm always trying to help people. I'm one of the few in our area that have marketing or graphic design experience, so there's a lot of times I help out.” Only four participants spoke about tangible giving, such as completing thank-you notes or bringing treats to the office.

All participants discussed relying on a coworker in some form during their interview, and 11 mentioned it their journals. Additionally, it was not surprising to find that participants who mentioned valuing their peers more often turned to them to cope. Strong relationships made negative environments bearable and good environments better. They provided an avenue for processing and the emotional support needed to deal with the daily stress. Ultimately, coworker connection was the saving grace for mid-level professionals.

**Research Question Findings**

The themes previously presented illustrated the overlap between the conceptual framework categories. This section explores how both the conceptual framework
categories and the study themes came together to answer the research questions. Four research questions were originally presented:

1. How does the phenomenon of resilience influence professional practice?
2. How do student affairs professionals demonstrate resilience?
3. How is resilience challenged in the professional setting?
4. How is resilience cultivated in the professional setting?

Research Question 1: How Does the Phenomenon of Resilience Influence Professional Practice?

Answers to this question were grounded in Theme One, the relationship between belief and behavior. Data were drawn from the conceptual framework categories of belief and outcome. Essentially, participants’ beliefs about themselves and the concept of resilience influenced their professional practice. Resilient mid-level student affairs professionals valued growth and learning, had positive outlooks, and viewed themselves as hard workers. These beliefs mean that student affairs professionals valued the lessons learned through failure, change, and challenge. Hudson explained the interaction of these values by saying:

I think that [resilience is] looking at how can you learn from something, and you can take that experience, no matter how negative… how can you frame it into a learning experience and learning opportunity.

Additionally, resilience focused on positive outlook, such as McKenzie described:

“Resiliency as being able to overcome. Overcome any challenges or obstacles. Maintaining that positivity and the hope that things will improve. Things will get better.
Things will work out in the end.” Jennifer tied the two concepts of growth and positivity by stating:

[Resilience] is not giving up through those stressful times, and finding a way to be positive about it and to be constructive and grow from it. It's not just burying your head in the sand and waiting for it to be over, it's kind of facing the challenge head on and yeah it's going to be tough and it's probably not going to be pleasant all the time. But, the fact that you're going to learn and grow from this is something that needs to happen.

The concept of not only learning, but to keep going was not unique to Jennifer. Eighteen participants framed their view of resilience as to keep trying or keep going. Chris said, “It’s not giving up, keeping your focus on where you're going.” Ray added, “I'm going to come back and I'm going to do something different or I'm going to try again.” Sally described it as “putting one foot in front of the other.” Dave said, “Its keep on keepin’ on.” A story shared by Vivian truly captured the tone of resilience for all participants:

I once heard someone share a story about how a buffalo in a storm will turn and head towards the storm. Like go head down and go straight through it. Knowing that when you do that, you're going to come out more quickly

Ultimately, the concept of resilience for mid-level professionals comes down to face your problems, keep positive, learn and grow from it, and most importantly keep trying. The common definition that emerged was resilience is the ability to maintain a positive attitude and to focus on learning and growth while facing challenges head on.
Research Question 2: How Do Student Affairs Professionals Demonstrate Resilience?

Again the answers were drawn from Theme One, belief’s influence on behavior. As Kathy noted, Student affairs professionals have to “practice what you preach.” They utilized their core coping strategies to manage their emotions in order to be positive and in the correct mindset to support students and their coworkers. They practice distraction, reappraisal, and catharsis.

- “I like to stand outside if it's a nice day, even if it's for less than a minute.”
  (Adam)
- “I focus on my breathing.” (Aspen)
- “Getting away, physically distancing myself both from the situation and from other people is often a high priority at my worst times.” (Dave)
- “Behind closed doors I kind of let it out. I cried a lot at home.” (Disney)
- “I have to coach myself out of going into that dark well.” (Sally)

Other observable characteristics on mid-level professionals’ demonstration of resilience originated from Theme Three. Participants were aware of their need their coworkers, so many made a point of being generous with their time. As Aspen said, “I really try hard to be available to people.” They were intentional on forming connections. Brett explained, “I make sure that they know that I have their back and that I really understand what they are going through.” Some made a point of giving and showing appreciation. Kathy commented, “I buy pizza on the first day of each semester, and donuts for other stressful days.”
Finally, the result was that they dug in and accomplished the work that needs to be done.

- “I just have to buckle down and get it done.” (Brett)
- “I’m just doing my job.” (Jennifer)
- “You just suck it up, you take that extra call shift because its other duties as assigned.” (Alex)
- “I just dig in and do the work.” (Sue)
- “I work diligently to get everything done that needs to be done.” (Dave).

In the worst-case scenarios when they could no longer reconcile their personal values with those of the institution, they moved on. As Alex said:

That institution will always hold a special place in my heart, but I had to move on before I became too jaded to do my job. That’s how I practiced resilience in that situation. I recognized it was about to get the best of me, so I made a change.

**Research Question 3: How is Resilience Challenged in the Professional Setting?**

Challenges to resiliency were evident in the downward spirals experienced by participants. As mentioned, negative environments fueled negative emotions, ultimately influencing beliefs and behaviors. Most participants attributed the negative environment to challenging their resilience. Adam indicated that the lack of trust that continually challenged him:

I feel that one of the biggest factors in any working relationship is going to be trust. If you just have the feeling that maybe your supervisor doesn't trust you or the work you're doing, but you've been you've been successful in what you've been doing, it causes you to constantly question things.
This lack of trust was related to the broader factor of poor leadership; 12 participants reported poor leadership. Jennifer said, “Honestly our leadership is terrible right now. It makes it really difficult.” Leadership’s priorities in some cases created the challenge. McKenzie explained, “Executive leadership is really focused on the bottom dollar and not so much how to help our students.” Sue provided another example: “An environment that stifles creativity and doesn’t allow growth. That punishes failures, so much so that you are afraid to try.”

Relative to leadership priorities, institutional culture and a lack of appreciation emerged as a challenge. Five participants discussed a lack of appreciation; creating a culture that did not support resilience. Six participants discussed a hierarchy at which student affairs professionals appeared at the bottom. Disney noted:

I think when it's not appreciated, when people don't realize how much effort it takes to cultivate and to keep that going, or if you lose like your morale, so morale is low, I think that could kind of hinder it a little bit.

Alex also commented appreciation:

I don't need a parade every day, but if I just tackled a practice that was really hard for me a nice, "Hey, you know what? That was pretty great. You did a good job," from my boss, that's all I need… One thank you breakfast a year, that’s not creating appreciation.

