DISSERTATION

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

OF NEW STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT OF

NEW STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

In this phenomenological study, the author examined the experiences of how 13 new student affairs professionals made meaning of organizational commitment in the workplace. Using data collected from interviews, the findings offer insight into how student affairs supervisors can create an atmosphere conducive to employee commitment to their organization. The author used Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment as a framework. The thematic results were (a) personal connection, (b) supportive supervision, (c) workplace support among colleagues, (d) gratification from impacting students, (e) long hours, and (f) emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues. *Cultivated Relationships* was the essence that emerged from the study.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following section provides terminology to help readers understand the context of these terms in this study.

Organizational commitment: Meyer and Allen (1991) defined commitment as "a psychological state that (a) characterizes the employees' relationship with the organization, and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization" (p. 67).

Mindsets: Mindsets refers to the frame of mind or psychological state that compels an employee towards a course of action. It is either an emotional attachment, a sense of being locked in, or a belief in and acceptance of goals that drives the behavior of the individual related to commitment. Mindsets are what differentiate the various dimensions of the commitment models provided in this study such as affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Affective commitment: Meyer and Allen (1991) defined affective commitment as "the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (p. 67).

Continuance commitment: Meyer and Allen (1991) defined continuance commitment as "an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization" (p. 67).

Normative commitment: Meyer and Allen (1991) defined normative commitment as "a feeling of obligation to continue employment" (p. 67).

Antecedents: Antecedents are the external factors that influence an individual toward commitment. For this study, we describe antecedents that lead to the development of affective, continuance, or normative commitment within the Meyer and Allen's (1991) model.

Student affairs professionals: For this study, student affairs professionals were employees who had worked in the 1- to 3-year range in higher education. These employees worked in student services areas such as Greek life, orientation, leadership, volunteerism, and housing and residence life.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Student affairs professionals have a salient impact on students in higher education, so understanding the organizational commitment of employees in student affairs is important for supervisors in higher education. Supervisors want highly skilled and competent student affairs professionals. However, lack of employee commitment may have adverse effects on the mission, goals, and work outcomes of the overall organization. "Demanding schedule and work over-load may frequently be responsible for interpersonal and time conflicts which can reduce job satisfaction and increase stress" for student affairs professionals and cause them to leave the field or a specific institution (Anderson, Guido-De-Brito, & Morell, 2000, p. 99). Other reasons for leaving the student affairs field or the institution may include burnout as the result of long hours and stressful conditions, lack of professional development opportunities, unclear job expectations, conflict with supervisor, limited advancement opportunities, low level of pay, or a combination of these (Bender, 1980; Burns, 1982; Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006; Ward, 1995). Although these are the previous studies that relate specifically to this topic, most were done quite a while ago; so I want to learn whether the reasons provided previously are still relevant today. There is more work to be done in this area to identify the reasons new student affairs professionals leave the profession and, specifically, their institution.

In this chapter, I provide the background and the purpose for this study, identify the research questions, explain the significance of the study, and share my perspective as the researcher.

Background

Little research has been conducted on determining an employee's commitment to student affairs (Boehman, 2006), and most literature located is outdated. The literature that I found

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focuses mostly on reasons that student affairs professionals leave the student affairs field. Although my study focuses more on employee commitment to the institution, the following research is relevant because it reveals some factors that identify why professionals leave this field of work.

Bender (1980) conducted a quantitative study (republished in 2009) on job satisfaction with student affairs professionals with a range of positions and years of service. The professionals were selected from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Region II membership roster, which is derived from eastern states including Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, and also Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia. The research revealed that 66% of the participants were satisfied with, 16% were indifferent to, and 18% were dissatisfied with their jobs (Bender, 1980; Bender, 2009). From this study, the sample population in the 23- to 36-year-old age range were more dissatisfied with their jobs than the 37-year-old and older population. As for the participants' intentions to stay in the student affairs field for their career path, 36% indicated they would stay, 39% were indifferent, and 25% planned to pursue other career options (Bender, 1980; Bender, 2009). The study revealed a high level of satisfaction in the student affairs field; however, those who were most dissatisfied were the younger professionals. The dissatisfaction stemmed from limited opportunities for advancement and limited opportunities for input around institutional and student affairs decision-making (Bender, 1980; Bender, 2009).

Burns (1982) conducted a similar study of professionals who received their graduate degrees in the field from two large eastern universities. Burns (1982) reported that 61% stayed in the student affairs field; however, among those who were leaving the field, 47% were women, compared to 31% who were men. Salary, potential for advancement, and geographic location

were the top three reasons that participants left their work in student affairs. Participants were seeking more money, responsibility, and variety in potential non-student affairs positions. Burns (1982) recommended there was a strong need to diversify responsibilities and develop job training to combat professionals being locked into certain roles and to encourage professional growth. It is important for supervisors to engage employees in constant growth opportunities, which may have some effect on the organizational commitment of those employees to the profession and the institution.

Holmes, Verrier, and Chisholm (1983) examined the persistence of student affairs professionals upon graduation from their master's-degree programs. Holmes et al. (1983) reported that 60% of the 131 student affairs professionals surveyed withdrew from the field within their first 6 years of employment. The attrition rate for women after the first year was 84.5%, and it fell to 42.9% by the fifth year, which was higher than the men's attrition rate that went from 76.7% after the first year down to 46.9% by the fifth year. Unfortunately, this study did not explain the reasons these professionals left or why women were leaving faster than the men. However, it does bring attention to the fact that individuals are leaving their institutions and the student affairs field, so the question of why student affairs professionals are leaving needs to be explored.

Wood, Winston, and Polkosnik (1985) found that 68% of the 65 participants surveyed stayed in the student affairs field after 5 years after they graduated from their master's program. Factors that played a role for those who left the profession after 5 years included a higher need for autonomy, "freedom from fixed bureaucratic structure," geographic location, and frustration with limited independent decision making (Wood et al., 1985, p. 537).

Lorden (1998) suggested that burnout, unclear job expectations, low pay, limited advancement opportunities, and discrepancies between perceived expectations and job realities for those who enter the field were factors in job dissatisfaction leading to attrition in student affairs. The question that needs to be explored is what caused these issues, such as burnout, for example. There is a need to explore the *"why"* behind these reasons.

Rosser and Javinar (2003) conducted a quantitative study of 1,166 midlevel student affairs professionals' quality of work life with regard to morale, satisfaction, and intent to leave their student affairs positions. Although this study is focused on midlevel versus new professionals, it still provides some background information about why individuals leave the field. The midlevel student affairs professionals were defined as support personnel who reported to senior-level administrators, who in turn were directors and coordinators of student affairs, housing, admissions, placement, the registrar's office, counseling, or financial aid.

> The results indicate that the perception student affairs leaders have of their professional and institutional work life have a direct and significant impact on both their satisfaction and morale; that is, the quality of work life . . . is important to student affairs leaders and has a strong influence on their level of satisfaction, morale, and subsequently their intentions to leave. (Rosser & Javinar, 2003, p. 822)

Rosser and Javinar's (2003) study showed that student affairs professionals' perception of their professional and institutional work lives could affect their overall satisfaction and morale, and thus affect their decision to remain with or to leave an institution.

Another significant factor for organizational commitment may be the incongruency between the ideation and expectation of new professionals as they complete their graduate programs in comparison to the reality of their professional experience. Boehman (2007) explained,

> As current student affairs practitioners and graduate faculty train and socialize the next generation of student affairs professionals, the consistency between the ideal culture of student affairs and the actual culture of student affairs needs to be examined. To students

entering graduate preparation programs, student affairs work is about making a difference in the lives of college students and working in the vibrant atmosphere of a college campus. Student affairs practitioners and graduate faculty cultivate this ideal, but at the same time begin the socialization of the workaholic culture by creating expectations that long hours, low pay, and other sacrifices are the norm. This devaluation can in no way help in the formation of affective attachment, and it leads entry level professionals to question their commitment to a profession they see as a calling. (p. 321)

The incongruence between new professionals' expectations during the graduate-preparation programs and their entry into the workforce may bring cause to the organizational commitment issues.

Cilente, Henning, Jackson, Kennedy, and Sloane (2006) published a needs study on new student affairs professionals for the American College Personnel Association. Similar to Boehman's work, the participants in this study expressed frustration with the transition between graduate programs and their first position in the student affairs field because the reality of the work did not align with what was taught in the classroom during graduate school (Cilente et al., 2006). Another frustration was the lack of clear job expectations and limited advancement opportunities (Cilente et al., 2006).

Renn and Hodges' (2007) studied the experiences of new student affairs professionals who had recently graduated from their master's program. Transition in the workplace was a key element in participants' work experiences, particularly with relationships, fit, and competence (Renn & Hodges, 2007). The study raised the question about who is responsible to ensure a seamless transition between graduate school and the workplace (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Participants from the study expressed frustration with lack of synergistic supervision or guidance from their supervisors.

Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) looked into the attrition of new student affairs professionals. Their study revealed that attrition stemmed from limited knowledge of institutional culture and lack of "fit."

Buchanan's (2012) qualitative study revealed that salaries were important, a positive work environment was critical, and geography mattered for student affairs professionals. The participants were student affairs professionals who had worked in the field from 1 year to 6 years and were considered new employees.

Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, and Lowery (2016) conducted a study of student affairs employees who exited the profession. The results indicated that stress and burnout, noncompetitive salaries, attractive career alternatives, and the evening and weekend responsibilities were factors that led participants in this study to leave the student affairs field (Marshall et al., 2016). This study, along with the "30-year span of literature," has shown that "new professionals and mid-level/mid-career professionals were more likely to leave" the student affairs field (Marshall et al., 2016, p. 148). In summary, I gleaned a number of factors from the literature that reveal why professionals leave the student affairs field. Factors for leaving included limited advancement opportunities, limited decision-making input, low-level salary, burnout, geographic location, lack of job training, need for autonomy, unclear job expectations, and discrepancies between perceived expectations and job realities upon entry into the field.

Although this literature focused on factors pertaining to why student affairs professionals leave the student affairs field, the literature did not address how those professionals became committed or why they stayed committed; nor did it focus on student affairs professionals new to the field. Therefore, I take this study a step further to learn what makes new student affairs professionals committed not only to the student affairs field but also, and more specifically, to the institution.

Problem Statement

The attrition rate of new professionals in the student affairs field has been reported at between 50% and 60% within the employees first 5 years of employment (Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006), and that as many as 60% of student affairs professionals left the field within their first 6 years of employment (Holmes et al., 1983). Marshall et al. (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study that included 153 participants. The results of their study indicate that 41.7% of those participants had spent only 1 year to 5 years in the student affairs field before leaving, and 21.7% left the field after 8 years to 10 years. In total, "over 60% of participants left the student affairs field in 10 years or less of starting as new professionals" (Marshall et al., 2016, p. 152). Attrition rates are highest among new student affairs employees (Bender, 1980; Holmes et al., 1983; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Buchanan, 2012). It is critical that supervisors understand and address key experiences that contribute to institutional commitment, and the factors that affect retention of new student affairs professionals. The indication in the current literature is that sound staffing practices, combined with supervision and professional development for employees, have an impact on the quality of educational services provided to college students (Arminio & Creamer, 2001; Winston & Creamer, 1997). These research results further support the importance of investigating institutional commitment and retention of student affairs professions because constant employee turnover could adversely affect services to students.

Furthermore, the research conducted thus far has concentrated on the midmanagement level, and the research conducted on new student affairs professionals has mainly focused on employees who have been in their positions from 5 years to 6 years (Buchanan, 2012; Holmes et al., 1983; Ward, 1995; Wood et al., 1985). The Barham and Winston (2006) study is the only one that defined new professionals who were in the first 3 years of their student affairs career.

As such, there is a gap in the research that examines institutional commitment of student affairs professionals prior to the 5-year employment mark, in whether that mark is a little late to adequately affect employee institutional commitment, and in whether student affairs professionals with 1 year to 3 years of experience are lost at a similar attrition rate as that of student affairs professionals around the 5-year mark (Holmes et al., 1983; Wood et al., 1985). Additionally, there is a gap in the research regarding identified experiences that contribute to entry-level student affairs professionals (1 to 3 years in the position) being institutionally committed, and the signs that may reflect their lack of commitment to the institution and the student affairs field.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding about how new student affairs professionals made meaning of their organizational commitment through their lived experiences. For this study, a midmanagement-level supervisor is defined as an individual who is directly responsible for the supervision and evaluation of the new professional (Barnham & Winston, 2006). A new professional is defined as an individual who has been in the student affairs profession from 1 year to 3 years.

In this study, I examined the factors that served as antecedents to organizational commitment for 13 new student affairs professionals. The findings from this study contribute to the knowledge base for midmanagement-level student affairs supervisors, to support creation of a workplace environment conducive to new student affairs employees' organizational commitment.

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Research Questions

For supervisors to create a workplace conducive to organizational commitment, it is first important for professionals in the field to understand how new student affairs employees make meaning of their organizational commitment. To guide this study, the following research questions were used:

1. How do new student affairs professionals experience their role on campus?

2. What makes new student affairs professionals organizationally committed to their current institution?

3. What makes new student affairs professionals organizationally committed to the student affairs profession in general?

Delimitations

Delimitations are used in the research study to intentionally narrow the scope of the study and outline what is not included in it. I chose to recruit participants from 4-year public and private institutions who had worked in the student affairs profession from 1 year to 3 years. I did not include employees at community colleges or other professional, higher-education-related associations. The participants all had master's degrees in the higher-education field. The guiding questions focused on the participants' experiences in their respective new student affairs professionals' positions. I did not ask specific questions about participants' age, sexual orientation, gender identity, or race because I focused more on their experiences than their demographics.

Another delimitation was the recruitment of student affairs professionals from the functional areas of student activities: Greek life, orientation, leadership, volunteerism, and

housing and residence life, or a combination of those areas. I chose those areas because of my familiarity with them through my own work experience.

Limitations

This study was limited to 13 new student affairs professionals, so the information cannot be generalized beyond the participants in this study; however, it does provide the basis for expanded research. The other limitation is that the results of the study cannot be applied outside of the areas of Greek life, orientation, leadership, volunteerism, and housing and residence life because I only interviewed participants who worked in those functional areas. The student affairs profession can encompass many professionals outside of that scope, including, but not limited to, career planning, multicultural affairs, student conduct, health services, disability services and counseling.

I did not ask specific demographic questions. Because of that, I was not able to determine whether the self-reported experiences in the data results may have been related to the identities of specific participants, which reflects another limitation of this study.

Qualitative data can be gathered in many forms, such as interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 2008). In this study, most of the interviews had to be conducted by phone; so I was able to observe only three participants in their work environment. Thus, observations were limited for me to be able to collect data for this study.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it contributes to the knowledge base for midmanagement-level student affairs supervisors to help meet the needs of new student affairs professionals in the field. I selected the qualitative method to give a richer perspective on how new student affairs professionals make meaning of organizational commitment to the student

affairs field and their institutions, and to identify what factors contribute to commitment and retention of new student affairs professionals.

Boehman (2006) indicated that "a student affairs professional will remain committed to the profession if there is evidence of a supportive work environment, if the professional's satisfaction with the job in general remains high, and if the level of political activity within the organization is diminished" (p. 150). This study adds to the literature by revealing some of the factors that create a supportive work environment for new student affairs employees. Understanding the factors that positively affect organizational commitment for employees is salient for midlevel student affairs supervisors. Increased retention of employees may help mitigate the costs associated with constant turnover of new professionals.

Researcher's Perspective

I have been working in the student affairs field for almost twenty years. My experience ranges from housing and residence life to student conduct, Title IX, admissions, orientation, Greek life, and student activities. When I started this dissertation journey, I was at a director level that encompassed student activities, student organizations, Greek life, orientation, campus programming, student media, leadership, and volunteerism. In that director role, the staff I supervised encompassed one paraprofessional and five professional employees. When I first entered the profession, the focus was on student development. However, no one prepared me for the transition from working with students to supervising professional staff. It took me years to learn how to supervise the various types of employees who entered my life. Employees have different learning styles, personalities, and communication processes. Each individual views work through a different lens. My biggest challenge was making the transition to supervising these student affairs professionals.