Regarding the hierarchy, Veronica stated, “Everyone knows it’s, students first, then faculty, and then us. Sometimes, it’s really hard to work in an environment where you aren’t valued.”
Additionally, workloads, lack of control, and values disagreement contributed to stress. Kathryn described problems with workload by saying, “It’s being so bogged down in the day-to-dayness, that you can’t step back and evaluate. You can’t see what needs to be changed to make it better.” Gram noted that lack of control was very frustrating saying, “A decision being made without asking the people that it really affects. It’s frustrating, sometimes I just want to bang my head against a wall when they do stuff like that.” Finally, Alex discussed values disagreement stating, “I just couldn’t support the change in mission the new leadership was wanting.” Regardless of cause, the downward spirals became difficult to break and challenged participants’ abilities to demonstrate resilience. They generally required an environmental intervention, such as those described in the next section.

**Research Question 4: How is Resilience Cultivated in the Professional Setting?**

As the negative environments mentioned above challenged resilience, positive environments cultivated it. Supportive leadership, mentors, and a growth-focused organizational culture were common strands for cultivating resilience in the professional setting. Regarding supportive leadership, participants commented:

- “First and foremost, I think before that is having realistic expectations. Supervisors need to have a framework in place for how they expect work to get done.” (Dave)

- “Really just making sure that they are supported in their work. I think that's going to cultivate the resiliency. Just making sure that they know we are in the trenches together.” (Brett)
• “I think it's easier to be resilient if you're surrounded by positive people. If you have a supervisor that puts in the same effort, I think it helps you to keep going as well.” (Disney)

Role models and connection with others were another important part of cultivating resilience. Aspen explained, “I think it helps when folks in formal leadership positions model resilience.” Kathryn elaborated by saying:

I think having folks around you who are willing to share those journeys helps. Sometimes people in leadership are very closed about the journey that got them there or the struggles that they feel as a professional and I think that when that happens, you miss out on a lot of opportunities

Kathy stated,

The biggest one is having that mentor person to look after one another. It is important to have somebody who understands what you're going through, who understands where you're coming from. Any helping profession, it's always important to have that person to just say 'I can't make it any better, but I'm there for you if you want to talk to me'.

Finally, a culture that supports growth and learning was imperative. Brett stated, “We have a culture of forgiveness, we have a culture of moving forward. It helps make bouncing back from a failure easier.” Robin shared this sentiment: “There needs to be a culture that allows for risk and mistakes. So people aren't so pent up that they're just going to end their career if they try hard and screw something up.” McKenzie had this same viewpoint:
We have to be allowed to make mistakes, if I am afraid I am going to get fired every time something new doesn’t work out, I’ll never know the best way to help our student. Sometimes its trial and error… Personally, I am very forgiving. If a member of my team screws up. I am like ‘what’d you learn? Ok then, moving on.’

Participants acknowledged their personal beliefs and behaviors as having a role in cultivating resilience, more so than with the previous research question involving challenging resilience. Positivity, choice, growth focus, having a strong sense of self, and coping strategies were mentioned as ways to cultivate resilience. For instance, Sue said, “I think it would be hard to be resilient if you were closed minded, being open minded and having flexibility really helps me.” Vivian added, “Having a strong sense of self, really knowing yourself that is helpful to overcoming.” Gram noted, “I am just a positive guy, I don’t let a lot get under my skin. I know that is helpful.” Six participants reported reflecting on something positive as a way of building resilience. Kathy summed it up best by saying:

I have boxes of cards. I have a drawer in my office that has cards. When I have a hateful student or parent, or I just cannot believe what just happened, I have to flip through them. It reminds me why I do this job. It reminds me I am capable of doing this job.

Summary

Through a substantial amount of data, three primary themes emerged from the conceptual framework categories as being important to resilience: (1) Identity matters: The impact of belief on behavior (2) Upward and downward spirals: How environment and emotion intertwine, and (3) We are all in this together: The role of coworker
connection. The theme of identity matters explored the relationship between belief and behavior. Coping practices and other participant behaviors, such as leading and connecting, were strongly related to participant identities of hard workers, their core values of learning and growth, and their overall positive outlook. Upward and downward spirals demonstrated the connection between environments and emotions, and in some cases behavior. Findings indicated that downward spirals often were more difficult to break, usually requiring some environmental change in order to make a difference. Upward spirals were less prominent, but the relationship between work satisfaction and positive work environments was overwhelmingly strong. Finally, the theme of we are all in this together demonstrated the importance of coworker connection, which was evident in all participant interviews, regardless of environment or work satisfaction.

These themes, along with the conceptual framework categories, were utilized to answer the research questions. The findings indicated that mid-level student affairs professionals viewed resilience as the ability to face obstacles head on, while maintaining a positive attitude and a focus on growth and learning from the difficult circumstance. This belief influenced participant behaviors. Mid-level professionals assumed new challenges; they focus on doing the work, and learning from the experience. The primary risk factor was a negative environment with unrealistic workloads and an organizational culture that did not support staff. The primary protective factor was strong coworker connection. Figure 4 summarizes the findings from each step of the data analysis process. Finally, chapter five will explore findings in relation to the literature, discuss recommendations based on the findings, and suggest directions for future research.
Conceptual Framework Categories
Initial coding led to six conceptual framework categories: belief, behavior, emotion, environment, cause of stress, and outcome.

Research Themes
Three themes emerged from the conceptual framework categories. These themes revealed three factors critical to the resilience process: participants’ beliefs influence on their behavior, the environments influence on emotions, and coworker connection.

Research Questions
The themes and conceptual framework categories were used to answer the research questions. Finding indicate mid-level student affairs professionals believe in growing and learning from their challenges, demonstrate resilience through direct action and emotion management, and both environment and personal beliefs cultivate and challenge resilience.

Resilience Definition
From the research question findings a definition of resilience specific to mid-level student affairs professionals emerged. They defined resilience as the ability to maintain a positive attitude and to focus on growth while facing challenges head on. The primary risk factor was a negative environment with unrealistic workloads and an organizational culture that did not support staff. The primary protective factor was strong coworker connection.

Figure 4. Overview of data analysis and findings at each stage.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Cultivating resilience in students has long been a primary goal of educators; with an increase in student mental health issues and retention concerns, this topic has become even more important in higher education in the last 10 years. The majority of research on resilience has continued to focus on development in students or response to high-level trauma, with some high-stress work-place resilience work emerging (Aldwin, 2007; Masten, 2001; Seery et al., 2010; Silver, 2010). However, because individuals cannot teach that which they do not know (Gu & Day, 2007), research should consider the role of resilience in student affairs professionals. Furthermore, exploring the resilience process as a whole was important; to break it down into parts is to “scrub it of the very concepts that make it so important” (Brown, 2015. p. XXV).

Therefore, this phenomenological study sought to ascertain and describe professional resilience for mid-level student affairs professionals. Using participant journal responses and interviews, the lived experiences of 20 mid-level student affairs professionals was captured. The data were coded resulting in 54 codes across six conceptual framework categories. Three themes emerged from the data related to participant resilience. Ultimately, the data indicated that for mid-level professionals, resilience is the ability to face challenges while maintaining a positive outlook and focusing on growth and learning. Personal beliefs, the environment, and social connections all played a major role in the resilience process. This study will add to the
body of resilience research and fill a gap in literature on the specific population of mid-
level professionals through an examination daily stress versus trauma. This chapter
reviews the findings and implications of the study, discusses the connection to the
literature, presents recommendations, and suggests areas for future research.

**Study Finding and Connection to the Literature**

This study found that mid-level student affairs professionals were very passionate
about student learning. They reported that student learning was their purpose, their
priority, and their mission. On the whole, participants were very positive, growth
oriented, and content in their roles. They faced their problems head on and were proactive
in attempting to prevent future problems. Participants recognized the value of their
coworkers and often made a conscious effort to connect and to be generous. The findings
also revealed that participants experienced difficulty in directly describing their coping
mechanisms, though they easily recounted their handling of problems. Additionally, the
role of the environment emerged as a larger than anticipated influence on resilience.

Three distinct themes emerged from the research: (1) Identity matters: The impact of
belief on behavior; (2) Upward and downward spirals: How environment and emotions
intertwine; and (3) We are all in this together: The role of coworker connection. The
following sections examine the themes and their relationship to the literature, as well as
explore implications of the finding.

**Identity Matters: The Impact of Belief on Behavior**

Data revealed a strong connection between participant beliefs and behavior. All
individuals discussed their personal identities, values, and general outlook. Beliefs were
related to how mid-level professionals coped in difficult situations, how they connected
with others, and how they lead their departments. Previous research on resilience has indicated that certain personality traits are a protective factor in the resilience process. Luther et al. (2000) described resiliency by stating that it “encompasses a set of traits reflecting general resourcefulness and sturdiness of character, and flexibility of functioning in response to varying environmental circumstances” (p. 546).

Participants displayed personal characteristics consistent with these resiliency traits and certainly embodied the sturdiness of character in their consistency of responses. Participants’ beliefs rarely misaligned with their reported behaviors. Furthermore, they prided themselves on learning, growing, and being flexible and open-minded; all traits related to personality protective factors. Additionally, self-efficacy and self-confidence are known to be protective factors connected to personality traits (Benight & Cieslack, 2011). While not as prominent as the other traits, over half of the participants spoke about their belief that they could effect change or have a positive impact; six specifically described themselves as confident. For those who did not speak about this concept directly, their journal responses indicated their belief in self-efficacy through their direct actions to remedy the situations they faced.

Finally, the use of situation-appropriate coping strategies is a behavior-based protective factor (Aldwin, 2007). Participants regularly engaged in direct action and problem solving when facing challenges; they also used reappraisal, catharsis, and distraction to manage their emotions. They consistently described selecting an appropriate strategy for their problems. However, they were unable to easily answer the direct question, “How do you cope?” This was one of the more problematic findings. Student affairs professionals are educators, mentors, and role models. As stress is a given
for a college student and fellow student affairs professionals, mid-level professionals
need to be able to explain how they cope. While self-reports indicated they possessed the
skill, which acted as a protective factor for resilience, being able to articulate it would
allow them to share their approach with students who are in need of coping skills.

**Upward and Downward Spirals: How Environment and Emotions Intertwine**

A surprising number of participants reported on negative environments, perhaps
due to the framework of the study. As a profession that prides itself on inclusivity,
education, wellness, and ethics, it appeared that student affairs professionals were not
proficient at creating this for one another. Research in K-12 education has shown that
negative environments with heavy workloads and a culture that is unsupportive of staff
are a risk factor in the resilience process (Beltman et al., 2011; Day, 2008; Gu & Day,
2007). These findings held consistent across higher education environments. Every
participant spoke about stress and negative emotion as a result of unrealistic workloads.
Furthermore, numerous individuals reported on unsupportive environments in which they
were not valued, and seven reported openly hostile environments. These environments
included hierarchal models with staff on the bottom, a focus on finance rather than
development, and poor leadership from direct supervisors.

Moreover, K-12 research has shown that negative environments may not have
driven teachers from the profession if they possessed personal protective factors, but it
may have caused them to change jobs. This finding also was consistent with mid-level
student affairs professionals, with four participants mentioning change of jobs as a result
of poor environments. Downward spirals were difficult to break; individuals’ personal
beliefs and behaviors generally were not sufficient. Direct intervention, such as a change of position, a leadership change, or a change of culture, typically was required.

Conversely, K-12 research has shown caring and supportive environments, the promotion of high standards, and opportunities for meaningful engagement that serve as environmental protective factors (Henderson & Milestein, 1996; Masten et al., 2009). Again, this held true in higher education environments. Participants related having the opportunity to work on passion projects, feeling like a valuable member of the team, and having the resources to perform their job as contributing to positive environments and overall work satisfaction. However, the positive environments received less attention. Individuals were less likely to attribute the positive environment to their positive feelings; rather, they tended to attribute positive feelings to their beliefs. This indicated that, while positive environments are a protective factor of resilience, participants took it for granted as a part of the processes.

**We are all in this Together: The Role of Coworker Connection.**

Finally, strong connection between coworker support and resilience was expected as a result. Social support, real or perceived, is one of the primary protective factors in the resilience process (Seery et al., 2010). Furthermore, seeking social support is a common coping strategy regardless of cause of stress (David & Suls, 1999). K-12 research has shown that teachers who have role models, are willing to ask for help, and regularly connect with coworkers on a social level are more successful in their roles. Again, similar results were found for mid-level student affairs professionals. They frequently spoke of turning to colleagues for support, asking for help, and looking to role models or mentors for guidance. Professionals fell short, however, in creating intentional
social connection. They were generous with their time when a coworker needed assistance or in being a team player; however, they appeared to take more than they actually gave. Participants rarely discussed making intentional connection; in fact, some mentioned limiting their social interactions due to workload. This strategy for managing workload stress may have been counterproductive, as social connection was overwhelmingly related to the resilience process. Rather, professionals should consider non-time consuming ways to maintain the connection.