Another major challenge I have experienced over the years was hiring young, entry-level professionals who would be committed not only to the profession but to the institution for a long time. As I entered the student affairs field, I was taught that new professionals starting a job will be in that position for about three years. The first year is where you learn everything, the second year is where you implement some initiatives, and the third year is where you see the outcomes of those initiatives. After those 3 years, it is time to start looking to move to the next level position. Now that I am in the supervisor role, I do not necessarily agree with that thought process. Quick turnover requires time, energy, money, and resources to replace and train professionals. Constant turnover in entry-level positions creates inconsistency for student support and a breakdown in communication with students. Although I believe in mentoring new professionals to help them advance in their careers, I see the value of individuals staying for more than 3 years.

I have seen a number of entry-level professionals come from the North, Midwest, or West geographic areas of our country to join my institution, which is located in the Southeast, and leave within 2 years to be closer to home or to leave the student affairs field altogether. In recent employee search processes, I find myself evaluating the candidates' ties to the community in addition to their skills, abilities, experiences, and educational training. I am looking at entry-level candidates with the idea in mind that they may stay for a longer period to serve the needs of the students, the department, and the institution. I want to see if these factors figure into my participants' views of commitment to their institution and to the profession.

I am committed to my institution, which is why the subject is so dear to my heart. I chose this student affairs profession because of my love for the students and knowledge that I make an impact in their lives. In turn, I believe it is also important to have a team of employees

who are organizationally committed to the student affairs profession and the institution for the overall good of the students, the department, and the institution. I chose this topic because I believe it is critical for supervisors to understand the complex dynamics of supervision when they are working with various types of employees within the organizational structure. As a supervisor, I need to know what makes employees organizationally committed to both the institution and the student affairs profession.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of organizational commitment was introduced in the organizational behavior literature beginning in the 1950s in an effort to explore the linkage between the employee and the organization. The thought process behind the research was the notion that committed employees would be more beneficial to the organization as a result of their potentially reduced absenteeism, increased performance, and reduced turnover (Mowday, 1998).

The purpose of this study is to provide the basis for a better understanding of how new student affairs professionals make meaning of their organizational commitment. This chapter includes a review of the literature pertaining to organizational commitment. Although the research is limited on this topic in relation to student affairs professionals, the literature on organizational commitment in general is vast. This chapter includes definitions, conceptual models, and some key related research around organizational commitment.

Definitions of Organizational Commitment

I found a number of organizational-commitment concepts in the literature; however, the term *commitment* has been difficult to define (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) explained that the problem appears to come from the fact that commitment has been used in the literature to describe two different perspectives: attitudes and behavior. That is, *attitudinal commitment* is how employees view their relationship with the organization; and *behavioral commitment* is how employees lock themselves into an organization and how they take action to deal with this problem (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Mottaz (1988) proposed that the definitions in the literature can be classified into one of these two categories. The following literature provides a

chronological perspective to show how, over the years, researchers have developed the concept of commitment.

Categorized as a behavioral commitment, Becker (1960) stated that commitment comes into fruition when a person makes side bets. A *side bet* is the idea that an individual makes a commitment to something based on an extraneous interest. For example, a person may not leave a job for a higher-paying position because he is shy 2 years of being vested for retirement. In essence, commitment comes from a line of action one choses that is associated with having satisfactory or rewarding outcomes. Investments are the stabilizing force that detours an individual from leaving an organization. Becker's definition of commitment becomes the foundation for a term later developed by researchers called *continuance commitment*, which is discussed in depth further along in this chapter. Continuance commitment is the concept that an individual commits to an organization because of his perceptions of the high costs associated with losing the organizational membership.

Categorized as attitudinal commitment, Kanter's (1968) research looks at the social system of organizational commitment, which involves the intersection of organizational goals and personal experiences. Basically, how much energy and loyalty will an individual give to an organization? "Commitment may be defined as the process through which individual interests become attached to the carrying out of socially organized patterns of behavior which are seen as fulfilling those interests, as expressing the nature and needs of the person" (Kanter, 1968, p. 500). Kanter (1968) hypothesized that groups who exist because of the commitment of their participants should be more successful if participants have *continuance commitment* (wish to remain), *cohesion commitment* (group solidarity), and *control commitment* (upholds norms and obeys group authority). Kanter's work is relevant because it is the first to look at the social

system in connection to an individual's organizational commitment. Like Becker's work,

Kanter's research is a foundation to later research developed on *affective* (cohesion) *commitment*

and continuance commitment, which I discuss further later in this chapter.

Buchanan (1974) came from an attitudinal commitment perspective and defined

commitment as the attachment based on goals and values of the organization and how one relates

to those goals and values. The results of Buchanan's (1974) study indicated that one's social

interactions with colleagues and supervisors significantly related to one's group cohesion and

attitudes toward the organization. Buchanan's definition is salient because it serves as a

foundation for the affective commitment that I explore further in this chapter.

Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) began to look at commitment from both an

attitudinal and behavioral perspective. Their definition has become one of the most widely used

definitions in the organizational commitment literature:

> *Organizational commitment* is defined in the present context in terms of the strength of
> an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. Such
> commitment can generally be characterized by at least three factors: (a) a strong belief in
> and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert
> considerable effort on behalf of the organization; (c) a definite desire to maintain
> organizational membership. (Porter et al., 1974, p. 604)

The three factors can be categorized respectively as *identification, involvement*, and

loyalty (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Buchanan, 1974). These characteristics mean that employees

want to be active participants in and make an impact on the organization, and to feel that they

have an important status (Bogler & Somech, 2004). Organizational commitment is the

connection to the entire organization, not just to the work itself, the position, or the people.

Continuing with the idea that there is a distinction between attitudinal and behavioral

commitment, Scholl (1981) defined commitment as "a stabilizing force that acts to maintain

behavioral direction when expectancy/equity conditions are not met and do not function"

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(p. 593). The notion behind this definition is that behavior is influenced by commitment and may lead to a certain action even if an individual's motives or attitudes conflict (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). In other words, commitment could affect behavior "even in the absence of extrinsic motivation and positive attitudes" (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 301). Thus, commitment is a distinguishable construct from other constructs such as motivation and target-relevant attitudes (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) defined commitment as an employee's psychological attachment to the organization and how much the individual "internalizes or adopts characteristics or perspectives of the organization" (p. 493). The authors developed a multidimensional conceptual framework based on the idea that commitment represents an attitude toward the organization. I explain their model more in depth later in this chapter.

As stated earlier, the organizational-commitment construct has been difficult to define, and there are many definitions in the literature. The definitions provided show how earlier research, such as Becker's (1960), looked at organizational commitment from a behavioral approach, based on how employees lock themselves into a certain organization and how they deal with that particular context. As research progressed, researchers began to look at organizational commitment from an attitudinal perspective, based on the way individuals view their relationship with the organization (Buchanan, 1974; Kanter, 1968; Porter et al., 1974). However, later researchers began to see commitment as a much more complex construct with a multidimensional perspective (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), which I discuss in-depth in the next section. Although these definitions are not an exhaustive list, they are some of those most referenced in the literature.

After reviewing all these varying definitions of organizational commitment, Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) posited that a commonality comes from all of the definitions: "that commitment (a) is a stabilizing or obliging force, that (b) gives direction to behavior" (p. 301), and "that the force is experienced as a *mind-set* (i.e., a frame of mind or psychological state that compels an individual toward a course of action)" (p. 303). In other words, commitment is the binding force that directs behavior.

These definitions lay the groundwork to shape and develop the conceptual organizational commitment models, which will be discussed in the next section. As we begin to look at these models, Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) stated that "the nature of the underlying mind-set" is what differentiates the various dimensions of commitment within the models (p. 303). In other words, the mindsets can take on varying forms "including desire, perceived cost, or obligation to continue a course of action" (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 308). In the next section, I discuss how the organizational commitment models developed over the years.

Organizational Commitment Models

I have provided definitions of organizational commitment from the literature, some of which provide a foundation for the development of conceptual organizational commitment models. As stated earlier, the commonality between these definitions is that commitment is the binding force that drives behavior (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) go on to explain that the nature of that force is experienced as a mindset, or "a frame of mind or psychological state that compels an individual toward a course of action" (p. 303). In other words, is it a state of emotional attachment, sense of being locked in, or a belief in and acceptance of goals that drive the behavior of an individual? These mindsets associated with commitment can take on different forms, such as having a desire to remain or follow a course of

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action, having perceived costs associated with a course of action, or having perceived obligations to continue a course of action (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). These mindsets, which are derived from the conceptual models I discuss in this section, show the complexity of the different forms of organizational commitment.

Of the key conceptual organizational commitment models that were most frequently cited in the literature review and for which I have provided a chronological perspective, the most widely used model is Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model of affective, continuance, and normative commitment. The following references to the literature show how earlier organizational commitment models moved from unidimensional to multidimensional conceptualizations and eventually led to Meyer and Allen's (1991) three component model.

Commitment: Side Bet

Becker (1960) had one of the earliest conceptualizations of organizational commitment, introducing the concept of side bets. This conceptual model was considered to be a unidimensional construct. An employee who evaluates the financial costs connected with leaving or staying with an organization is a side bet. That could include losing a pension if the employee departed from the position, the loss of seniority or professional connections, or losing retirement benefits. Becker (1960) stated that side bets could take on various forms, such as generalized cultural expectations, impersonal bureaucratic arrangements, individual adjustment to social positions, and face-to-face interactions.

For generalized cultural expectations, an individual's commitment may be based on what is expected from a surrounding group. The researcher used the example of one who changes jobs after short stints. People may perceive individuals who jump from position to position in small periods of time as being unreliable. An employee may turn down a job offer if the person

has only been in the current position for a short stint because they do not want to ruin the reputation of trustworthiness.

For impersonal bureaucratic arrangements, an employee's decision to stay employed with a certain company may be affected by policies imposed on that individual. For example, an individual who has been employed for 7 years may choose not to leave a position because she must be employed for 10 years to be vested for retirement. The decision about leaving involves a financial side bet based on what the retirement policy requires of the individual.

Becker (1960) stated that side bets can also be constraining behaviors through adjusting to social positions in the workplace. For face-to-face interactions, Becker (1960) stated that an employee may exhibit behaviors to keep up appearances. In other words, decisions are often based on saving face. Whatever appearance an individual presented initially, the employee continues to make decisions based on keeping up those appearances.

Becker (1960) also explained that a consistent line of activity may be based on a number of side bets, depending on what is at stake for an individual and is impacting his decision of whether to leave or stay. Becker's model comes from a behavioral perspective on commitment because the investments (or side bets) drive the action of the employee's decision to stay within the organization.

For this study, this research is relevant because supervisors need to understand that costs associated with a person's commitment to stay or leave may play a factor in his commitment to the institution. The underlying mindset accompanying this form of commitment is perceived costs. This perspective overlaps conceptually with the continuance-commitment dimension within Meyer and Allen's (1991) framework.

Commitment: Continuance, Cohesion, and Control

Kanter (1968) developed a multidimensional conceptual framework for organizational commitment for the social system. The relevance of this research is important because supervisors want loyal, dedicated employees who are positively engaged in the system to successfully carry out the organization's mission and goals.

As noted, Kanter (1968) broke organizational commitment down into the three components of continuance commitment, cohesion commitment, and control commitment. To explain these components in more detail, continuance commitment is the continued participation in the organization when the cost of leaving is greater than the cost of remaining (Kanter, 1968). In other words, continuance commitment is part of the social system role when a member wants to participate in and remain with the organization.

Cohesion commitment is based on the member's positive social relationships within the organization and ties within the community (Kanter, 1968). Cohesion commitment means there is high group solidarity, low discord and resentment, and the system can prevail against threats to the organization. Control commitment is the connection based on upholding the norms of the organization and obeying the group authority (Kanter, 1968).

Kanter's (1968) conceptual model suggests that these three types of commitment impact an individual's behavior toward bigger connections with the organization. Kanter posited that a system that includes employees who possess all three of these commitments should be more successful than organizations without them. This conceptual framework is important because it explores employee commitment in relation to the overall organization. The key underlying mindsets accompanying these forms of commitment are perceived costs, the relationship among the group, and obligation to follow the norms. Kanter's (1968) and Meyer and Allen's (1991)

continuance commitment (perceived costs) dimensions are conceptually similar. Meyer and

Allen (1991) also drew upon Kanter's (1968) concept of cohesion to develop their affective

commitment dimension, one's desire or emotional attachment to stay with an organization.

Meyer and Allen's (1991) dimension of normative commitment (obligation to remain with an

organization) is similar to Kanter's concept of control commitment. I discuss Meyer and Allen's

model further in the latter part of this main section.

Commitment: Attitudinal Versus Behavioral

As the literature developed over time, two distinct perspectives became evident in

relationship to attitudinal and behavioral commitment. Most definitions in the early stages of

commitment were focused on commitment-related behaviors, but then another trend emerged

that began to define commitment in terms of attitude. Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1982)

developed one concept that focused on attitudinal versus behavioral commitment. Attitudinal

commitment focused on the process by which people come to think of their own values and goals

in relation to the organization (Mowday et al., 1982).

Attitudinal commitment represents how employees identified with the organization and

its goals and whether to continue membership to execute those goals (Mowday, Steers, & Porter,

1979). Behavioral commitment relates to how individuals feel locked into an organization and

how they respond to the problem (Mowday et al., 1982). In other words, individuals who stay

with an organization and forgo alternative options because of the costs associated with leaving

(Becker, 1970) provide an example of a behavior approach to commitment.

Although Mowday et al. (1979) were more focused on attitudinal commitment in their

research, their definition included aspects of commitment-related behaviors. Mowday et al.

(1979) used three factors to characterize organizational commitment: "(1) a strong belief in and

acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization" (p. 226). Mowday et al. (1979) explained that this definition of organizational commitment meant individuals moved beyond displaying mere loyalty to an organization and gave of themselves to contribute to the organization's greater good. This level of commitment reflects a mindset to remain with an organization because of the belief in the organization's values and goals. This perspective lays the foundation for Meyer and Allen's (1991) dimension of affective commitment within their model.

Commitment: Value Commitment and Commitment to Stay

Angle and Perry (1981) utilized the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Porter et al. (1974) to relate organizational commitment to organizational effectiveness in lower-level employees for bus transportation companies. The researchers found that organizational commitment was connected with "organizational adaptability, turnover, and tardiness rate, but not with operating costs or absenteeism" (Angle & Perry, 1981, p. 1).

What is important about this study is that Angle and Perry (1981) developed two dimensions of commitment using factor analysis of items from the OCQ—*value commitment* and *commitment to stay*. They defined value commitment as "pride in association with the organization (i.e., identification), willingness to perform for the organization, concern for the fate of the organization, and congruence between personal values and those of the organization" (Angle & Perry, 1981, pp. 4–5). Value commitment reflects individuals' commitment to support organizational goals, while commitment to stay reflects the respondents' willingness to keep their organizational membership (Angle & Perry, 1981).

Expanding on Angle and Perry's work, Mayer and Schoorman (1998) suggested two dimensions, which they in turn labeled as *continuance commitment* (to participate) and *value commitment* (to produce). Mayer and Schoorman's (1998) study determined that continuance commitment was associated with tenure, retirement benefits, education, and age, but value commitment was associated with participation, perceived prestige, job involvement, and role ambiguity.

Angle and Perry's (1981) and Mayer and Schoorman's (1998) work focused commitment on behavioral consequences, in which an employee's decision to stay or leave is connected to continuance commitment, whereas value commitment is related to how much effort an employee exhibits toward achieving the goals of the organization (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Angle and Perry's (1981) and Mayor and Schoorman's (1998) work is considered a multidimensional approach to organizational commitment, in contrast to Mowday et al.'s (1974) one-dimensional construct.

Angle and Perry's (1981) and Mayer and Schoorman's (1998) value commitment conceptually overlaps with Meyer and Allen's (1991) dimension of affective commitment, the desire or emotional attachment to stay with an organization. Also, Angle and Perry's (1981) commitment to stay and Mayer and Schoorman's (1998) continuance commitment is similar to Meyer and Allen's (1991) dimension of continuance commitment, involving the costs associated with leaving or staying with an organization.

Commitment: Moral, Calculative, and Alienative

Penley and Gould (1988) described commitment in two ways: *instrumental* and *affective*. The instrumental view involves the exchange between the employee and the organization, thus causing a bond (Penley & Gould, 1988). The affective view involves the emotional attachment

to or connection with the organization and the values of that organization (Penley & Gould, 1988). The researchers believed that behavior could depend on both the instrumental and affective views to organizational commitment.