**Conceptual Framework Categories Applied to the Research Questions**

The conceptual framework was useful in sorting data and providing a structure for analyzing the data and identifying patterns. However, there was often overlap in the categories for the personal characteristics: behavior, belief, and emotion. For instance, the belief of hard worker often overlapped with specific behaviors. Furthermore, the way society as a whole often interchanges the words ‘think’ and ‘feel’ made it difficult to distinguish beliefs from emotions, thus these statements were frequently coded into both categories. Given the overlap between categories, the collapse of these three constructs into a single personal characteristics construct in previous research is understandable. However, dividing the personal characteristics into the three distinct categories allowed for subtle differences in the patterns to emerge and provided a greater depth to the findings.

The themes revealed the relationships between the conceptual framework categories that provided evidence for answering each of the research questions.

1. How does the phenomenon of resilience influence professional practice?
2. How do student affairs professionals demonstrate resilience?
3. How is resilience challenged in the professional setting?

4. How is resilience cultivated in the professional setting?

Research question one sought to identify how the phenomenon of resilience influenced professional practice. Evidence for this question was drawn from theme one and the strong influence of belief, specifically personal identity, on behavior. The beliefs participants held about themselves and the phenomenon of resilience revealed that for mid-level student affairs professionals, resilience is the ability to maintain a positive outlook, keep trying, and learn and grow from challenges. Participants’ beliefs about themselves, specifically their personal identities and core values, inspire professional resilience. Participants that identified as hard working, having a positive outlook, and valuing education most effectively dealt with the daily stress of their positions. Participants spoke with passion about not giving up, looking for another way, and always keep trying.

These ideas were also a part of their core characteristics and influenced their demonstration of resilience in research question two. Findings for research question two were also drawn from theme one, as well as theme three. The findings revealed that professionals demonstrate resilience through hard work, purposeful problem solving, and the use of positive coping strategies to manage distress. These behaviors reinforce professionals’ beliefs, thus contributing to positive future behaviors. Furthermore, when mid-level professionals use the appropriate coping strategies, they are able to maintain a growth and learning focus and demonstrate resilience for others, which is critical to the overall resilience process. Mid-level professionals count on coworkers for social support, and demonstrate resilience through nourishing those relationships and by helping others.
Ultimately, mid-level professionals demonstrate resilience in their ability to keep looking for new solutions in the face of difficult challenges, all while maintaining a positive outlook.

Finally, answers for questions three and four were primarily derived from theme two. A large factor in cultivating or challenging resilience was the professional environment. Negative environments challenged resilience. These environments often consisted of excessive workloads, unrealistic expectations, conflicts with coworkers and supervisors, lack of support or resources, lack of recognition or appreciation, and organizational values that did not align with personal values. The other factors that challenged resilience were a lack of personal-agency and feeling a lack of control over stressors. Alternatively, positive environments helped cultivate resilience. These environments included access to mentors and role models, supportive leadership, positive relationships with coworkers, sufficient resources, and opportunities for positive contributions. Additionally, individuals often credited their own beliefs with contributing to resilience; positive outlook, choice, and core values were viewed as a helpful part of the resilience process.

Recommendations

The following section synthesizes the findings into recommendations for professional associations, graduate training programs, and institutions and individuals.

Recommendations for Professional Associations

Professional associations should provide targeted training for the variety of mid-level roles and responsibilities. While not the purpose of the study, distinct differences surfaced in mid-level roles and their needs based on responsibilities. There were
distinctions between professionals who were mid-level in their department compared to professionals who were mid-level within the broader university. As the authority level increased, less direct interaction occurred with students, but responsibility for influencing the environment increased.

Professional associations are focusing more attention on mid-level work. For instance, ACPA has created a mid-level community of practice, but the position is still broadly defined as anyone with more than five years of experience and not serving as a senior student affairs officer, it does not distinguish between authority levels (ACPA, 2015). Professional associations need to examine the varying roles and levels of responsibilities of mid-level professionals based on authority level. They need to address the broad range of needs for mid-level professionals in order to provide appropriate training opportunities for creating positive culture, staff enrichment, and fostering social connection based specifically on authority level.

Professional associations should advocate for environment change. Professional associations tend to focus research initiatives on student development; they should expand their initiatives to healthy college environments for students, staff, and faculty. With one population as the sole focus, the environment becomes unbalanced; thus, it creates the negative organizational cultures often reported by professionals. Furthermore, professional associations should serve as advocates for realistic workloads to impact environmental change. CAS Professional Standards (2015) provided guidance for human resource needs, but they are vague to accommodate varying size institutions. Furthermore, specialized professional associations, such as National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), offer caseload recommendations for academic advisors.
However, even NACADA acknowledges these recommendations are based on institutional size, advising approach, and additional responsibilities of advisors (Robbins, 2013). Nearly all participants spoke about heavy workloads and being expected to regularly work more than 40 hours per week. Because position requirements vary, it is difficult to create universal workload recommendations. However, at minimum, professional associations should advocate that professionals are not regularly expected to work more than 40 hours a week to complete their job duties.

*Development of shared values.* There are numerous guiding documents that outline behavior and value expectations for student affairs professionals. The ACPA and NASPA Professional Competencies (2015) provide the most current, universally accepted, and comprehensive expectations for the profession. However, they are extensive and hard to briefly summarize. Furthermore, ACPA has posted Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs (2013). Again, these provide a good starting point for shaping behavior, but these are primarily student engagement focused. They do not address the identity and values that drive behavior.

The American Psychological Association provides a good framework for sharing their values and expectations. In their Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2010), their five guiding principles are briefly outlined in the preamble, followed by in-depth behavior expectations and competencies. The ACPA and NASPA competencies could adopt a similar framework by adding a short distinct values statement at the beginning of the competencies. This statement should address the personal and professional values and beliefs all student affairs professionals should have in order to be
successful in the field. Given the strong connection between belief and behavior, this could be a positive behavior motivator.

*Make resilience a foundational competency in the ACPA and NASPA professional competencies.* In the recent revision to the professional competencies, resilience was moved from a foundational to an intermediate competency (ACPA & NASPA, 2010, ACPA & NASPA, 2015). While resilience develops over time, new professionals need to possess at least a basic understanding of this construct. The move of the competency is problematic, as entry-level professionals have the most direct contact with students, and they need to be able to demonstrate this skill from day one of professional employment. Moving it to an intermediate skill indicates that it may not be developed within a graduate program.