Penley and Gould (1988) built on the work of Angle and Perry by utilizing Etzioni's (1961) model of organizational involvement to create a modified version, a three-dimensional model of organizational commitment: *moral, calculative*, and *alienative*. Moral and alienative commitment represent the affective attachment to an organization, whereas calculative commitment represents the instrumental attachment to an organization. Penley and Gould (1988) defined moral commitment as the acceptance of and identification with organization goals; calculative commitment as the exchange between an employee's contributions and the organization's inducements; and alienative commitment as a consequence, whether that is "a lack of control over the internal organizational environment" or "the perceived absence of alternatives for organizational commitment" (p. 47).

Penley and Gould's (1988) study revealed that the adapted model of organizational commitment suggested that commitment might come from both affective and instrumental sources, such as an individual's personality-based predispositions, the organization's culture, and a supervisor's leadership styles.

Penley and Gould's framework is similar to other models. Their dimension of moral commitment is conceptually similar to Meyer and Allen's (1991) dimension of affective commitment, and also Angle and Perry's (1981) and Mayer and Schoorman's (1992) dimension of value commitment. Penley and Gould's (1988) dimension of calculative commitment corresponds to Meyer and Allen's (1991) dimension of continuance commitment, and also O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) dimension of compliance, which I discuss next.

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Commitment: Compliance, Identification, and Internalization

O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) developed another multidimensional model that has generated significant research. The multidimensional framework posits that commitment is based on an attitude toward the organization, but that there are various ways the attitude can form. According to their conceptualization, commitment could take on the following forms: *compliance, identification*, and *internalization*.

- Compliance means that attitude and respective behaviors are exhibited for extrinsic rewards, which is similar to the mindset of perceived costs.

- Identification means that involvement is "based on a desire for affiliation" (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986, p. 493). In other words, identification occurs when relationships are established and satisfyingly maintained. The underlying mindset with the dimension of identification is that the desire to remain with an organization is because of an emotional attachment.

- Internalization means involvement is based "on congruence between individual and organizational values" (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986, p. 493), which is also a mindset discussed in earlier models.

O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) model overlaps conceptually with the two of the three dimensions of Meyer and Allen's (1991) model: continuance commitment (perceived costs) and affective commitment (emotional attachment and identification with goals and values).

Commitment: Global and Constituency Specific

Although this model is not necessarily in chronological order, it reflects more recent research supporting the concept of the affective commitment dimension in Meyer and Allen's (1991) conceptual model. Hunt and Morgan (1994) developed a two-dimensional organizational

commitment model that focused on two concepts: *global organizational commitment* and *constituency-specific commitments*. In other words, global commitment refers to commitment to the overall organization, such as the university in this study; and commitment to constituency-specific groups refers to commitment to work groups (or departments), supervisors, or top management (Becker, 1992). Hunt and Morgan's (1994) study supports the notion "that global organizational commitment is a key mediating concept and the constituency-specific commitments are factors that have important outcomes for organizations because they lead to, bring about, or result in global organizational commitment" (p. 1581).

Hunt and Morgan's (1994) qualitative study results revealed that employee commitment to specific constituencies such as top management and supervisor could contribute to an employee's global commitment (the overall organization). This finding is important for midmanagement student affairs supervisors to be aware of as they develop their working relationship with their employees and understanding of employees' organizational commitment. Hunt and Morgan's (1994) results also suggest that supervisors should not fear when employees develop constituency-based commitments as it could still benefit the organization. This mindset coincides with the desire to remain based on identification with or emotional attachment to the organization, or both, whether that is in a global sense or with constituency-specific groups. This perspective is consistent with the affective commitment that I discuss in more depth relative to Meyer and Allen's (1991) model.

Commitment: Affective, Continuance, and Normative

As stated earlier, the most widely used multidimensional organizational commitment model in the literature is based on Meyer and Allen's (1991) work. Many of the models described earlier in this section laid the groundwork for Meyer and Allen's model. These

researchers defined "commitment [as] a psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization, and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). Meyer and Allen (1991) developed a three-component model for organizational commitment: *affective, continuance*, and *normative*. According to their model, these three forms of commitment have varied implications for behaviors. Individuals could exhibit one, two, or all three of these commitment components depending on their experience.

Affective commitment. Affective commitment was defined as "the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). Employees who stayed with an organization because they wanted to do so exhibited affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Mowday et al. (1982) described personal characteristics, structural characteristics, job-related characteristics, and work experiences as antecedents to affective commitment. For Meyer and Allen's (1991) research, they utilized the first two antecedents and combined the latter two to define it as work experience in general.

Continuance commitment. Continuance commitment was defined as "an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). Employees who stayed with an organization because they needed to do so exhibited continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Side bets, investments, and availability of alternatives were described as antecedents to continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The term side bets was defined as loss of benefits or privileges, acquired non-transferable skills, the potential of uprooting a family or disrupting a relationship (Meyer & Allen, 1991). For example, an employee chooses not to leave an institution or a position because the individual lacks one

year from being vested for retirement. In other words, the higher the costs were associated with leaving, the more likely an individual would stay committed based on the continuance component.

Normative commitment. Normative commitment was defined as "a feeling of obligation to continue employment" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). The term was originally introduced by Wiener (1982), who viewed commitment as internalized pressures in two distinct types of beliefs. The first being a "moral obligation to engage in a mode of conduct reflecting loyalty and duty in all social situations in which he has a significant personal involvement," and the second type of beliefs make one act in "consistent with organizational mission, goals, policies, and style of operations" (Wiener, 1982, p. 423). Employees who stayed with an organization because they ought to do so exhibited normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In other words, this type of commitment reflects a sense of loyalty as long as the debt or obligation is repaid.

In summary, the various dimensional frameworks presented two major important similarities among the varying forms of commitment that laid the foundation for two of Meyer and Allen's (1991) three–component dimensions to organizational commitment.

The first similarity of commitment is a desire to follow a course of action. In other words, the desire is the mindset of emotional attachment, personal and organizational value congruence, or belief in and acceptance of goals that leads to a course of action such as continued employment or willingness to "exert effort to achieve organizational goals" (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 308). Meyer and Allen (1991) categorized this dimension as affective commitment and drew upon Kanter's (1968) cohesion commitment, Mowday et al.'s (1979) belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, Angle and Perry's (1981) value

congruence, O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) dimensions of identification and internalization, and Penley and Gould's (1988) moral commitment.

The second similarity of commitment is where individuals become committed to a certain course of action based on the mindset of perceived costs. Meyer and Allen (1991) categorized this dimension as continuance commitment and drew upon Becker's (1960) side-bets, Kanter's (1968) continuance commitment, Angle and Perry's (1981) commitment to stay, and O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) compliance commitment, and Penley and Gould's (1988) alienative commitment.

Although not derived from all the conceptual models, Meyer and Allen developed a third form called normative commitment, which was commitment based on the mindset of perceived obligations to pursue a certain course of action. Kanter's (1968) dimension of control commitment is slightly similar because she posited that this form of commitment was based on obligations of upholding the norms of the organization.

The earlier conceptual models laid the groundwork for Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component organizational commitment model. Their model views commitment as a "psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization, and (b) has the implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 2001, p. 67). If the psychological state, or mindset, is commitment based on a desire (i.e., emotional attachment, personal and organizational value congruence, or belief in and acceptance of goals) to follow a course of action; a commitment to a certain course of action based on perceived costs; or a commitment based on the mindset of perceived obligations to pursue a certain course of action, then what are the external factors that

affect that desire, perceived costs, and perceived obligations? In the next section, I look at

antecedents that can affect the various mindsets toward organizational commitment.

Antecedents to Organizational Commitment

So, what are the external factors (or antecedents) that contribute to the development of

organizational commitment? From the literature, there does not seem to be one specific factor

that affects organizational commitment. In fact, a number of antecedents described in the

literature contribute to the development of organizational commitment. For my study, I focused

on the descriptive narrative to explain how these antecedents interacted and how the participants

felt about them. However, most of the antecedents discussed in the next section come from

studies from a quantitative frequency distribution that missed the descriptive narrative,

emergence piece, which is what my study will provide.

Because Meyer and Allen's (1991) conceptual organizational-commitment model is the

most widely referenced in the literature, this and the paragraphs that follow present the literature

on the antecedents to the various forms of commitment within the context of their three-

component model. Antecedents for affective commitment fall into one of these various

categories: *personal characteristics, structural characteristics,* and *job-related/work experiences*

(Steers, 1977; Meyer & Allen, 1991). *Personal characteristics* could encompass antecedents

such as age, tenure, sex, education, achievement, affiliation, and work ethic (Angle & Perry,

1981; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Steers, 1977). Antecedents under *structural characteristics* could

encompass employee/supervisor relations, role clarity, and feelings of personal importance

(Kanter, 1968; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Under *work experiences,* antecedents could encompass

expectations, reward distribution, organizational dependability, organizational support, job

challenge, job scope, opportunity for advancement, decision-making, autonomy, and importance

to the organization (Buchanan, 1974; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Steers, 1977). Mayor and

Schoorman (1998) conducted quantitative research to look at participation, prestige, job

involvement, and role ambiguity as antecedents in relation to value (or affective) commitment.

The study found that all four of the antecedents were "highly correlated with value commitment"

(Mayor & Schoorman, 1998, p. 15). Boehman (2007) conducted quantitative research on

affective commitment of student affairs professionals, which revealed that overall job

satisfaction, organizational politics, and organizational support had a positive impact on affective

commitment. All of these antecedents have the potential to impact an employee's affective

commitment, which is defined by Meyer and Allen (1991) as the "emotional attachment to,

identification with, and involvement in the organization" (p. 67).

For continuance commitment, anything that could be perceived as an increase in costs,

such as wasting time and effort, losing benefits, tenure giving up seniority, loss of reputation, or

uprooting family (Becker, 1960; Mayer & Schoorman, 1998; Meyer & Allen, 1991), could be an

antecedent. Continuance commitment is based on the costs associated with leaving an

organization (Becker, 1960; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Mayor and Schoorman's (1998) quantitative

study also looked at organizational tenure, retirement benefits, age, and education as antecedents

in relation to continuance commitment. In the study, the researchers found that all four of these

antecedents were "highly correlated with continuance commitment" (Mayor & Schoorman,

1998, p. 15). All of these antecedents have the potential to impact an employee's continuance

commitment, which Meyer and Allen (1991) defined as the "awareness of the costs associated

with leaving the organization" (p. 67).

For normative commitment, employees might feel an obligation to stay until a debt has

been repaid (Scholl, 1981) if they've received reward in advance, such as payment for college

tuition or costs with job training (Meyer & Allen, 1991). For example, an employee who receives financial assistance from an institution to help pay for school may feel an obligation to stay for a period of time after they have completed their degree because of the financial assistance that the institution provided. Similarly, Wiener (1982) suggested that there may be familial or cultural socialization that make an individual feel an obligation to remain with an organization. These are some of the antecedents that may have the potential to impact an employee's normative commitment, which Meyer and Allen (1991) defined as the "feeling of obligation to continue employment" (p. 67).

In summary, the antecedents found in the literature provide an idea of potential variables that might affect the various mindsets (or dimensions) of organizational commitment as defined by Meyer and Allen's three-component conceptual model. I discussed earlier that, in the literature, *commitment* is defined as the binding force that directs behavior. The nature of that force is reflected in the mindsets associated with commitment, which can take on different forms, such as a desire to remain or follow a course of action (affective commitment), to have perceived costs associated with a course of action (continuance commitment), or to have perceived obligations to continue a course of action (normative commitment) (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Once again, these forms were derived from the organizational commitment models that led to Meyer and Allen's three-component conceptual model. Those three components can have varying antecedents that affect each dimension of organizational commitment. This literature was important as I conducted descriptive narrative research in this study to determine whether these antecedents (found from quantitative research) truly were antecedents of organizational commitment for new student affairs professionals, or whether I would discover other antecedents from this qualitative study.

Relevant Organizational Commitment Research

As previously noted, one of the most frequently used organizational commitment models in various research in the literature is based on Meyer and Allen's (1991) work, discussed earlier in this chapter. The following section presents some empirical research examples, many of which utilized Meyer and Allen's organizational commitment model.

Commitment Research in Student Affairs

I found limited research on organizational commitment of student affairs professionals; however, the studies that were conducted looked at whether job satisfaction impacted organizational commitment. Rosser and Javinar (2003), Cook (2006), Renn and Hodges (2007), Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008), Buchanan (2012), and Marshall et al. (2016) conducted studies that looked at job satisfaction and attrition in relation to student affairs professionals; however, Boehman (2006) argued that job satisfaction was not really connected to commitment but instead was a systemic issue. Both Boehman (2006) and Cilente et al. (2006) discussed the incongruency between what new professionals learn in graduate school versus the realities of the job expectations.

Rosser and Javinar (2003) conducted a quantitative study of midlevel student affairs professionals' quality of work life with regard to morale, satisfaction, and intent to leave their student affairs positions. Although that study was focused on midlevel versus new professionals, it still provided some background information about why individuals leave the student affairs field. The midlevel student affairs professionals were defined as support personnel who reported to senior-level administrators who were, in turn, directors and coordinators of student affairs, housing, admissions, placement, the registrar's office, counseling, or financial aid. There were 1,166 participants in this study. Rosser and Javinar's (2003) study showed that student affairs

professionals' perception of their professional and institutional work lives could affect their

overall satisfaction and morale, and thus affect their decision to remain or leave an institution.

Cook (2006) conducted a mixed-methods approach to study student affairs professionals'

satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the student affairs field. She used a mixed-methods approach to

look at the demographic variables such as gender, age, ethnic background, marital status, highest

degree completed, salary, years of post-baccalaureate student affairs experience, current

functional area, years of experience in current functional area, and years in current position in

relation to satisfaction/dissatisfaction. She utilized Herzberg's Dual Factor Theory to describe

satisfaction/dissatisfaction factors: achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility,

advancement, and growth. In her study, Cook's participants included directors in student

activities, residence life, and Greek life student affairs functional areas. Cook's (2006) study

revealed significant demographic correlations with achievement, advancement, recognition, and

work itself. Cook explained that midlevel supervisors could use the factors that make them

satisfied with their jobs to develop ways to help their employees become more satisfied. This

information was useful research; however, I believed there was still a need to find what makes

new student affairs professionals organizationally committed to their institution and the student

affairs field.

Again, Boehman (2006) argued that job satisfaction was not really connected to

commitment, but rather that it was a systemic issue. He utilized Meyer and Allen's (1991) three

components of commitment to conduct a quantitative study on the impact of organizational

politics, organizational support, work/nonwork interaction, and job satisfaction on organizational

commitment among student affairs professionals. His research has been the only study to date

that examined student affairs professionals' organizational commitment using Meyer and Allen's

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(1991) model. Boehman (2006) found that student affairs professionals exhibited affective and normative commitment because they had an emotional attachment and felt an obligation or loyalty to the organization, but student affairs professionals did not feel obligated to stay in their positions because of a lack of alternatives; thus, they had a low continuance commitment level. Boehman's (2006) study revealed that the more emotionally attached the student affairs professionals were to the organization (affective commitment), the more loyal they felt to the organization (normative commitment), and the less likely they were to feel locked into the job (continuance commitment).

As for the impact organizational politics, organizational support, work/nonwork interaction, and job satisfaction had on the three components of organizational commitment, Boehman (2006) found that "[o]rganizational support, job satisfaction, and organizational politics each made significant contributions to the variance in affective commitment ($p < .001$)" (p. 122); thus, "as organizational support and job satisfaction increase, affective commitment should increase" (p. 120).

With continuance commitment, Boehman found positive correlation with organizational politics and a negative correlation with organizational support and job satisfaction (Boehman, 2006). In other words, "as the perception of organizational politics increased in an organization, the levels of continuance commitment would also increase. At the same time, perceived decreases in organizational support and job satisfaction would promote increased levels of continuance commitment" (Boehman, 2006, p. 123).

In the Boehman study, normative commitment showed positive correlations with organizational support and job satisfaction, and a negative correlation with organizational politics (Boehman, 2006). This means that the "perceived increases in organizational support or

job satisfaction should result in higher levels of normative commitment. Additionally, an increase in the perceived level of organizational political behavior will likely lead to decreased levels of normative commitment" (Boehman, 2006, p. 127).

Cilente et al. (2006) published a needs study on new student affairs professionals for the American College Personnel Association. Initially, a survey was sent to 269 entry-level professionals. After the survey was completed, focus groups comprising 35 new professionals and 12 senior student affairs practitioners were created to collect qualitative data. Similar to Boehman's work, the participants in this mixed-methods study expressed frustration with the transition between graduate programs and their first positions in the student affairs field because the reality of their work did not align with what was taught in the classroom during graduate school (Cilente et al., 2006). Another frustration was the lack of clear job expectations and limited advancement opportunities in these first positions (Cilente et al., 2006).

Renn and Hodges (2007) conducted a qualitative study with 10 new student affairs professionals who had recently graduated from their master's program. Out of the 10 participants, eight worked in housing and residence life. Transition in the workplace was a key element affecting participants' work experiences, particularly with relationships, fit, and competence (Renn & Hodges, 2007). The study raised the question about who is responsible to ensure a seamless transition between graduate school and the workplace (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Participants from the study expressed frustration with a lack of synergistic supervision or guidance from their supervisors.

Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) facilitated a year-long qualitative study with 90 new student affairs professionals. In their study, attrition of new student affairs professionals

stemmed from the new employees' limited knowledge of institutional culture and lack of "fit." They struggled with "creating a professional identify, navigating cultural adjustment, maintaining a learning orientation, and seeking sage advice" (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008, p. 324).

Buchanan's (2012) qualitative study revealed that salaries were important, a positive work environment was critical, and geography mattered for student affairs professionals. The five participants in this study were student affairs professionals who had worked in the field from 1 year to 6 years and were considered new employees.

Marshall et al. (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study of 153 student affairs employees who exited the profession. Although the participants ranged in age, degree level, and position level, the results provide factors that reflect why student affairs professionals leave the field. The results indicate that stress and burnout, noncompetitive salaries, attractive career alternatives, and the evening and weekend responsibilities were factors that led participants in this study to leave the student affairs field (Marshall et al., 2016).

In summary, these studies looked at job satisfaction among student affairs professionals. The studies took into consideration demographic variables, organizational support, organizational politics, work/nonwork interactions, and morale as factors that might affect job satisfaction. Rosser and Javinar's (2003) study showed that student affairs professionals' perception of their professional and institutional work lives could affect their overall satisfaction and morale, and thus affect their decision to remain with or leave an institution. Cook's (2006) study showed significant correlations between demographic variables and job satisfaction in the areas of achievement, advancement, recognition, and work itself. Boehman's (2006) study showed that having a supportive work environment where professionals know that the

organization cares about them leads to more loyalty to remain with the organization. His study

also showed increased organizational politics that create a politically charged environment can

lead to professionals being less likely to commit to the organization (Boehman, 2006). Both

Boehman (2006) and Cilente et al. (2006) discussed that what was taught in the classroom during

graduate school did not align with the reality of the work for new professionals, which could

adversely affect their experiences. Other factors that affected job satisfaction were lack of

synergistic supervision, fit with the institutional culture, salaries, positive work environment, job

location with regard to geography, and evening and weekend responsibilities (Buchanan, 2012;

Marshall et al., 2016; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn and Jessup-Anger, 2008). Although each

study was very different from another, all recommended the need for further research on

organizational commitment of student affairs professionals, particularly from the qualitative

perspective. In the next section, I provide relevant organizational commitment research in

education in general versus student affairs in particular.

Commitment Research in Education

Other relevant organizational commitment research is not necessarily focused on the

student affairs field but is connected to education in some fashion. Synthesis of this literature

was difficult because each study found various reasons that led to organizational commitment for

the different types of participants. However, understanding the various factors that played a role

in organizational commitment for these participants is still relevant.

Using Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model as a basis for understanding

organizational commitment, Cortez (2008) conducted a qualitative case study of organizational

commitment with teachers in private elementary and secondary schools. Cortez (2008) found

that the participants "demonstrated a five-stage process toward organizational commitment" (p. vi) that involved a calling to the vocation or school or both—a calling in the form of action, and action in the form of conflict, decision making, and perseverance.

Flores (2008) conducted a phenomenological study of organizational commitment with nine community-college faculty members. In this study, five themes emerged that described the faculty members' experiences: service attitude, types of commitment, collegial responsibilities, collegial relationships, and institutional support (Flores, 2008). The five thematic structures "illustrated how participants experienced organizational commitment through the Dimensions of Organizational Commitment: Individual Expectations, Positive Experiences, and Negative Experiences" (Flores, 2008, p. 169). Flores (2008) discovered that the essence was courtship, "which portray[ed] the complex and intricate nature of how community college faculty experienced commitment to their college" (p. 169). Flores (2008) stated that socialization in the early stages of employment, orientation programs, and augmented training were critical to the development of commitment. Clarification of the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of faculty members could "decrease role ambiguity, increase role clarity, and increase commitment to the organization" (Flores, 2008, p. 177). These same concepts could be applied to student affairs practitioners in higher education.

Engle (2010) conducted a quantitative study of organizational commitment of full- and part-time community college faculty in North Carolina. The study consisted of 788 (635 full-time faculty and 153 part-time faculty) participants that came from 26 community colleges. The study utilized the Meyer and Allen (1991) three-component organizational commitment model as the foundation of the research. Engle (2010) examined how organizational, alternatives/transferability, rewards, and demographic variables predict organizational commitment for full-

time and part-time faculty. Organizational support, rewards, age, and education level were predictive factors for the affective, normative, and continuance commitment levels for both full-time and part-time faculty (Engle, 2010). Interestingly, Engle's (2010) study revealed that affective commitment for part-time faculty was negatively affected by the extrinsic financial rewards such as salary increases or promotions; but affective commitment remained uninfluenced for full-time faculty as the rewards increased.

Baker-Tate (2010) conducted a phenomenological study on midlevel student-services professionals to determine their organizational commitment patterns in higher education. The study consisted of 11 participants who came from departments such as Admissions, Financial Aid, Bursar, Advising or Registrar, and Education. Three themes emerged from Baker-Tate's (2010) research:

> A. Theme 1: Midlevel Professionals are generally satisfied with their jobs based on several intrinsic variables – the work itself, working with students, and a sense of duty (achievement and responsibility);
>
> B. Theme 2: Midlevel Professionals decision to stay in or leave the profession is influenced by several extrinsic variables – salary, institutional policies and practices, and working conditions; and
>
> C. Theme 3: Committed Midlevel Professionals enjoy their job, are able to balance competing constituents, understand the big picture and make career decisions based on family, self-satisfaction and financial concerns. (p. 83)

The first two themes relate to personal and organization factors that impact whether an individual stays or leaves the profession, and the third theme has to do with perceptions of the student-services field and other midlevel student-services professionals (Baxter-Tate, 2010). Although this research is based on midlevel student-services professionals, the participants were still serving students in higher education in a similar fashion to professionals in the student affairs field.

Talbert (2011) conducted a quantitative study on the components of organizational commitment and superintendent longevity, again using Meyer and Allen's three-component organizational commitment model for this study. The study consisted of 438 superintendents in Texas public and charter schools. The results of the study led Talbert to conclude that there was a correlation between longevity and commitment. Superintendents that stayed because they wanted to (affective commitment) was the strongest predictor of tenure (Talbert, 2011).

Calland (2012) conducted a study on faculty and staff employees at a private, nonprofit university in Virginia. To study employee commitment, the researcher investigated the human resources strategies, such as benefits, due process, employee participation, employee skill level, general training, job enrichment, social interactions, and wages, in effect at the private institution in comparison to research reported for faculty and staff at public colleges and universities (Calland, 2012). The second part of the study was to compare the organizational commitment levels of the participants from the private institution to what the research had found in the public sector, again using Meyer and Allen's three-component organizational commitment model. The third part of the study compared levels of organizational commitment of the faculty to that of the staff employed at the educational institution in the private sector.

One key finding from Calland's (2012) study confirmed a connection "between the specific commitment levels of employees and the embedded HR strategies with[in] an organization" (p. 161). In other words, having sound human-resources strategies, such as benefits, due process, employee participation, employee skill level, general training, job enrichment, social interactions, and wages can have an impact on employee organizational commitment.

Most recently, Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2012) conducted a quantitative study on the link between the Big Five-traits personality model and organizational commitment. The purpose of the study was "to contribute to commitment theory by shedding light on the mechanisms through which personality may predispose employees to experience specific types of commitment" (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012, p. 648). Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model of organizational commitment was used; however, Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2012) broke continuance commitment into two subcomponents: *continuance-sacrifices* (costs of leaving) and *continuance-alternatives* (lack of alternatives). The Big Five traits were extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. This research broke ground by looking at the relationship between personality and organizational commitment. "Specifically, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism predicted change in organizational commitments" (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012, p. 655). The results showed that "[e]xtraversion and agreeableness were positively related to affective, normative, and continuance-sacrifices commitments via enhanced positive affect" and "neuroticism was negatively linked to affective commitment, and positively related to continuance-alternatives commitment" (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012, p. 647). The study adds to the literature and suggests that personality traits can have an impact on organizational commitment.

In Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the literature on organizational commitment, including definitions, conceptual commitment models, antecedents, and relevant related research. The literature reveals that level of organizational commitment is connected to employees' emotional connection, needs, and feeling of obligation (Meyer & Allen, 2001). Much of the literature approaches the research quantitatively. This study is designed to

complement and take the research further, to look at the how and why, from a qualitative

perspective, new student affairs professionals make meaning of organizational commitment. In

Chapter 3, I provide a detailed discussion of the methodology used for this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

The purpose of this study is to better understand how new student affairs professionals make meaning of their organizational commitment. The results offer insight into the how and why of the organizational commitment of new student affairs professionals to their institutions. I chose the qualitative paradigm, specifically a phenomenological approach, because most of the literature that has researched student affairs professionals has been limited and has focused on the quantitative method. Taking a qualitative research-design approach allowed me to explore and understand the meaning of what makes student affairs professionals committed to their organizations. In addition, as Creswell (2008) stated, "social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meaning of their experiences" (p. 8). So a social constructivist perspective was needed for this study.

This chapter includes the research methods I used for this study. These methods include the research design, the description of the participants and site locations, the data-collection and data-analysis processes, and information about the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

Creswell (2008) explained that phenomenological research allows the investigator to identify "the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 13).

> Phenomenology focuses on lived experience. It looks at people's everyday experiences of phenomena and how these experiences are structured, focusing the analysis on the perspective of the individual experiencing the phenomenon. (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 97)

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explained that "researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (p. 25). In this study, I focused on new student affairs professionals in their current positions in their career. I looked at the events and interactions participants experienced in those roles to learn how these new professionals made meaning of organizational commitment.

Participants and Site

Initially, I worked with the institutional research office at my current institution to identify four regional, medium-sized, public, state institutions in the Southeast region that are benchmarked with my current institution. I intended to use medium-sized public institutions because that was the setting within which I worked, and also, in the smaller institution, new student affairs professionals many times may be tasked with a number of areas of responsibility. I looked at four Division II institutions with 10,000 students or less within driving proximity to serve as the site selections. I did not use my current institution as a backyard to facilitate the study.

I reached out to Vice Presidents of Student Affairs and other midmanagement-level professionals as gatekeepers trying to recruit potential participants at these institutions. I attempted to make contact with this selected group by email and phone for 3 to 4 months. A limited number of individuals responded, and I was not successful recruiting enough participants in this manner. So I reached out to colleagues to provide names of individuals, and also asked colleagues to share my study with employees who might be interested. At that point, I was able to recruit the required participants to meet the sampling needed for this study. Consequently, the participants came from various types of institutions, including one participant from a small,

private institution; four participants from large, public institutions, and eight participants from midsized public institutions.

Originally, as noted, participants were to be selected from four designated institutions using a combination of purposeful sampling, convenience sampling, and criterion sampling. I chose purposeful sampling because the participants were new student affairs professionals. They had the information I wanted to explore and experienced the phenomenon I wanted to better understand. However, I had to use snowball sampling, in addition to convenience sampling, working with colleagues in the field to help me identify possible participants. I also use criterion sampling because participants of this study were new student affairs professionals who had worked in the profession from 1 year to 3 years. Most of the studies in the literature have focused on student affairs professionals with 5 to 6 years of experience. In contrast, I wanted to look at new student affairs professionals between the 1- to 3-year level to identify whether they were already developing signs of lack of commitment to the institution and to the student affairs field. To meet the sampling requirements for the study, as mentioned, I had to expand the study to allow two participants who had 4 years of experience. But most of the participants still fell into the 1- to 3-year range.

Each of the study participants worked in the following functional areas of student activities: Greek life, orientation, leadership, volunteerism, housing and residence life, or a combination of those areas. These are typical areas in which most entry-level student affairs professionals begin their career. I chose these functional areas because they are where my interests and experiences lie.

As described, I selected 13 participants from various types of institutions. Creswell (2008) stated that phenomenology "involves studying a small number of subjects through

extensive and prolonged engagement" (p. 13). Interviewing these participants provided the rich, thick descriptions necessary to address the purpose of the study.

Once participants were identified, I recruited them by email with a follow-up phone call. I provided a detailed letter via email explaining the study and the confidentiality of the research.

Data Collection

Data collection with three participants occurred through face-to-face, one-on-one interviews, and 10 interviews were conducted by phone because of the geographic distance between the participants and me as the researcher. I conducted 60- to 90-minute interviews with each participant. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

Because of the potentially sensitive nature of the participants' respective levels of commitment in the workplace, there was a need to ensure confidentiality for them. For the face-to-face interviews, I worked with the participants to find a neutral, quiet, and discrete place to meet on campus, to provide a safe environment for them to be open and honest with their experiences in the workplace. The rest of the interviews were conducted by phone, and we scheduled those at each participant's discretion to ensure discreetness relative to their workplaces.

Since I had to use the phone to interview most of the participants, I had to build trust and help them feel comfortable with the interview. I explained a little about my history and background with student affairs. I was able to utilize my own work experiences to connect with them and let them know I understood the type of work they were doing.

A professional transcriber transcribed the interviews. I kept a detailed account of my process, procedures, and decisions throughout this study. I kept an organized notebook and computer files of recorded audio interviews, interview transcripts, coded transcripts, and

reflexive journals to help ensure a sound audit trail. Located in Appendix A is a list of interview

questions that I used to help guide the data-collection process in this study.

I used fieldnotes for each interview to record what I heard, saw, experienced, and

thought as I collected and reflected on the data in this qualitative study. Bogdan and Biklen

(2007) recommended that the researcher "create a separate file for each set of fieldnotes you

write and for each formal interview you transcribe . . . Put fieldnotes and interview transcriptions

in separate files" (p. 118). I kept the recordings, transcripts, coded transcripts, and fieldnotes in

separate files, using notebooks and computer files.

Data Analysis

"Phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of

meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas (1994) called an "essence description"

(Creswell, 2008, p. 184). I recorded each interview with the participant's permission. After

conducting the interviews, I sent the recorded information to a professional to be transcribed.

I used a modified version of van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of analysis (Moustakas,

1994) for my data analysis. First, each transcript was coded line by line, listing every quote

relevant to the experience and giving equal value to the quotes from the data, which is called

horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Second, I used reduction and

elimination to determine whether the statement in the transcript was important to the

participant's lived experience. I bracketed statements to show what was experienced. If

statements were vague, repetitive, or overlapping, I removed them. I considered the statements

that remained the *invariant constituents*, which were expressions that consistently emerged from

the data. Third, I used textural descriptions to develop structural themes. In other words, I

grouped the invariant statements into clusters and labeled them with the core themes of the

experiences. Fourth, I checked to make sure that each theme and invariant constituents were truly expressed for each participant in the transcripts. Fifth, I created individual textual descriptions using verbatim quotes for each participant to show what was experienced. Sixth, I created structural descriptions for each participant to show how the phenomenon was experienced. In the final step, I developed a textural-structural description for each participant using the invariant statements and core themes to examine the essences of the experiences.

Once I had completed the seven steps, I developed a final description that represented all the participants' essences of experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Observations and field notes allowed me to document my observations, hunches, thoughts, and reflections about the interviews. The field notes were collected and typed after each interview.

Trustworthiness

Merriam and Associates (2002) indicated that a qualitative study is good when it is systematically and ethically done and the findings are trustworthy. Trustworthiness is related to issues of "internal validity, reliability, and external validity or generalizability" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, pp. 30–31). Implementing the reflexive journal, an audit trail, adequate time in data collection, the peer review, and rich, thick descriptions strategies helped ensure trustworthiness in this research study (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The following items outline the strategies I implemented to ensure the trustworthiness in this study.

I employed a professional transcriber to type the interview transcripts. The transcripts were checked multiple times to make sure they did not contain any mistakes from the transcription (Creswell, 2008).