**Recommendations for Graduate Training Programs**

*Graduate training programs need to teach stress and coping theory.* Participants attended more than 10 different graduate programs, yet none recall being taught stress and coping theory as a part of their program. When asked directly, nearly all professionals struggled to describe how they coped. Given the prevalence of these topics with students and fellow professionals, an introduction to the constructs would aid in educational conversations. Graduate programs regularly provide counseling or helping skills classes. This information could be presented within that class. Lazarus’ and Selye’s work on stress and coping should be included, as both of these authors are foundational in the field and focus on types and cause of stress and the selection of appropriate coping methods. Learning should be done through both case study and self-reflection, so students can learn to apply to others and themselves.
Graduate training programs need to be intentional with shaping identity. The findings indicated that personal identity was a primary influence of behavior; furthermore, change-based research has shown that change will not occur if it is not aligned with identity (Heath & Heath, 2007). Thus, graduate programs have a responsibility to ensure that they contribute to shaping personal identities that will serve the individuals and the profession. For instance, teaching programs that value social interactions, seeking assistance from others, and the development of an optimistic outlook, produce teachers that are more likely to stay in the field (Gu & Day, 2007). The results of this study indicated that certain identities and beliefs, such as having personal agency and having a positive outlook, were associated with the resilience process. These beliefs can be cultivated through in-class lectures and out-of-class mentorships, and they may likewise contribute to cultivating an identity that is beneficial to the resilience process.

Graduate training programs should teach career choice as an alternative for calling. Half of the participants spoke of choosing student affairs as a profession, whereas four viewed it as a calling. Those who viewed it as a choice also had greater personal agency in other areas. Self-efficacy and personal agency are hallmarks of resilience, and reinforcing the career as a professional choice, rather than a calling that must be followed, lays the groundwork for developing agency throughout the career.

Graduate programs should focus more on environmental development. Leadership certainly is important, but is often viewed as positional, as much as instructors attempt to teach otherwise. Curriculum should be expanded to focus on healthy environments and behaviors that positively contribute to the work environment,
regardless of positional level. Multidisciplinary research on work environments, such as from industrial psychology and business, could introduce the importance of staff connection, open communication, positive working relationships, and managing up (Warr, 2007). These skills would be useful to new professionals and would provide a framework for professional success as they are promoted to mid-level roles.

**Recommendations for Individuals and Institutions**

*Institutions and individuals need to develop realistic workloads.* All participants reported stress caused by unrealistic workloads, and nearly all discussed the need to work additional hours or bring work home to manage their workload. Not only should institutions ensure they are properly staffed and communicate expectations to employees, but employees need to be advocates for their own work-life balance.

*Institutions and individuals need to foster social connection and appreciation.* Social connections are critical to resilience. Institutionally, formal programs should exist to create opportunities for coworker connection, as well as opportunities for informal relationships. The concept of role models and mentors was prevalent in the data on social connection. These relationships were strongest when formed organically, but structured settings were beneficial in making the introductions, especially when individuals are new to an institution. Institutions that do not formally offer connection or mentorship programs should create a culture that allows this to occur naturally. Small gestures, such as allowing staff the opportunity to have working lunches with colleagues or participate in socially-oriented events, create an environment of connection that benefit staff. Additionally, numerous participants mentioned recognition and appreciation or, more specifically, the lack there of. In addition to formal recognition programs, institutional
leadership needs to encourage senior-level leaders to recognize and support their departments’ staffs and be a role model of this behavior.

Individuals assume the majority of the responsibility in creating appropriate social connections. Seeking out mentors, including peer mentors, and taking time to connect with coworkers on a personal level are important to work satisfaction. Participants were generous with their time in providing help, but only 10 discussed behaviors that intentionally formed connections. Taking a few moments to talk about non-work related matters, participating in work social events, or writing a thank you card were given as examples of connecting. Taking a few moments in the week to ensure professionals give of themselves to coworkers can create more positive environments overall.

**Directions of Future Research**

This study provided a glimpse into the lived experiences of mid-level professionals in relation to the phenomenon of resilience; three themes were revealed. Research looking deeper into those areas could provide a better understanding of the phenomenon. First, negative environments were more prevalent than expected, and would be a target area for future study. Large-scale quantitative environmental scans could be helpful in capturing the culture in which professionals work. This environmental data could be correlated with personality focused resiliency instruments, allowing the relationship between the environment and resiliency to be studied in further depth.

Second, identity’s influences of behavior should be studied further. Positive attitude and self-agency were prevalent participant identities. A deeper look into the development of these two traits may provide insight on their specific role in the resilience process, as well as the educational environment as a whole. Moreover, in K-12
educational research, the belief areas of optimism, hope, and gratitude have been shown to be connected to resilience (Furlong, Rich, Gilman & Scott, 2014). Research exploring these specific constructs in relation to resilience could provide additional insight into the behavior-identity connection, and could influence the way in which graduate programs work to shape student identity.

Additionally, because of the strong connection of identity and behavior to the overall resilience process, resilience could be explored through the lenses of social identity development theories. Social identity theories explain how individuals’ social identities affect other aspects of their lives (Evans, et al., 2010). Research in this area could explore how the development of social identities related to ethnicity, race, culture, gender, or sexual orientation impact beliefs around resilience, thus influencing behavior. Furthermore, a deeper look at family of origin stories could provide increased insight into belief development around resilience.

A third area of further study would be on emotion. As was mentioned in the findings, emotion was not easily discussed by participants. Future research should explore why emotion was not a prevalent topic in relation to resilience, in order to provide insight on how to make emotion a less taboo topic in academia. Future research should also explore the feeling of stress in relation to the resilience process to provide additional insight into the emotional construct of the resilience process. Furthermore, future research should explore the appropriate balance between self-care to prevent emotional burnout and engaging in behaviors that promote a resilient environment.

Fourth, this study relied exclusively on self-reports to measure behavior; the addition of observations would provide an even greater understanding of how behavior
contributes to the resilience process. Additionally, a closer look at negative case analysis, or a study of the non-resilient professionals that persist can show what contributes to the lack of resilience and if they are causing harm to the environment or students they serve. Finally, a follow-up with participants on their experiences following participation in the study would show if the opportunity to reflect on the process of resilience shaped any of their interactions over the year.

**Conclusion**

As indicated at the onset of this study, a consistent definition for resilience was not found in the literature, but three common elements were: positive adaptation, adversity, and risk and protective factors. This study defined resilience as positive adaptation to adversity. Positive adaptation initially included wellness, being self-directive, self-reflective and self-aware, maintaining integrity, and having a passion for work, whereas adversity was considered everyday stressors. Additionally, risk and protective factors were examined.