I used a reflexive journal to document the details of my research. These included my own worldview, my biases or preconceived notions that might affect my research, any

assumptions that I developed during the process, and my own theoretical perspectives that affected my study (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

I implemented an audit trail to ensure trustworthiness. I kept "a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points" that I carried out in the study (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 31). I kept an organized notebook and electronic files of recorded audio interviews, interview transcripts, coded transcripts, and reflexive journals to help ensure a sound audit trail.

As the researcher, I submerged in the data collection until I was hearing the same things repeatedly and the emerged findings felt saturated (Merriam & Associates, 2002). I also utilized a colleague to conduct a peer review of the transcripts.

I was able to employ rich and thick descriptions to ensure trustworthiness. Through multiple interviews and careful analysis of the transcripts, I was able to provide rich and thick descriptive data that developed into an overall contextual basis to allow readers to relate their current situations to the research (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In other words, my goal was to allow readers to make a connection between their situation and the contextual information of the research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This purpose of this study was to examine how new student affairs professionals made meaning of their organizational commitment. I examined the experience of 11 participants who had been in their full-time positions from 1 year to 3 years, and two participants who had been in their positions 4 years. To explain how these new student affairs professionals came into the field, I introduce the study participants with brief descriptions in the first section of this chapter. In the second section, I address the research questions in the context of the structural themes that emerged from participants' textural descriptions.

Data analysis of the interview transcripts revealed the following structural themes; personal connection, supportive supervision, workplace support from colleagues, gratification from impacting students, long hours, and emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues. In addition, participants considered leaving their institutions for several reasons which included career advancement, having been taught the 2- to 3-year rule, lack of leadership, and being closer to family. *Cultivated Relationships* emerged as the essence of this study.

Introduction of Participants

This section includes brief introductions for each participant as a way for the reader to become familiar with the participants. The profiles provide background on how the participants entered the student affairs field, starting with their undergraduate experiences and leading into their positions as new student affairs professionals. All participants were asked to provide a little background about themselves and why they chose to enter higher education and the student affairs field. Responses included descriptions of their involvement in their undergraduate experiences, their graduate-school programs and assistantships, and the positions they chose to

pursue after graduation. Names have been changed to maintain participants' confidentiality.

Participants are introduced in the order in which they were interviewed.

David—Participant #1

David was born and raised in the Midwest. He left home and attended a midsized, public

institution within his home state and pursued the same major throughout college. He was a first-

generation student from a low-income family. Because of limited financial resources, he worked

numerous jobs to put himself through school. As an undergraduate student, he was a resident

assistant (RA) for 4 years. David did not know much about student affairs as an undergraduate

student until his mentors introduced him to the field. He described having a number of mentors

telling him he could do this student affairs work. He explained that he had people who helped

him and encouraged him through his undergraduate journey so that is why he wanted to pursue

working in higher education. It was a supervisor who explained the student affairs profession

and encouraged David to consider a graduate-assistant position.

David pursued his graduate degree at the same institution and obtained a graduate

assistantship in housing. After graduation, David pursued a position in housing at a midsized,

4-year public institution on the Southeast coast as a new student affairs professional. He wanted

a different experience and was comfortable exploring new adventures, which is why this position

was appealing. He was nervous and unsettled about his first job and knew he had to learn a new

culture. David had a "very turbulent" experience during the first year of his position, but he

stayed another year because he had "something to prove" in the face of adversity. David was a

Residence Coordinator and had been in the live-in housing position for 2 years at the time of the

interview.

Linda—Participant #2

Linda was born and raised in the Midwest. She left home and attended a midsized, 4-year public institution within her home state. As an undergraduate student, she had an academic program that she thought she wanted to pursue; but as time went on, she felt lost in what she wanted to major in and eventually changed it. During that time, Linda was actively involved in the student-government association and joined a sorority. She was a student worker for the campus events office. She served as an RA and eventually became an assistant hall director. Linda's supervisor was inspirational to her, and she wanted to learn the skills that he had. Her supervisor was the one who introduced her to the field of student affairs.

Linda left the Midwest and moved to the East Coast for graduate school to pursue a degree in student affairs. She obtained a graduate assistantship as a hall director. Her graduate school was a large, public institution. She also participated in an orientation internship while she continued to work in housing and residence life. Linda shared that her first year of graduate school was the hardest year of her life. She almost left the student affairs field midway through her graduate program because of her negative experience with the assistantship supervisor. Her orientation internship affirmed her desire to stay in the field; thus, she continued with her second year of graduate school.

After graduation, Linda pursued a position in housing closer to home as a new student affairs professional. Being closer to family and friends was important to her. She returned to work at her undergraduate *alma mater*. Linda was a Residence Coordinator at a mid-sized, 4-year public institution and had been in the live-in housing position for 1 year at the time of the interview.

Jack—Participant #3

Jack was born and raised in the Midwest. He left his home state to obtain his undergraduate degree from a midsized, public university that was also located in the Midwest. He entered school with a specific major and changed it later on during his tenure. As an undergraduate, he was a resident advisor for two years and had worked within the residence-life department doing various jobs; so he came to know the department and the employees well.

Jack never intended to go into higher education and student affairs. When he graduated, he was not sure what path he wanted to follow for a career, so he decided to take a full-time position in residence life at his undergraduate institution. Through that experience, he realized he wanted to pursue the student affairs profession.

Jack had worked in residence-life for 2 years when he decided to get a graduate degree in student affairs. He attended a large, public university for graduate school in the Midwest, and he obtained a graduate assistantship in housing.

After graduation, Jack pursued a job in student activities and student conduct as a new student affairs professional at a midsized, 4-year public university located closer to family in the Midwest. He was ready for a change and transitioned from housing to this opportunity so he could work with a wide variety of students. Jack explained, "I enjoy that opportunity to kind of pay it back like some people helped me along the way." Jack was an Assistant Director of Student Life and had been in the position for 2 years at the time of this interview.

Joe—Participant #4

Joe was born and raised in the Southeast and was a first-generation student. He attended a large, public institution within his home state and pursued the same major throughout college. While an undergraduate, he became extremely involved in Greek life and student government.

He became president of his Greek council and served as an ambassador for his university. He lived on campus for a year. Joe explored his long-term career plans and fell in love with higher education. Around his junior and senior years, he realized he loved advising, serving as a school ambassador, and participating in interview panels. He had a Greek advisor and a resident director who mentored and encouraged him to go into higher education.

Joe observed how much energy and passion the Greek advisor had for him. The more time he spent with her, and other administrators, the more passionate he got about the student affairs field. Joe's resident director shared how he was going to graduate school for free so Joe should think about it too. Both his Greek advisor and resident director encouraged Joe to consider the student affairs program.

Joe pursued his graduate degree at the same institution and majored in the student affairs program. He obtained a graduate assistantship working with the graduate academic program. Joe also completed an internship in housing at a small, private institution on the West Coast. He realized he wanted to gain more experiences, particularly in the housing and residence-life area.

After graduation, Joe pursued a position in housing as a new student affairs professional at a small, 4-year private institution in the Northeast. He spent 2 years at that institution, and then took another live-in housing position at a midsized, 4-year public institution in the South to be closer to family. Joe was a Residence Director and had been in his current live-in housing position for 2 years at the time of this interview.

Suzy—Participant #5

Suzy was born and raised in a small town in the North. She left home and attended a midsized, 4-year public institution within her home state and pursued the same major throughout college. She was the first of her family to go to a 4-year college and obtain a degree. As an

undergraduate student, she got involved in residence hall government and later became a resident assistant. She loved her college experience because she got the opportunity to work and interact with different people and she was really involved. Her experience as an RA was what made her realize she wanted to "give back." Pam's supervisor introduced her to the world of student affairs and shared his experience of higher education. She had so many people "invest the time and energy" in her that she wanted "to be that person for someone else."

Pam attended graduate school for student affairs at a midsized, public institution in the Southeast and obtained a graduate assistantship working with housing, specifically an apartment complex. She worked with a first year-experience hall during her second year of graduate school.

After graduation, Pam pursued a housing position working with first-year students as a new student affairs professional at a large, 4-year public university in the Midwest. She stayed for 1 year but left to pursue another live-in housing position working with second-year students at a midsized, 4-year public institution in the South. Pam was a Residence Director and had been in the current live-in housing position for 2 years at the time of this interview.

Glenda—Participant #7

Glenda was born and raised on the southern West Coast. She left home and attended a large, public institution within her home state and pursued the same major throughout college. The institution was not her first choice because she was looking "for a private, liberal-arts" college experience. Glenda became quickly involved in the residence hall activities and programmatic efforts. She became a summer resident assistant for a specialized summer program, and later became a resident assistant during the school year. As an undergraduate, she

felt like she was going through an "identity crisis." Her supervisor talked to her about what her options were and suggested student affairs as a field that Glenda might want to pursue.

Glenda took a year off after completing her bachelor's degree because she "was feeling a little burnt out." During that time, she took an interim position in housing and residence life at another college in the area. It was there that she realized how fulfilling the work was in student affairs. Her colleagues encouraged her to apply for graduate school.

She pursued a graduate program in student affairs at a small, private institution on the West Coast and obtained a graduate assistantship in housing. She still struggled with whether student affairs was what she wanted to do for the rest of her life. Graduate school sparked her passion because she fell in love with the classes and really loved her academic program. During graduate school, she also completed an internship in student activities at another small, private institution.

After graduation, Glenda pursued a position in housing as a new student affairs professional at a small, 4-year private institution located in the Northwest. Glenda was an Area Director and had been in the live-in housing position for 1 year at the time of the interview.

Holly—Participant #8

Holly was born and raised in the Midwest. She left her home state to obtain her undergraduate degree from a large, public university, which was also located in the Midwest. She quickly got involved by participating in sorority recruitment and joining a Greek group. Her involvement led her to become extremely involved in the Panhellenic Council, the governing body for the sororities on campus. Holly changed her major primarily because of her extracurricular experiences. Like other participants, she "went through [an] identity crisis in [her] undergraduate experience." Holly's whole family pursued a specific career field. She

thought she wanted to pursue that field too. She even volunteered in it. However, some experiences from her past led her to have a panic attack and question that career. Holly's mentors kept pushing her to not give up on finding her own career path. Her advisors encouraged her to apply for a traveling consultant position with her sorority. While applying for that role, she also applied for graduate schools in student affairs. The main reason she decided to go into the field was because of the undergrad mentors who encouraged her.

Holly decided to pursue the traveling consultant role for a year, and then began graduate school for a student affairs program at another large, public university in the Midwest. She obtained a graduate assistantship in Greek life, and she was able to complete a practicum that eventually opened doors for her to join that institution for her first job.

Holly's first position as a new student affairs professional was a combined Greek life and live-in housing position, where she served as a hall director. The institution was a midsized, 4-year private university in the Southwest. Holly stayed for 1 year but left for personal reasons to follow her partner. She obtained another Greek life position at a large, 4-year public institution in the Midwest. Holly was Program Coordinator for Greek Life and had been in the current position for 1 year at the time of the interview.

Lindsey—Participant #9

Lindsey was born and raised in the Southwest. She left home and attended a large public institution within her home state and pursued the same major throughout college. As a freshman, she initially struggled making connections and finding her niche because she did not live on campus. She even considered transferring schools. Her orientation leaders did not stay connected to her as she transitioned her first year, which led her to try out for an orientation leader position so she could make a difference. She became heavily involved with the

orientation program which defined her collegiate experience. She was involved in a woman's leadership group along with other campus activities. Lindsey's involvement kept her at her institution rather than transferring out. During her senior year, she met with a career counselor to try to determine the next steps after graduation. The career counselor said that Lindsey's resume was perfect for a career in student affairs. Lindsey knew it was a perfect fit. She pursued the career path and has not regretted it ever since.

Lindsey chose to continue a graduate degree in student affairs at the same institution. She obtained a graduate assistantship as a hall director in housing and realized that residence life was not for her. Her second year, Lindsey switched to student activities to work with "advising student organizations about leadership and service." She also completed an internship with orientation between her first and second year of graduate school.

After graduation, Lindsey pursued a position with orientation as a new student affairs professional at a large, 4-year public institution in the West. Lindsey was a Program Coordinator for Orientation and had been in the position 1 year at the time of the interview.

Mary—Participant #10

Mary was born and raised in the Midwest. She left home and attended a midsized, public institution within her home state and pursued the same major throughout college. As an undergraduate student, she had become quickly involved in student organizations. Mary was a resident assistant for 2 years. She was extremely involved in the programming board, which led Mary to pursue her interests in student activities. Her supervisor in undergrad was good at getting Mary to push herself and her boundaries. For example, her supervisor would make Mary attend and present at conferences. That supervisor and another advisor encouraged Mary to consider higher education as a career.

She pursued her graduate degree at the same institution and majored in a degree outside of the traditional type of student affairs program. She obtained a graduate assistantship as one of the programming board advisors. Mary explained that three of the four full-time staff members quit so she got to take on a very professional role as a graduate assistant, leaving just one office assistant her first year. Mary was also able to do an internship at a midsized, private institution in the South.

During her graduate program, Mary was able to get a full-time position working with the programming board while she finished her second year of graduate work. She enjoyed helping students grow and develop. Mary was an advisor in the student activities center at a midsized, 4-year public institution in the Midwest and had been in her position for 1 year at the time of the interview.

Laura—Participant #11

Laura was born and raised in the Midwest. She attended a large, public institution within her hometown and pursued the same major throughout college. She was involved in a sorority and other campus organizations. Laura felt like she had been working in higher education and student affairs since her first day of freshman year. She had been hired as a student worker in the student-activities office before classes started and continued in that position her entire undergraduate career.

Laura experienced a traumatic event while she was in college and found that it was the Greek advisors and other higher-education professionals who helped her get through the situation. An individual had committed suicide while she was at home. Her advisors were her rock and foundation to assist her through this traumatic experience. Her Greek advisor supported her and the other women in the house who witnessed the situation. The Greek advisor

was really close to the student who committed suicide, and Laura "could tell that he chose to sacrifice . . . his grieving in that moment to take care of us." At that point, Laura decided higher education was the career path she wanted to pursue so she could pay it forward to others.

Laura pursued her graduate program in student affairs at a large, public institution in the Midwest, and she obtained a graduate-assistantship working with Greek life. She did not have a good experience with her graduate-assistantship supervisor. Laura left graduate school feeling like student affairs was not for her and feeling incompetent because of how she was coached. Laura completed a summer internship working with a Greek headquarters, which helped her overcome the negative experience from her assistantship and confirmed her pursuit of the student affairs field. In that internship, she enjoyed the people she worked with and it allowed her to healthy work environments. She felt that those individuals did not perceive her as incompetent.

After graduation, Laura pursued a position with Greek life as a new student affairs professional at a large, 4-year public institution in the West. Laura was a Coordinator of Sorority and Fraternity Life and had been working at the institution for 3 years at the time of the interview.

Rick—Participant #12

Rick was born and raised on the East Coast. He left home and attended a small private institution within his home state on an athletic scholarship and pursued the same major throughout college. He was a first-generation student and the only one of his large family to obtain a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. Rick shared that he was able to get college paid for through his undergraduate and graduate experiences. He was the only one in his family that made it to college. For him to attain two degrees was momentous in his life.

Rick was very involved in athletics and became an RA in the latter part of his undergraduate experience. He loved the work he was doing as a RA and asked his supervisor about how he came into his career. Rick's supervisor explained the student affairs field as a career.

Rick was grateful for the support he received from his university. Because of his amazing opportunity for an education, he wanted to be a role model for his other family members and future students.

Rick continued at the same institution to pursue his graduate degree, and he majored in a program outside of the traditional type of student affairs program. He obtained a graduate assistantship in housing.

After graduation, Rick pursued a position in housing as a new student affairs professional at a midsized, 4-year public institution located in the Midwest. Rick was a Residence Hall Director and had been in the live-in housing position for 1 year at the time of the interview.

Kim—Participant #13

Kim was born and raised in the Southwest. She left home to attend a large, public institution within her home state and pursued the same major throughout college.

Kim had a tough time transitioning to college. Her roommate moved out halfway through the year so she lived by herself, which was lonely, but she quickly became involved by joining a student organization and becoming an RA for 3 years. She served as an orientation counselor and a class officer for a major event, and she did a lot of volunteer work.

In the meantime, Kim had a resident director supervisor who was a big influence for her life. The resident director helped Kim through some family issues, taught her time management skills, and helped her focus to get her grades back up. That supervisor was a huge support for

Kim. Kim eventually loved her collegiate experience and realized she could do this for a career, so she began to explore the student affairs field.

Kim pursued a master's degree at a large, public institution in the Southeast and obtained a graduate assistantship in student activities. She also got to work some in the Vice President of Student Affairs' office and in the leadership center. Kim also did some work with a community college and had an opportunity to study abroad during her graduate work. She had an "absolutely wonderful" experience there.

After graduation, Kim pursued a position in student activities as a new student affairs professional at a large, 4-year public institution located in the Midwest. Kim was a Coordinator of Student Organizations and had been in the position for 2 years at the time of the interview.

Summary of Participants

These brief introductions of the participants provide perspective on how each of them came into higher education. When they entered college, none had intended to go into the student affairs field. They all described amazing undergraduate experiences because of their extracurricular activities. They shared stories of how they were mentored by advisors, supervisors, and colleagues to consider pursuing student affairs as a career.

When the interviews were conducted, 13 participants worked at various types of institutions. Twelve participants were employed by public institutions, and one participant was employed by a private institution. Four participants worked at large, public universities located in the West and Midwest. Eight participants worked at midsized, public institutions located in various areas across the East Coast, Midwest, and South. One participant worked a small, private college in the West.

Participants' years of experience in the field ranged from 1 year to 4 years. Two participants had worked 4 years, two participants had worked 3 years, four participants had worked 2 years, and another five participants had worked 1 year.

As new student affairs professionals, the participants worked in various subcategories of the field. Seven participants worked in housing; three participants worked in student activities; two participants worked in Greek life; and one participant worked in orientation.

Research Results

Six structural themes emerged from the data analysis of the interview transcripts that framed the phenomenon: (a) personal connection, (b) supportive supervision, (c) workplace support from colleagues, (d) gratification from impacting students, (e) long hours, and (f) emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues. To guide this study, the following research questions were used:

1. How do new student affairs professionals experience their role on campus?

2. What makes new student affairs professionals organizationally committed to their current institution?

3. What makes new student affairs professionals organizationally committed to the student affairs profession in general?

Various participant responses within all six themes answered the first research question of how the participants experienced their roles as new professionals. Responses pertaining to the themes for personal connection, supportive supervision, and workplace support from colleagues answered the second research question. And the responses related to the theme of gratification from impacting students addressed the third research question. However, the themes of long hours and the emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management reflect two

major reasons why some of these new professionals considered leaving the student affairs field. In this section, I illustrate all these emerging themes through the participants' voices.

Theme 1: Personal Connection

Personal connection emerged as a theme from the data that described one aspect of the new student affairs professionals' lived experiences. Participants' descriptions revealed personal connections that reflected a social relationship that involved showing a caring attitude and interacting with individuals outside of the workplace. Two key subthemes played a role in personal connection for the employees: (a) personal connection with their supervisor and (b) personal connections with their colleagues. A third subtheme of loneliness emerged if participants did not have those personal connections. For these employees, connectedness mattered when it came to both their supervisors and their colleagues in the workplace and made a huge impact on their lived experiences in their positions. Participants were positively affected when strong personal connections were fostered with their supervisors and their colleagues.

Personal connection with supervisor. Participants shared stories about personal connections with their supervisors. They described those meaningful experiences with supervisors from both their graduate assistantships and their new professional positions. For some individuals, negative interactions with supervisors almost caused them to leave the institution or the student affairs field altogether.

Participants illustrated examples of what they experienced through dinners and social times with supervisors outside the workplace. Meaningful conversations and intentional interactions made them feel valued and cared for by their employers. Many of them described positive interactions by "eating dinner all the time with [their] bosses and hanging out" (David), "watching their kids, going out with them, [and] having dinners" (Suzy), or going to "athletic

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games" (Joe). David described how his supervisor "invited [him] over for Thanksgiving" and they "spent all Easter together." Glenda shared,

> The first day that I got here [my supervisor] made a strong effort to get to know me . . . we go out to eat occasionally and we hang out . . . so that has been one of the strongest factors in my feeling I can be comfortable in this space.

Several participants talked about how important it was for relationships to be built. They described how building relationships takes time, and they need to be cultivated outside the work setting. "I always try to make that personal connection" (Linda). "I want to go on adventures. I want to have memories, too . . . I want that personal connection" (David). Those social interactions outside the workplace illustrated their need to have a personal connection with their supervisors, thus positively impacting their lived experiences in the workplace.

Not only the social interactions outside the workplace were salient, but participants provided examples of experiences in which supervisors, and higher-level administrators, showed their caring attitude by taking the time to get to know the participants' individually. Lindsey had a personal connection from the very start of her new position because of how her supervisor helped her make the transition into the new job:

> My first weekend when I moved here, she took me to the farmers' market and showed me around, and she had flowers waiting for me at my apartment. She found out where I was going to live and . . . had flowers there waiting for me; just like little things like that. She really models as far as how we want our orientation students to feel when they go through the program is kind of how she made me feel in my transition here . . . She was really excited for me to be there, that I was important and that . . . she cared about me.

Some participants even described how their Vice President of Student Affairs "invested in me" and "[made] sure we were okay" (Joe). "Just the care and time that your supervisors and your colleagues take into knowing you and your development" (Lindsey) sent a message of support and care.

Holly gave an example that was a little different, but that I believe still reflects the

element of care as part of the personal connection with her dean. At the first institution where

she worked, Holly was a member of the on-call duty rotation as a live-in housing professional.

She shared the following story:

> I participated as part of the university's on-call system. So one of the nights I was on
> call, there was a student who had been raped. And so . . . caring for that student, we
> worked with [the] police department . . . she was a female and the police officer who
> responded was not. So knowing the boundaries, maybe I should stay in the room with
> her . . . and not have another male presence there. I kind of stayed with that student
> through her whole experience . . . I went back for her meetings with the dean and helped
> walk her to the counseling center, checked in on her . . . On the flip side of that, being the
> primary responder . . . after we got her the immediate help that she needed, that night the
> dean on call was like "Let's go get some pancakes to debrief." That's a traumatic
> experience, and so I just really appreciated that we both needed that time and that space
> to kind of remove ourselves from that situation and make sure we were taking care of one
> another; and so you learn to care about everyone because they cared about you, too.

Holly valued the personal connection the dean created for her in that moment. Although

not her direct supervisor, the dean was a member of upper-level administration who took the

time to connect with her outside of the workplace to provide the personal and professional

support she needed to process this incident. The dean showed a caring attitude. Holly valued

and shared that experience as an example of how the student affairs administration at that

institution was "invested in the success of all" and of how everyone would "meet the needs of

the students while helping each other grow professionally and taking care of one another." Her

commitment to the institution was positively affected by moments such as this.

Those that did not have the personal connection had a less positive experience in the

work environment. Not having that personal interaction made it hard for Kim to "challenge" or

"ask questions about what [she's] being asked to do, or what direction [their] office is moving in

general." Kim did not believe she could have real dialogue with her supervisor because she did

not feel that connection. "He's nice, we get things done, we're cordial and friendly to each

other, but we don't really see each other outside of work" (Kim). Their interactions were almost as if they were just mere acquaintances. At the time of the interview, she and her boss were intentionally working on that relationship. Kim shared the following:

> The other thing that is incredibly helpful, as well, is we're also working on having a better relationship, so just getting to know each other on a personal level. Not that we have to be best friends with each other or buddy-buddy, but just knowing . . . it's okay that we have fun and goof off and laugh in the office because that'll make things easier. . . Whenever I'm frustrated or have a concern, or need to give him feedback, or vice versa, he needs to give me feedback, and stuff like that. So, it's a work in progress.

Because of the hours Kim puts into her job, she said ". . . this is my home and this is where my office is, my family; and I see my supervisor some weeks more than I do my partner. . ." so having a personal connection with her supervisor was salient.

Intentional social interactions and a caring attitude from supervisors, and even from upper administration, proved to be significant for these new student affairs professionals' lived experiences. Not only did they need that personal connection with their bosses, but they desired that connection with their colleagues too.

Personal connection with colleagues. Participants shared stories about personal connections with their colleagues, which had an impact on their organizational commitment. They explained experiences from both graduate school and their new positions that seemed to be the most meaningful for them. For some participants, negative interactions with colleagues almost caused them to leave the institution or the student affairs field all together.

Again, participants illustrated examples of what they experienced through social interactions with colleagues outside the workplace. Those personal connections made them feel valued and cared for by their colleagues. Many of them described interactions by "spend[ing] time together" and "go[ing] out to meals." "[I] kind of loved it, being with them and getting connected with these people who had come from all over the place" (Linda). "I went to another

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town an hour away . . . with several colleagues and . . . had . . . dinner with everyone" (David). David shared how he ran a major relay race with a team of coworkers, and Holly described going on "lunch walk[s]" and participating in "team-building activities." Hanging out with colleagues outside of the workplace helped positively develop participants' work relationships.

> Know[ing] the people in my office, I'm friends with them . . . outside of work, so a couple of my coworkers I hang out with on the weekends; we'll go and have a beer together . . . and that helps me have a better working relationship with them. (Kim)

Participants valued "creating close relationships with colleagues" (Glenda), and one shared "I always want to ensure that whatever I'm doing in life . . . the people I interact with feel like they matter, and that they belong, and that they have value" (Lindsey). Lindsey explained that "it'd be really hard to do this position if you didn't care." In Holly's first job, she described having "strong partnerships" and her colleagues "felt like a family" because they "cared about each other." Joe said his colleagues were "awesome and [he] love[d] them." "You connect with all sorts of professionals across the university . . . you have these personal relationships. . . building on those is good" (Linda). Those social interactions outside the workplace illustrated their need to have a personal connection with their colleagues, thus positively impacting their lived experiences in the workplace.

Participants that did not have the personal connection had a less positive experience in the work environment. Initially, David's first position did not start off well in terms of personal connections between him and his colleagues. He experienced harassing and demeaning behavior from them. Once he overcame those obstacles, David shared how he was able to thrive better in the position because of the relationships he was able to foster later with his colleagues.

For Suzy, her limited personal connection with colleagues negatively impacted her experience because she did not feel like she belonged.

I want a little bit more of. . . a personal connection with those that I work with [and right now] there's not a real personal connection between me and the other professionals. [I] was looking for being able to belong . . .

She described falling into some negative "trenches" and how her colleagues had destructive attitudes, but she wanted to belong so badly that she became part of that group-think mentality:

I didn't have opinions of my own at that point. I believed their opinions. I believed what they were doing, their agenda; . . . and I lost sight of why I was doing this. And it ultimately goes back to the sense of belonging, like, I belonged with the peer group, and I was excited about it.

When Suzy "drew that line" and began to part ways with the group think, she became isolated from the rest of her colleagues. She lost the personal connection, which was extremely difficult for her. The experience impacted her negatively and was one of the factors related to why she was job searching at the time of the interview.

When Holly switched to her second position, she found it more of a struggle to belong as well. She felt disconnected because many of their colleagues attended the same graduate school program. It was hard for her to form "relationships outside of the office" because her colleagues had "that shared experience of going through the [graduate program] . . . so sometimes that can just feel like a little bit of barrier . . . just kind of not feeling included." Holly's experience from her first position, compared with this second position, was completely different. She said it had been hard to leave the first institution because of the personal connections she had with her colleagues.

Kim explained how she knew the people in her office, and she was friends with a few outside the workplace; however, she still felt like she was missing a personal connection with the rest of her colleagues:

We don't have an office community. We don't do fun things within our office . . . we don't hang outside of work, we don't even like . . . go to lunch together; we don't even take like an office retreat or anything like that over the summertime. I, very often really, don't know the people that I'm working with, which I think is kind of weird . . . We need

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days when we just close the office and go get ice cream, or we close the office and . . . go for a lunch walk; or maybe we do some in-field team-building activities where we get a little bit more in-depth about who we are, and our families, and our backgrounds, and why we do what we do and, and things like that. I think that would help everyone kind of come to a better understanding that we need to work together as a team and not just work together as a bunch of individuals trying to get stuff done.

For Kim, the personal connection with her colleagues could lead to a stronger team. Those interactions, whether positive or negative, had an impact on her experience in the workplace.

The social interactions and caring attitude with workplace colleagues were elements of those personal connections that materialized through the data analysis. Personal connections with colleagues were salient for these new student affairs professionals' experiences. The absence of the positive personal connections led to loneliness.

Loneliness. The participants' collective voices demonstrated the need for personal connection with their supervisor and colleagues as part of their new student affairs professional experience. However, some participants expressed experiencing loneliness when they did not have those strong personal connections.

For instance, David had left family, friends, and everyone he knew to start this adventure with his new position. The transition was a challenge: "I was under a lot of stress because I had just left my family . . . and I didn't have any friends here, I felt kind of…lost." David's connections with his supervisor and colleagues were a negative experience for him. His first supervisor was demeaning by calling David "entitled," "spoiled," and said David had "no personality." David perceived his colleagues as abusive because they "bullied" and "harassed" him. His colleagues called him a "coward" to his face and "laughed" at him all the time. He felt like he "never had any support to stand up to things because [he] didn't have any friends; [he] didn't really have anyone to help [him]" (David).

> I didn't know how to respond to people, and every time I got . . . hurt I just internalized it. I just took it inside myself, and I'd just sit in my office and cry my eyes out. I'd call

> my parents, crying my eyes out . . . they didn't know what to do. It was . . . so heartbreaking because [voice cracks] I've never treated people that way, and I don't come from a place where that's okay.

David did not know how to respond and handle the matter, and he felt extremely alone. That lack of personal connection with colleagues negatively impacted his experience.

Like David, Linda and Laura both experienced feeling disconnected and alone as if they did not really have any friends. Linda described moving 1,500 miles away to graduate school when

> I took everything out of my life . . . I took away my family and friends; it was now Skype dates and text messages and Snapchat that kept me connected. And all I had now was just work and school.

Similarly, Laura talked about how she would

> I would sometimes just go home and just be a loner . . . because I was just so upset with my current situation . . . I did kind of let my assistantship cloud my whole grad school experience for me and kind of taint the feelings I had for everyone else in my cohort.

In retrospect, Laura said she would have set up a "better support network" for herself within her "grad cohort" by "building better connections with them and focusing on that experience and potentially seeing how I could have made the best of everything else." She would have made more "social time" with her peers "to make [her] overall outlook okay" and not let the "in-work situation" make so much of negative impact on her personal connections with her peers.

In Laura's new professional position, she talked about still missing those personal connections. She described having "a great working relationship with colleagues, but not deep personal relationships." She considered leaving the institution because "there's a lot of things I'm missing, like I don't have a lot of friends here in [city], my family's not here" and it has been hard to develop peer connections. None of the young professionals at her current institution had come through an experience similar to hers " . . . so it was hard for [her] to relate on the front end" (Laura).

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I'm glad I landed where I landed, but it didn't fill any deeper level of commonality between my peers. So it was a little difficult for me to adjust. I wish they had a class on that in grad school, like how to build adult friendships, 'cause I could definitely have benefitted from that. [laughs] I think that's where I struggled a lot, and still to a certain extent continue to struggle is that lack of like peer to peer interaction because I guess that I was so used to building friendships and relationships through commonality . . .

For Laura, starting her first full-time Greek position as the only Greek professional at her institution could be lonely. She related to the students more easily because she was closer in age to them and had that Greek commonality at the core of their interests. However, she still struggled to foster those personal connections with her peers, which caused her to feel that loneliness in the workplace.

In summary, the lived experiences for these participants revealed that personal connections with the supervisor and colleagues was salient. If they did not have a personal connection, then they expressed a feeling of loneliness. The lack of personal connection created a feeling of loneliness in several of the participants in this study. These lived experiences had an impact on whether they would consider staying or leaving an institution. For some participants, their experiences caused them to consider leaving their institutions or the student affairs field or both, and thus impacted their organizational commitment.

Theme 2: Supportive Supervision

Supportive supervision is another theme that emerged from the data analysis of this study. Participants indicated supportive supervision was needed to have a positive experience in the workplace thus positively affecting their organizational commitment. They described having supervisors who encouraged them and provided constructive feedback while still giving them the autonomy they needed to be creative, learn, and fulfill the work responsibilities. Through the data analysis, supportive supervision consisted of three subthemes: (a) positive reinforcement,

(b) feedback from a caring place, and (c) autonomy. Through the participants' voices, the following section describes those elements of their experiences.