This study provided insight into the environments and traits that promote resilience in mid-level student affairs professionals. As the study progressed, the data revealed a more precise common definition of resilience by mid-level participants. They defined resilience as the ability to maintain a positive attitude and to focus on learning and growth while facing challenges head on. Maintaining a positive attitude and growth and learning became mid-level professionals’ primary evidence of positive adaptation. Other positive adaptation behaviors also were evident; many participants discussed processing, problem solving, relaxation, and exercise as effective techniques for managing stress. Additionally, positive adaptation was evident in their emotions and
beliefs, their passion for their jobs and their values. Their stressors were disagreement with institutional values, institutional change, lack of control, excessive workloads, and personal trauma.

The risk and protective factors for mid-level student affairs professionals’ resilience process aligned with previous research on other populations, yet manifested with their own nuances. Personal identity as hard worker, valuing education, and a positive outlook are traits that can be cultivated to contribute to positive coping strategies. Coworker connection was the most common protective factor and a vital component of the resilience process. It is one environmental characteristic that can be easily cultivated. The most surprising finding was the risk factor of negative environments and the prevalence at which it appeared, as well as the disassociation of positive environments on positive emotion. An organizational culture unsupportive of staff and unrealistic workloads contribute to burnout and challenging the resilience process.

Students should always be at the heart of what student affairs professionals do, but professionals cannot dismiss their own wellbeing for the wellbeing of others. If they are too tired, burned out, stressed, or depressed to make a difference, it will be the students that suffer. Making the effort to change the environment, cultivate coworker relationships, and curate positive attitudes will not detract from their ability to educate—to build resilience, but it will improve it.
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APPENDIX A

Intake Interview Protocol

Introduction:
First of all thank you for interest in participating in this study. I appreciate you giving up a little of your time to discuss your possible participation. As you probably know from previous email I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs working on my dissertation.

This call will take about 10 minutes of your time and we discuss participant criteria, study protocol, and next steps if you are eligible and interested in participating.

Study protocol brief
In the email arranging this phone call I attached the informed consent. If we determine you are eligible and interested in participating I will review the full protocol. But to be respectful of your time, I will only briefly summarize it now. The study looks at resiliency in mid-level professionals. It will take about 3 hours of your total time, but will be spread out over several weeks. And you will receive a $25 gift card for your participation.

The first phase of the study will involve the collection of daily journals for one week. These prompts will take about 15 minutes per day. Then over the summer I will conduct a follow up interview with you, which will last about an hour.

At this time can we review the participant criteria to determine your eligibility? Yes or No?

Participant Criteria:
- Are you currently employed full-time at an institution of higher education? Yes or No?
- Have you been working professionally for at least 3 years? (student employment does not count) Yes or No?
- In your current position are you responsible for allocating resources to serve student learning/development/engagement OR have a supervisory role for someone that does? Yes or No?

Option A: Not eligible: It seems as though you are not eligible because (explain why they aren’t eligible). I truly appreciate your interest. Can I answer any questions for you at this time?
Option B: It appears that you are eligible to participate in the study. I would like to collect just a little more information about you to verify that. I would prefer to collect this information now, so that it is not connected with your email, journals, or follow up interview in order to protect your identity should you chose to participate. Collecting this information does not commit you to participating. Would that be all right? Yes or No?

Work History
Do you mind answering a couple work history questions? Yes or No? Please remember you can decline to answer any question.
- How many years have you been employed in a full-time capacity in higher education?
- What is your current position title?
- How many years have you been in this position?
- Can you please briefly summarize your primary duties?

Thank you so much.

Demographics
At this time I would like to ask a few demographic questions. Would that be ok? Yes or No? Please remember you can decline to answer any specific question.
- Age
- Gender
- Educational background/Degrees obtained

Thank you for that information. We are almost finished. I would just like to review a couple aspects of the study protocol a little further and see if you are still interested.

You have already received the informed consent, which asks you to respond electronically with your consent. This explains the purpose of the study, your rights as participants, and the safe guards in place to protect your privacy.

I want to explain just a couple things about this study.

As I previously stated, the first part will include journal collections of six prompts to be completed over 10 days. These prompts will be sent to you in a single email and you will click on the link to respond to a specific prompt. Each of the prompts will be similar. They will ask 2 open-ended questions about your most bothersome events of the 2014-2015 academic year and how you responded, and 4 multiple-choice questions about the event and your response. Every effort to protect your privacy will be made, but you are also welcome to use pseudonyms or generic terms such as student or coworker within the prompts. It is very important for the integrity of the study to collect this data during the academic year and for it to be collected consecutively over one week.
The second part of the study will be an interview preferably conducted in person. This will be conducted over the summer. It will be recorded and transcribed; all identifying details will be removed.

Do you have any questions about the study protocol or your rights as a participant?

I ask that you please review the informed consent and respond electronically, but if you think you are interest in participating I would like to collect some contact information at this time. Again, I would like to collect it now so that it is not connected with your email, journal responses, or interview in order to further protect your identity. Collecting this information does not commit you to participating. Is this alright? Yes or No?

Contact Information

Please remember you can decline any specific questions.

- At this time are you willing to select a pseudonym? Yes or No?
  - What would you like it to be?

- At this time are you willing to identify an email I can contact you at for the study? Yes or No?
  - What email would you like me to contact you at moving forward?

- At this time are you willing to identify a phone number I can contact you at for the study?
  - What phone number would you like me to contact you at moving forward?

- At this time are you willing to identify a week that the journal prompts will be completed?
  - Can you please select a week you would like to receive the daily prompts?
    It is preferable to start on a Monday and for it to be an “average” week in terms of your workload.

*If the participants decline to answer any of the questions, I will ask if it is alright to follow up after they submit the informed consent.

Thank you for your time, I really appreciate your interest. The next step will be for you to thoroughly review the informed consent and respond electronically with your willingness to participate. Once that is received you will receive your journal prompts in the week you selected (or I will follow up to collect the additional information once the informed consent is received).
APPENDIX B

Recruitment Email Examples

Recruitment Email Sent to List Servs

Hello,

Some of you may know me as a fellow [SAHE Alumni, CPAC Member, etc…], but I am also working on my Ph.D. at UCCS and in the process of completing my dissertation. I am looking for some mid-level student affairs professionals to help with research for my dissertation on resilience. You need to have been employed full-time for 3 years and working currently at a higher education institution in the State of Colorado.