Positive reinforcement. The participants described the need for positive reinforcement from their supervisors. Positive reinforcement provided them with the desired encouragement, which impacted the new professionals' overall commitment and willingness to push forward and excel in the workplace.

In his initial time in his position, David had very little interaction with his supervisor; and what interaction he did have was strongly negative. His supervisor was demeaning to him, calling him an "entitled, little, spoilt brat" and telling him he had "no personality." The supervisor never provided encouragement and was disengaged from David. David described how his "boss kind of took a hands-off form of leadership" and never "came to visit [David] in [his] office, or ever stopped by." He described having "one-on-one meetings[s] every once in a while," and that his boss gave him a "checklist of things to do and that's it." David shared, "He never came to my office, he never trained me, he never helped, and he never supported me." What he learned from that negative interaction and disengagement was that he needed the positive reinforcement to be successful as an employee. David needed "mentors" and if he "think[s] someone believes in [him], [he]'ll produce 10 times the amount of what [he] produce(s) now" (David).

Because of the initial negative interactions with his first supervisor, David became very disconnected and unhappy with his place of work. With his new supervisor during his second year in the position, he began to get the positive reinforcement he needed to push forward and to feel valued.

> When I got support . . . that's what started changing; as soon as I had one person or a couple people that believed in me, then I could . . . take off. And I'll work, I'll work

people under the table, I'll work, I'll work 10 hours a day . . . 12 hours a day, 15, 18, I'll

work so hard . . . 'cause I think someone believes in me . . . that's what helps.

David described how positive reinforcement exhibits a power of trust and helps build a

solid relationship:

> The power of trust, too, in terms of letting them have the [tasks] . . . if you're
> communicating with them and they're confident in something, letting them take it . . . It's
> helping them process failure and mistakes . . . I think, to be honest one of the best gifts
> that you can give . . . is your time and your focus and your attention. Because when
> people are talking to you about challenges and shortcomings and situations, you're
> opening, you're listening . . . you're just focusing on them; and I want to build a solid
> relationship with this person.

David needed someone who could empower him to take on tasks, trust him to fulfill the

job duties of his position, and be there for him in a supportive manner when he needed to process

the issues related to the job. He described that positive reinforcement as having a supervisor

who listens to people, builds good relationships from the start, and takes time to invest in the

employees. He needed positive reinforcement by a supervisor who listened and actively engaged

with him as a person. Positive reinforcement was critical for David's success and commitment.

He was fortunate to get that from his new supervisor as he continued in the second year in his

position.

Kim recounted a situation in which she felt she was missing that positive reinforcement.

Although there are several issues with the experience she described (following), I share it here

because of the lack of positive reinforcement it reflects. Had she received that positive

reinforcement, it might have changed this experience for her:

> Coming into work every day is a challenge; and while that is a good thing, sometimes I
> think I am definitely stretched beyond my capacity and my limit to the point where I'm
> going to break. And that's not a good feeling to come in and come to work and, you
> know, at 8:02 in the morning feel like I'm already frustrated for the day and . . . I already
> have problems on my desk for the day, and I still have . . . nine, 10 more hours to go. So
> that's frustrating whenever that happens day after day and . . . you feel like you are not
> supported or you're not getting a lot of positive feedback about the work that you're
> doing. Not a lot of people are telling you that it gets better or it gets easier or that you

will grow in your competency. At that moment, it feels like it sucks, it's not going to get better; and so for me it was like . . . if I had 5 days in a row of a pretty shitty week, why do I . . . do this for the rest of my life?

Not having that encouragement from her supervisor had a negative impact on Kim's experience to the point that she was evaluating whether she wanted to stay in the student affairs field.

Glenda compared her experience from graduate school to her first professional position. In graduate school, she did not feel she was a "valued member of the team." Glenda shared that her supervisors in graduate school were demeaning at times because they would make snide comments about changing the graduate assistants into full-time professionals. Supervisors were telling them, as graduate students, to quit complaining and just deal with the workload. Glenda's concern, along with others, was that they were trying to balance the job responsibilities with the rigor of the graduate school program. They experienced their supervisors' responses as uncaring and disparaging. Glenda commented about how those "offhand comments really etch[ed] away at your motivation . . . or etched away at my motivation." Glenda understood there might be a realignment of expectations, but the negative approach to it was unsettling.

Unlike her graduate assistantship experience, Glenda received positive reinforcement in her current position. She explained that the

feedback that [she] get[s] is really helpful in terms of . . . [her being] on the right path; and it's not . . . "Oh; well, you should do this way," or "Don't do it this way" kind of thing. It's . . . encouragement and support.

Glenda needed that encouragement that she was on the right path. It created a "positive experience" in the workplace because she felt the "support and trusting environment." That positive reinforcement impacted her organizational commitment.

Like Glenda, Laura compared her experience from graduate school to her first professional position. She had a period of time during which she questioned whether she wanted to go into this field because of her interactions with her graduate assistantship supervisor. (Laura

described key experiences with supervisors from her graduate assistantship, internship, and current position.) In her graduate assistantship, Laura's boss would give her assignments, send her on her way, and then rip what she did apart in the end. Her boss "would let [her] float out there all by [her]self" and when she would "bring him the finished product . . . he would either tear it to shreds or give it the 'Go' light" (Laura). "There wasn't that kind of consistent nudging that kind of helped [her] get to the goal" (Laura). The feedback was "telling [her] everything [she] did was wrong without giving [her] any guidance on the project as a whole along the way" (Laura).

Laura's supervisor was an "intense kind of micro manager," but it usually happened "in the final stages" of her projects. She described feeling "incompetent for most of the time in grad school" because of those interactions with her supervisor. Laura needed the positive reinforcement to make sure she was on the right path.

> I don't need a gold star . . . but what I've learned about myself and . . . only recently I've been able to . . . phrase this into words . . . is that I just need the constant validation that I'm on the right path . . . I don't need the big award in front of everybody, I mean that's nice, who doesn't like those things? But I just, just even the acknowledgement that like, okay like "That's good; maybe try something different here" . . . . Just slight nudges along the path to . . . make sure that I'm going in the direction.

Validation that she was headed in the right direction was important for Laura's experience and her commitment. She was able to gain some affirmation from her spring internship supervisor during graduate school, which gave her reassurance. "I think that's where I got the confidence back," referring to her internship (Laura). Laura said, "they appreciated me" and "they thought I was helpful." One of the women from the internship was transitioning to another campus and told Laura "you need to apply for a job at this campus; I would love to work with you again," which Laura found "helpful" and encouraging.

As she continued on into her first position as a new professional, Laura felt "emotionally damaged" and really needed encouragement from her new boss. She described him as a "wonderful supervisor . . . who is very, very supportive." He was able to provide the positive reinforcement to help her feel like she was on the right path.

> I think for the first two and a half years I felt I had to ask because . . . I wasn't really sure and I wasn't really confident in my answer. . . . I was pretty sure it was the right idea. I was . . . over 50 percent sure, but I wasn't . . . 100 percent; and I needed that validation from [my supervisor] that I was making the right decision. And now I know my answer is right, or at least right for the community right now; and asking him is more about keeping him in the loop.

Her supervisor's validation allowed her to develop a sense of confidence and independence to make decisions. Laura had a safe space to grow and learn. She now felt confident to share her perspective on matters with her directors even when they disagreed:

> I just wasn't confident enough to believe in my own answer to stand up for it. I'm finally at a space where I feel like I can disagree with [my current supervisor] . . . I'm in a much better space, but I think it is through positive supervision where my . . . the two supervisors above me that I have one-on-ones with one supervisor . . . And then the director of our department . . . he has more Greek experience, and so he's typically a person I ask Greek questions to; but he doesn't do my one-on-ones. So between those two staff members, they've really kind of nudged [and] built this safe space for me to kind of, it was almost like a cocoon; I think they, like, made this really beautiful cocoon for me to grow and learn and absorb this profession and, and my job and this space . . . I feel like I can fly on my own because of that support that they gave me in my first two and a half years.

Laura's experience as a new student affairs professional was impacted by the positive reinforcement she received from her supervisors. She felt more "confident" and "competent" in her role as an employee, which had a positive impact on her commitment. Laura explained she was staying at her institution because she wanted to take advantage of the learning opportunities while she still had that support. Laura believed there were "more learning opportunities" that she could "seize" while she still had "a safety net beneath [her]" through her supportive supervisor.

Laura appreciated the fact that her supervisors were very encouraging and supportive of her work:

> I think that's also part of the reason why I have the confidence now . . . I know that they have my back, and [when] I step forward here and take on bigger challenges and new opportunities and things that are kind of toeing the line . . . I know that they'll go to bat for me if need be; and I know that's to a certain extent that can be kind of rare in any profession and so that's what I really appreciate about being here.

Laura's boss created a "safe, comforting, home-like environment; . . . when I do go into that next job I feel extra confident, like I can walk in day one and know that I am completely able to do the job." The positive reinforcement she received gave her the supportive environment she needed to flourish as a new professional, thus reaffirming her commitment to stay longer at the institution.

Similarly, Lindsey felt that encouragement in her work environment from her supervisor and from upper administration. "I feel like there is an investment not only in me but in my desires and what I want to do for this program; so I think that makes me feel extra committed" (Lindsey).

Lindsey had the opportunity to pitch an idea to the Vice President for Student Affairs, who completely supported Lindsey's initiative. From that encouragement, the entire division got on board with her program and reaped positive results:

> I know a lot of institutions, I talk to colleagues [who] want to do something like this; but they just don't have the upper-level support or engagement from their campus partners to do so. So I feel that was something unique about [institution], that I wanted to do this and it actually happened.

Study participants' voices illustrated how positive reinforcement made an impact on their experience as new student affairs professionals. Positive reinforcement provided the employees the encouragement they needed to show them they were on the right path, and to help them push forward in their growth and success. Those who did not get that positive reinforcement

questioned whether they wanted to stay at that institution or in the student affairs field altogether. Positive reinforcement was a key element in supportive supervision. Although the new professionals needed the positive reinforcement, supervisors still needed to provide feedback as well to help employees grow. Participants indicated they needed feedback from a caring place.

Feedback from a caring place. Participants expressed that they wanted feedback from a caring place, meaning constructive guidance to help employees develop without tearing them down. Receiving response from a caring place allowed new professionals to improve in a productive way and remain committed to their workplace environment.

For David, feedback from a caring place was critical for his success. He explained, "I think that a manager can accelerate that [disengagement] or can make that worse by being very critical, not being developmental. I think it's possible to turn an employee off based on how you're treating them."

David's initial experience with his director was very challenging for him. As a new student affairs professional, his director told him he "had no personality" and called him "spoiled and entitled." For David, that feedback was heartbreaking because he worked three jobs in college to put himself through school. His first year was an uphill battle; but his interactions with his second-year supervisor made the experience better because he "really enjoy[ed] working with her." For him, feedback from a place of kindness was essential for his success. "I think it's how to treat people . . . how to recognize when someone's failing and how to . . . help them and . . . why you should be kind. You know, the value of kindness." (David).

David was leaving his position a week after we conducted the interview, and he had completed 2 years at that institution. Before he left, he noted that that same director who had been so negative "came in the office and he shook [my] hand and told [me] how much [I'd] be

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missed and how much . . . everyone appreciates and likes [me]." Being in that place of kindness

and getting feedback from a caring place was essential for David.

Similarly to David, Glenda shared that it was important that the feedback she got from

both her supervisor and her colleagues came from a caring place. Both the staff and their

students modeled this behavior. Glenda shared an example:

> Obviously we disagree sometimes . . . it's not like this ideal fantasyland at all; but I do
> think that the premium that we have on delivering feedback from a kind place—for me,
> it's every level of this organization. And we talk a lot about feedback and self-care with
> our students; and we keep each other accountable to that, and our supervisors keep us
> accountable to that. And so this is the first time I've ever been in a place where we,
> where we really do come from a caring standpoint; and we want to collectively push our
> organization to the next level together.

Glenda explained that feedback from a caring place was truly impactful for her

experience. She felt that she worked in a placed where "the culture of feedback is really open

and welcome . . . I always know that people are coming . . . in my best interest when they share

things with me. And it is a welcome conversation."

Like Glenda, Lindsey shared her admiration of a supervisor she had from graduate

school, and how her boss had provided feedback from a kind place:

> I think it's cool to see your supervisor in that way, so that when they give you feedback
> or give you comments, and/or suggestions and things, it really comes from . . . a person
> that you respect professionally and personally. It's someone you kind of aspire to be
> like . . . she's really good at what she does and she's nice about it at the same time.

Feedback from a caring place was important for Glenda and Lindsey. That element of

supportive supervision positively affected their experiences.

From Laura's perspective, she had an unsupportive supervisor for her graduate

assistantship who caused her to question her competency and whether she wanted to continue in

the student affairs field. "I kind of left grad school feeling like maybe this wasn't for me because

of how my coaching was. Because I felt really incompetent" (Laura). After working with Laura

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for a short stint, her supervisor "told me my work was what he expected out of an undergrad."

Laura was devastated by how he had presented her with the feedback. She explained,

> I was so emotionally hurt by that . . . he wasn't supporting me to the way that I was used to being supported. He wasn't trying to work with me, and he insulted me in a very deep level, and I tried to explain that to him and he just didn't get it.

Her supervisor told her, "You're going to learn from this"; like, "This is feedback, feedback is love." However, Laura "didn't think the way he phrased it was actually feedback; it was more of a criticism that was hurtful." After her negative experience in graduate school, it took Laura some time to build her confidence. That lack of feedback from a caring place caused her to consider leaving the student affairs field.

Like Laura, Linda had a similar experience with a supervisor in graduate school. Linda's first year in graduate school caused her to almost question whether she would continue into the student affairs field. She could not figure out why there was this "big abstract cloud [my] supervisor had put over [me] of 'you're not good enough to do this, but I can't tell you why.'" Linda shared that she loved the program and graduate school, but that

> being with my supervisor in housing was the biggest struggle that I went through . . . I cried a lot that year. I spent a lot of time thinking, "Is this really what I want to do?" It was a really hard year where I was told I wasn't a good supervisor, I wasn't prepared to do this.

She shared how it started. The third week after meeting her supervisor,

> We were about a week away from opening the building, and something changed. I'm not sure what happened; but all of a sudden, I was only going to make copies, and I was only going to audit key boxes, and that was all I was going to do. She told me she didn't see me fit to supervise any of the RAs; and there was just this misunderstanding that she gave me of why she wanted to have this control over everything, and that I was now kind of her administrative assistant and no longer fit. And so that was a struggle all year to work through that . . . I kept trying things, and it seemed like all year I was pushing against this brick wall of she says these things to me in one-on-one [interactions]. I literally cry in every one-on-one. I think it's her goal to get me to quit, and everyone was like, "No, we don't think that's true; that's, that's not what it is." And around April of that year, I finally convinced my area director, so my supervisor's supervisor, that one-on-ones were probably the worst part of it. She offered for me to have an advocate in one-on-ones, and

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that's when I knew that there was something that they were finally believing me, that maybe it wasn't me that was creating this awful narrative and story of my supervisor.

Linda felt as if her supervisor did not care about her or care that Linda was going to be continuing this career later in life. What turned her experience around was her internship supervisor, coupled with going back to her second-year assistantship with a new supervisor. Those experiences affirmed her commitment to pursue a career in the student affairs field. For Linda, supervisors made an impact on her commitment level. "Those people who have been in supervisory roles really influenced if I wanted to stay or not" (Linda).

From those experiences, Linda indicated she always wanted to make a personal connection with those she supervised by showing care. Someone told her once that "No one cares how much you know unless they know you care." That quote has stayed with her. Linda indicated she "always want[s] to show that care" and assist her employees to "find those opportunities" to help them grow because she did not think she ever got that. She believed feedback from a caring place was important and could affect someone's work experience just as it did for her.

Suzy had a very challenging first year in her new position as a new professional, with heavy accusations levied against her by her supervisor. The supervisor two levels up provided the feedback that helped her stay committed to the institution. Suzy explained that the higher level supervisor "values the forgiveness factor, the learning factor . . . [and] knows how to say things to encourage you." Suzy stayed at the institution because of him and his encouragement. The caring feedback Suzy received from the upper-level supervisor impacted her commitment to stay at the institution.

Participants' experiences illustrated how imperative it is for supervisors to provide feedback from a caring place. Constructive guidance from supervisors, coupled with empathy,

grace, and kindness, can show new student affairs professionals that they care about the young

professionals' growth.