Your participation would be invaluable, as there has been very little research done on resilience as it relates to student affairs professionals. To compensate you for your time you will receive a $25 gift card to a local dining establishment.

Your participation in this study would include responding to daily journal prompts and a follow-up phone interview. The journal prompts would be for one week and should take no more than 15 minutes per day. The interview would occur after the semester was over. So, the time commitment would be fairly spread out.

If you have any interest in participating, please contact me at aallee@uccs.edu and I will provide you with more information.

Thank you for your consideration!

Amanda Allee
Referral Recruitment Email Sample

Hello,

A mutual colleague, [Name], referred me to you. I am working on my Ph.D. at UCCS and in the process of completing my dissertation, and he/she thought you might be a good contact for me.

I am looking for study participants that are mid-level student affairs professionals who have been employed full-time for 3 years and working currently at a higher education institution in the State of Colorado.

Your participation in this study would include responding to daily journal prompts and a follow-up interview. The journal prompts would be for one week and should take no more than 15 minutes per day. The interview would occur after the semester was over. So the time commitment would be fairly spread out. Your participation would be invaluable, as there has been very little research done on resilience as it relates to higher education professionals. To compensate you for your time you will receive a $25 gift card to a local dining establishment.

Please know your participation would be completely confidential and is strictly voluntary, while [name] was kind enough to refer you to me, I will not disclose whether or not you choose to participate.

If you have any interest in participating, please contact me at aallee@uccs.edu and I will provide you with more information.

Thank you for your consideration!

Amanda Allee
APPENDIX C

Journal Protocol

Pseudonym:

Journal Prompts:

1. Describe the most bothersome event or issue from the 2014-2015 academic year that involved a coworker or supervisor.
2. Describe the most bothersome event or issue from the 2014-2015 academic year involved a student or group of students.
3. Describe the most bothersome event or issue from the 2014-2015 academic year that involved institutional policy, protocols, or politics.
4. Describe an on-going bothersome event or issues from the 2014-2015 academic year.
5. Describe any bothersome event or issue from the 2014-2015 academic year that you have not yet described in your journals. This particular event can be personal or professional.

Follow up questions will appear with each journal prompt:

Please describe how you managed this event (either in direct action or thought processing):

On a scale of 1-10 (1 = minimally bothersome and 10 = most bothersome), how troublesome was this event?

Was the event anticipated?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how long have you been aware of it?

Has this event occurred before this academic year?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how frequently?
APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

The interview process will be open-end and semi-structured to allow constructs important to the participant to emerge in a natural dialogue. The interviews will begin with reviewing the participants’ rights as shared in the informed consent.

The primary questions will be:

1. What did you discover through the journaling process?
2. How does resiliency influence your professional practices?
3. How do you cultivate resiliency?
4. How is resiliency challenged in the professional setting?

Interview Prompts

Member checking:

- Clarifications from any survey information

Background information:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your department and your role in the university? And your day-to-day responsibilities?
- How long have you worked in higher education?
- What about your background (previous jobs, institutions, or incidents) in higher education has been most vital and shaped your current practice?
- What is the most challenging part of your current job?
- What is the most rewarding?

Behavior Characteristics:

- Are you generous with your co-workers? Can you give an example?
- How would your staff/your students describe you?
- Can you describe a change you have had to manage? How did you handle that change? Is this normal or are there other steps you usually take/don’t take?
- Failures happen. What is something you have failed out recently? How did you handle it? How do you handle failure overall?
- How quickly did you bounce back?
- When have you had to display resilience
- How do you think you cope with stress?
- What keeps you going?
Philosophical:

- What is resiliency to you?
- Do you think being resilient important in Student Affairs as a profession? How so?
- Do you think resilience is something that can be taught?
- How do you think resiliency cultivated in professional environment?
- How do think resiliency challenged in the professional setting?
- Have you ever tried to teach someone to be more resilient? What did you do? Do you think it helped?
- Role model on resilience

Work Satisfaction:

- Are you satisfied with your current position? Overall career choice?
- What, if anything, would you change?
- Do you have a worst day? What made you want to come back to work the next day?
- Have you ever thought about going somewhere else?
- Do you participate in any professional development or formal networking activities? Can you tell me about them?
- What is success to you
- When where you last elated to go to work?
APPENDIX E

IRB Approval

University of Colorado
Colorado Springs
Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects

Date: 4/6/2015

IRB PROTOCOL NO.: 15-165
Protocol Title: Resilience in Student Affairs Professionals
Principal Investigator: Amanda Allee
Faculty Advisor if Applicable: Dr. Sylvia Martinez
Application: New Application
Type of Review: Expedited 7
Risk Level: No more than Minimal Risk
Renewal Review Level (If changed from original approval) if Applicable: N/A No Change
This Protocol involves a Vulnerable Population: N/A (No Vulnerable Population)
Expires: 5 April 2018
*Note, if exempt: If there are no major changes in the research, protocol does not require review on a continuing basis by the IRB. In addition, the protocol may match more than one review category not listed.
Externally funded: ☐ No ☑ Yes
OSP #: Sponsor:

Thank you for submitting your Request for IRB Review. The protocol identified above has been reviewed according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations. The review category is noted above, along with the expiration date, if applicable.

Once human participant research has been approved, it is the Principal Investigator’s (PI) responsibility to report any changes in research activity related to the project:

- The PI must provide the IRB with all protocol and consent form amendments and revisions.
- The IRB must approve these changes prior to implementation.
- All advertisements recruiting study subjects must also receive prior approval by the IRB.
- The PI must promptly inform the IRB of all unanticipated serious adverse events (within 24 hours). All unanticipated adverse events must be reported to the IRB within 1 week (see 45CFR46.102(f)). Failure to comply with these federally mandated responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of the project.
- Review study with the IRB prior to expiration.
- Notify the IRB when the study is complete.

If you have any questions, please contact Research Compliance Specialist in the Office of Sponsored Programs at 719-255-3903 or irb@uccs.edu

Thank you for your concern about human subject protection issues, and good luck with your research.

Sincerely yours,

Sonja B. Braun-Sand, PhD
IRB Reviewer

www.uccs.edu/irb/compliance/ 1430 Austin Bluffs Parkway Colorado Springs, CO 80923 719-255-3521 phone 719-255-3700 fax
APPENDIX F

Contact Summary

Date:

Type of Contact:

Themes that emerged:

Reflection on contact:
## APPENDIX G

### Data Analysis Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Total Codes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td><em>Participants' actions or intentional inaction.</em></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting</td>
<td>Participants’ actions to form or strengthen relationships with coworkers.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping+</td>
<td>Participants’ actions taken to handle something difficult.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance+</td>
<td>A form of coping where participants accept that the problem had occurred, but that nothing could be done about it.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catharsis+</td>
<td>A form of coping where participants expressed emotions to reduce tension. Done through crying, laughter, or other means.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct action+</td>
<td>A form of coping where participants take specific action to resolve a problem.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change job+</td>
<td>A form of direct action where participants sought a different job.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraction+</td>
<td>A form of coping where participants take actions taken to avoid thinking about a specific problem.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of scenery+</td>
<td>A specific form of distraction where participants relocate or change surroundings. This could be simply getting outside or going on a vacation.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving+</td>
<td>A form of coping where participants plan to take action to resolve the problem.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive+</td>
<td>A form of problem solving where participants think about potential conflicts and plan ahead to avoid them.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing+</td>
<td>A form of problem solving where participants think over their problems often in conjunction with regulating their feelings.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Total Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reappraisal*</td>
<td>A form of coping where participants reevaluate a situation and reconsider the impact in light of new information, often to make things seem more bearable.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation*</td>
<td>A form of coping where participants engaged in behavior designed to promote relaxation.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-care*</td>
<td>A form of coping where participants take intentional actions to care for their physical, mental, or emotional health. This included exercise, massage, etc.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support*</td>
<td>A form of coping where participants seek assistance from others.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venting*</td>
<td>A form of coping where participants discuss their problems with someone to discharge negative emotion.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving*</td>
<td>Participants sharing time without the expectation of receiving something in return.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangible giving*</td>
<td>A specific form of giving that involved physical goods.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading*</td>
<td>Participants engaging in behaviors traditionally associated with leadership.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>The mental representations that comprise of participants' conscious thoughts, including their thoughts, ideas, or opinions individuals have about themselves, situations, or the environment.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>Participants’ belief that they had a choice in their outlook and identity.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core values</td>
<td>Participants' principles and standards that serve as guideposts for participants.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal identity</td>
<td>Concepts participants have about themselves, including their background and personal traits.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive outlook</td>
<td>Participants' positive point of view.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priorities</td>
<td>Condition that participants treated as important.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Total Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>The reason why participants do something.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cause of stress</em></td>
<td><em>Situations or circumstances that cause distress.</em></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional change</td>
<td>Change occurring within the institution or department.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of control</td>
<td>Situations or circumstances where participants did not have a great deal of control over the cause or outcome.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal trauma</td>
<td>Situations or circumstances that were not connected with work, but caused participants stress that affected their work.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values disagreement</td>
<td>Situations or circumstances that did not align with participants' personal values.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work load</td>
<td>Stress derived from excessive workload or unrealistic expectations.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Emotion</em></td>
<td><em>Participants' feelings about something, including their mood, temperament, and motivation.</em></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Participants' feeling of happiness within their career or environment.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged</td>
<td>Participants' feeling determined, hopeful, or confident.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Participants' feeling of anger or annoyance.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of respect</td>
<td>Participants' feelings of not being trusted, unsupported, or unappreciated.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Participants' feeling a desire or willingness to do something.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Participants' feeling of faith and reliability in others.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valued</td>
<td>Participants' feeling supported, useful, or worthwhile.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Environment</em></td>
<td><em>The surroundings or conditions in which the participants worked.</em></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworker connection</td>
<td>Relationships between coworkers.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>Supportive or encouraging family.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>Role models and mentors who impacted participants.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Total Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative environment</td>
<td>Any environmental circumstance deemed negative by participants or spoke about with a negative connotation. Includes negative organizational cultures.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departmental conflict</td>
<td>Conflict with coworkers or supervisor in a participant’s direct department. Includes poor leadership within the department.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination/hostile environment</td>
<td>Experiences of discrimination, harassment, or direct hostility from a supervisor or colleague.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support</td>
<td>Lack of support from direct supervisor, coworkers, or institution. Includes lack of resources.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>A focus on physical factors, such as office space.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive environment</td>
<td>Any environmental circumstance deemed to be positive by participants.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good leadership</td>
<td>Supervision that was supportive, encouraging, and fostered a positive work environment.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Appropriate resources.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Working together toward the same goal.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Appreciation and value</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome</strong></td>
<td>The outcome of difficult circumstances.</td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep trying</td>
<td>Participants notion that it is important not to give up, specifically mentioned in conjunction with resilience.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and growth</td>
<td>Participants focus on growth and learning as an outcome of difficult circumstances.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Codes that are italicized are the six conceptual framework categories. + = behaviors that are coded into the coping subcategory.
# APPENDIX H

**Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years in the field</th>
<th>Area of Work</th>
<th>Level Description</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Student Support Services</td>
<td>Senior-Department</td>
<td>Sense of humor. Dependable. Helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>Senior-Department</td>
<td>Hard worker. Resource. Supportive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conduct</td>
<td>Senior-Department</td>
<td>Firm and fair. Always trying to do better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Veteran Affairs</td>
<td>Mid-Department</td>
<td>Student-focused. Hard worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>Mid-Department</td>
<td>Direct and thorough. Innovative. Hard worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disney</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>Senior-Department</td>
<td>Empowering. Strong leader. Consistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>Mid-Department</td>
<td>Sense of humor. Hard worker. Proactive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Admissions</td>
<td>Mid-Department</td>
<td>Friendly. Caretaker. Helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>Mid-Department</td>
<td>Patient. Easy-going. Developmental.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>Executive-Department</td>
<td>Sense of Humor. Hardworking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKenzie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student Support Services</td>
<td>Senior-Department</td>
<td>Open. Boss lady. Helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>Residence Life</td>
<td>Mid-Department</td>
<td>Knowledgeable. Hard worker. Team player.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Years in the field</td>
<td>Area of Work</td>
<td>Level Description</td>
<td>Characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conduct</td>
<td>Senior-Department</td>
<td>Hard worker. Loyal. Task-oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Senior-Department</td>
<td>Detail-oriented. Helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>Mid-Department</td>
<td>Hard working. Kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>Residence Life</td>
<td>Mid-Department</td>
<td>Calm. Flexible. Advocate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7+</td>
<td>Career Services</td>
<td>Senior-Department</td>
<td>Adaptable. Mindful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Characteristics are derived from participant self-description questions. Not all characteristics are listed. + = Participants did not wish to disclose exact number of years, gave a range.