Autonomy. Supporting their autonomy was another component for study participants

that reinforced the notion of supportive supervision. They described this experience of

autonomy through how their supervisors trusted them to make decisions and gave them the space

and empowerment to fulfill tasks.

Glenda, for example, described the autonomy and trusting environment she experienced

in her new position, which was unlike her graduate school experience:

> [I] really have a lot of autonomy . . . I was nervous about that because in my grad
> program . . . everything that we did was checked twice, and we were asked, "Can you do
> this, this, and this," a little bit micromanaged . . . So I knew it would be a . . . a big step,
> but I was ready for it; and I was kind of looking for that sort of trusting environment.
> And so I was hesitant at first; but once I got to campus, I knew that whatever instincts I
> had, whatever programs I wanted to do, whatever decisions I could make, that was upon
> me, and I would be supported through everything, [and] that my supervisor had my back,
> my coworkers had my back, and that I could be as dynamic or not as I wanted to be. And
> that was amazing. That has been amazing for me.

Glenda conveyed how she valued the trust the director gave to her and her colleagues.

The supervisor was able to give them the tasks they needed, but also the space to do those tasks

the best way they knew how:

> I would say just how liberating trust can be in work setting. I think that's something that
> I didn't know—how much I would grow within that space, that there are very few
> boundaries on the work that I do, and within that I can be as creative as invested as I
> want. And those are things that are really important to me in my work, and so that has
> been really, really, really phenomenal for me.

Glenda's supervisor gave her the autonomy she needed to feel invested in her work and thus

positively affected her overall experience.

Also like Glenda, Holly appreciated that her supervisor gave her the space to make

change and explore new ideas. She explained how her supervisor and the upper administration at

the institution gave her the space to try new things and see her work from a different perspective:

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I'm really excited about the change. My supervisor's really empowering about new ideas and exploring them, and helping me to look at them from different lenses . . . We're looking forward to change, and she's okay with shaking things up; and I really appreciate that opportunity. And the administration trusts us and knows that we're thinking through everything, and generally lets us kind of roll with it . . . I love that aspect about [institution], that we're kind of up for adventure and setting a new course and just spending time getting people on board. And so I really appreciate that about [institution], and I don't know that that was as easy to do at [her previous institution].

Holly had worked one year at another institution before joining her current institution. That autonomy that she was given to be progressive excited her and kept her hopeful in her current work.

Laura's internship supervisor gave her autonomy and a positive environment, which helped her bounce back from a negative graduate-school experience. She was "given [the] latitude to work on projects and also that nudging" she needed. Laura appreciated the independence to work on tasks without being micromanaged, which was the opposite of her graduate-school assistantship experience. She described the internship as

. . . a breath of fresh air. It was a new environment that just kind of gave me a space to let go before moving into a professional setting . . . I think I needed that. I think I needed this space where I wasn't micromanaged, and I could just kind of breathe and work on my little project at my cubicle, and…let go of that experience, shed the weight that it was putting on me before I stepped in[to] my professional experience.

This experience impacted Laura's student affairs commitment overall. She had questioned altogether whether to stay in the student affairs field, but the internship supervisor created an environment to allow her the autonomy she needed to bounce back.

Similarly to Laura, Mary had experienced being micromanaged from her supervisor in her new position, which caused communication issues. She explained how her "supervisor wanted to have direct control over all of our stuff" and was "demanding that [the students] talk to her [the supervisor]" instead of Mary as the program advisor. The students had a hard time trying to decipher whether they were supposed to report to Mary or her supervisor. Mary also

described how her supervisor would respond "to emails that really aren't addressed to her," "making calls for people," and "always asking if you've taken care of stuff every day." She did not feel like her supervisor trusted her to do the job. If she could have had the ability to change her work environment, Mary wished for "a little bit less micromanaging everything that happens [and] just trust [that] the employees are going to do what you hired them to do." She needed the environment of trust and autonomy to feel connected to the work environment, but she was not getting that from her supervisor, which negatively impacted her experience.

Unlike Mary's experience, Lindsey discussed how her supervisor was supportive and also gave her the autonomy to implement new initiatives. She described her boss as being "very intentional about the tasks that [is] given and that [her supervisor] was not giving [her] too much but at the same time letting [her] be in charge of things." Lindsey also shared how the space was given to her to be innovative. "I think something that I really value about here, that I think makes me feel connected and committed to working here, is the true, genuine focus and encouragement of innovation." As a new professional, for Lindsey to try new ideas was "very encouraged." She valued the autonomy provided to her in the work environment, and this trust positively impacted her level of commitment.

Pam appreciated being able to have the autonomy to use her interests in skills in different ways. She loved marketing, so she was able to do that for her department. "I've been given a lot of autonomy here, which is both a good and a bad thing, . . . but with that I've been able to grow a lot . . . in different ways" (Pam). Being able to have the space to try new things and utilize her skillset to improve the department was important to her experience. Pam was given the space to be creative, which she appreciated.

The ability to have ownership of tasks and projects, coupled with the trust and space to achieve those tasks, was illustrated through the participants' voices. The element of autonomy was salient in the supportive supervision these new student affairs professionals experienced.

Theme 3: Workplace Support Among Colleagues

Workplace support among colleagues is another theme that emerged from the data analysis of this study. Participants appreciated the "collaboration" and "ability to discuss ideas" (Glenda). Many participants viewed their peers as "great" (Rick) and enjoyed working with "incredibly intelligent" and "incredibly driven" (Glenda) colleagues. Being able to have colleagues to "lean on" (Rick) was valued as part of that workplace support. Participants described that workplace support through their various experiences, with examples such as receiving resources, exchanging ideas, and collaboration and teamwork.

Once David overcame the negative year in the position with his supervisor and colleagues, for example, he was able to forge some great relationships in the workplace. He did not want any of the new housing staff to feel unsupported. So he provided guidance and support because he felt like he did not get that when he started as a resident director at the institution. He valued the workplace support that colleagues could provide to one another.

> I have many friends, I think. . . .There's [*sic*] three new RDs. I helped mentor them a lot because I know what it was like not to have any support; so I designed entirely new curriculums and materials, and I sent it to them . . . I do everything I can to make them have a good experience because I know what it's like not to . . . I think one of the greatest gifts you can give a new employee, too, is sharing your experience with them and opening up about what you had to do and how you did it—what you learned about how to deal with things.

David believed in modeling the behavior he expected from his colleagues. He talked about "how I interact with people and the way. . . I want relationships built on respect and trust." David created resources and provided those materials to the new employees. He wanted to "make their lives easier" so he "created an entire budget, [a] way to track all expenses . . .

created a conduct-tracking log . . . [and] made a closing packet full of information." David felt that he did not get that kind of support when he started his new position. He was left to figure it out by himself, with no support from his supervisor or his colleagues. When the new housing staff started in his second year, he chose to be that workplace support for his colleagues, to be a role model for these new professionals.

Jack fully enjoyed his position and institution because of the supportive work culture that he experienced with his colleagues. "I think we work well together, and I think we have that same understanding of what our overall goal is of being here…I have very good colleagues, very supportive colleagues here" (Jack). He talked about the office staff and how they had different roles but worked together on various tasks. "I think we're all very supportive of each other's goals and each other's programs" (Jack). Jack even described the supportive work environment from colleagues throughout campus:

> It's a very supportive campus, and I think that one thing I've enjoyed about our institution is that everybody, I think, has these same big-picture goals of student success. And I think we all, while we come from different aspects because of our jobs, I think we all look at it in terms of "How can we help each other do our jobs the best we can?" Again, "How can we help the students the best?" And that, I think that's the guiding, the guiding principal; and I think that makes it much easier to network and, and make those bridges across departments, or across academic to student affairs, and vice versa . . . I never feel like I can't call someone and ask for some little guidance.

Jack said the workplace support he received from everyone on campus is "one thing [he's] enjoyed about [his] institution." This experience was important for him. He felt that he could call on anyone "beyond [his] immediate office" to get support and help that he might need throughout his division and across campus.

> I feel like I can pick up the phone and call just about anybody . . . I feel I can speak to our deans . . . I'm newer in the field. I feel like they're willing to either guide me or say, you know, "I'm not sure, but talk to this person; they would know more about it." I feel like there's very much of . . . I think they're invested in my success.

Throughout Jack's interview, he continued to go back to this workplace support from his colleagues. He very much valued that aspect of his experience as a new professional.

Holly talked about the need for a supportive workplace environment because it impacted her organizational commitment. She defined it as "people that we can bounce ideas off of and learn and grow together, support one another, be a united front in decision-making, consistently communicate things to students and stakeholders. Have fun together." In her first position, where she had been for one year working in Greek life, Holly felt that workplace support from her colleagues:

> I really felt like my values and what I worked for . . . were in complete alignment with what [the institution] teaches or expects of its students . . . they were hard-working students; they're a very collaborative staff; everybody kind of works together on different things. And so even though I worked in Panhellenic, I worked closely with the other hall directors on campus, the leadership center right upstairs, smaller campus, everything was kind of centralized . . . everyone was so much in the know . . . I felt like we really cared for the students.

Holly felt that her colleagues "cared about each other" and they worked "towards the same goals, caring for students." She said,

> It really felt like student affairs, you knew everybody. Everybody knew who you were. You worked together to see students through it, and so you really just felt invested in the success of all of the offices. And so whether it was campus life or the counseling center, we all would do things to meet the needs of the students while helping each other grow professionally and taking care of one another.

It was harder at Holly's current institution because there was so much turnover, and they had not been able to build that teamwork and supportive work environment. She did not feel the "team approach," which was the "biggest change" for her. Holly missed the workplace support among her colleagues that she had experienced at her first institution.

Similar to Holly, Kim was missing the workplace support from her colleagues. Kim talked about how their team had to do a sit-down and debrief the year. She believed there was

not much support within the workplace because they were just a "bunch of individuals trying to get stuff done" instead of really working together as a team.

> The six of us sat down and just kind of debriefed our year, and myself and a couple of other individuals in the room just kind of laid it out on the table that, like, we are not functioning as a team as well as we could . . . I think by kind of just putting the ugly and the dirty out there, it really kind of helped us, realizing that there are some gaps within our team and some ways that we could better support each other or better support our younger professionals in the office. And so that's really helped for us to be more vocal.

That workplace support with her colleagues was important for Kim's experience. Unfortunately, she was not getting that at her institution.

Laura discussed that having a collegial workplace and support was helpful to her work environment. Though her peer-to-peer interaction was limited because she felt that the work she did was focused in the Greek community, she talked about how it was helpful to learn everyone's style so they knew how to understand one another better. During her first summer, the staff completed "leadership-styles indicators." Laura conveyed how it helped them understand "each other's reactions," and they "still talk[ed] about it . . . when [they] reflect[ed] on what went weird with that meeting."

Laura also relayed how her and her colleagues had different advising styles, which caused her to feel disconnected at times from her peers. However, "they continue to politely validate that it's okay" to have different approaches when working with students. The workplace support was helpful to Laura's experience and her growth as a new professional.

Lindsey also loved the collegial support she received across campus while working with orientation. "I think I've really crafted my skill at working with different types of people and adjusting my approach to that type of person while still being authentically who I am" (Lindsey). At her institution, Lindsey valued that her colleagues took the "care and time" to get to know her and help with her development. "I mean it'd be really hard to do this position if you didn't

care." She gave an example of how she presented a series of sessions to campus departments on ways to improve their orientation presentations. The "engagement from the campus partners" to do this project "was something unique." She felt so supported because they all bought in to the initiative. This workplace support from her colleagues was salient to Lindsey's experience.

Each participant described workplace support among colleagues as having an impact on their experiences as new student affairs professionals. The collegial work relationships with peers had a positive impact on their experiences, thus positively impacting their organizational commitment.

Theme 4: Gratification From Impacting Students

Gratification from impacting students is another theme that emerged from the data analysis of this study. Participants provided examples of how the impact they made on students' lives brought them joy in the work that they did as new student affairs professionals.

Joe talked about being "an educator by nature" and how he "loves teaching" students. He believed student affairs was a platform that allowed him to be himself, and serving students was his "way of giving back because [he] was a first-generation student, and [he] recognize[d] the difference this made in [his] family." The work he does in student affairs helped Joe "feel like [he's] serving a greater good." He shared a story about being the first responder with a student who had just attempted suicide.

> I think in that moment when I realized that I was serving her and that she was in a moment of low in her own life,. . . I realized you're allowed to walk into this moment of this person's life. And being here, being present, and being with them matters because what, who they are when they're not with you every day can be greatly changed and impacted by what you said in this moment.

Joe said, "I'm just here for a moment, you know, a moment of this student's life and what I say and what I do matters in this moment."

Joe felt a sense of gratification that he could make a difference in students' lives. When asked about what made him committed, his number one reason was that he "enjoys working with the students." When he was in graduate school exploring the student affairs field, he explained that he "enjoyed . . . the ability to impact someone's life" and realized that his "words made a difference and [my] ability to help people find themselves was really there and that's a skill that [I] had."

David felt similarly to Joe in that he realized he could impact students' lives through his work in the field. He wanted to develop strong relationships using a developmental approach:

> I had a really strong relationship with the students because I wanted my conduct process to be so developmental, and I wanted it to be so educational, and I wanted them to think about what they were doing . . . I engaged them on how they felt about things . . . I helped them examine and look deeper into things. And I . . . treated everyone with integrity.

David expressed gratification in seeing the transformation in students through the work that he had done with them. "I really like working with students…it is rewarding because at the end of the day, at the end of the year, you get to see how things transformed" (David).

> Linda engaged in "meaningful conversations with students so that [she] could help them." She "wanted to have good conversations with students that [she] thought would matter to them." Linda too felt gratification from impacting students' lives, "I think sometimes when I hear about students that want to thank me about what I've done or how I've followed up on a situation, it's so cool to hear that they see me as an influence." She loved the work she was doing with the students because it was meaningful. Things that probably keep me excited about what I'm doing is [*sic*] that I see a difference, and that when people talk to me, things have changed. The other day I had dinner with the [residents on the] twelfth floor of my building, and they talked about their favorite memories of the year; and it was so cool to see that they had made connections, and we had created this opportunity to create connections. I think it's so cool because I think, . . . "Do I really have a hand in this? Could they do it without me? Or does it matter that I'm here?"

Linda shared how important it was for her to have influence with students by keeping them excited about the institution, retaining them at the institution, and reminding them of their purpose and why they were there. She talked about how gratifying it was to encourage students

that "you can do it, you can go further" and have "conversations with people who felt like they matter." Linda said she felt

> a huge commitment . . . I want other students to have the opportunity that I had to get a degree . . . I want to help push them a little further every day, so I think I have a strong commitment.

That gratification from impacting students' lives had a significant impact on her own commitment to the student affairs field.

As another example, Jack worked with leadership and student conduct, and through those experiences he discussed how he enjoyed the impact he had on students in his leadership class and conduct cases. "I really enjoy being able to help students again through that transition, and being able to help them make the most of the opportunities they have here" (Jack). Jack talked about teaching a leadership class and how "they have goals in mind; they're working to accomplish them in ways [I] never really thought about doing when [I] was in school," and he "really, really enjoys[s] seeing that." Jack enjoyed "the opportunity to give back or pay it forward."

Suzy talked specifically about the gratification of seeing her students pursue the next stages of their lives. Very emotionally, she shared that

> I think for me, seeing the long-term development of students. So, watching . . . RAs that I had graduate this year and go on and attain successful careers and positions that they've wanted and graduate schools that they've been working for—that's what drives me in the field. . . . I love seeing them grow and develop and work, and watching them develop as individuals.

Suzy talked about working with first-year students in her residence hall, and how she loved to help them have a great experience and find their path. She explained that she "went into this field for the students" and "that's really what drove [me] . . . the fact [I] could impact so many different people."

Pam's perspective was similar to the others, as well. She loved seeing students grow, and being able to impact their lives. Pam shared,

> I have one staff member who's been on my staff for these past two years and . . . she's [a] junior; she still has [a] 4.0. She works in the Deans office. She's interning for [prominent company] this summer . . . I love her, like she literally is like my . . . little sister; and so seeing her grow . . . Because when I hired her I had a vacancy during RA training week, and so I needed to hire someone like, fast, because we were midway through training. Hired her, she was like one of two people left. She wasn't supposed to be an RA, and, like, being able to see her grow, . . . She used to be this quiet girl who was . . . really timid . . . .Now she's president of her sorority . . . she's a week-of-welcome leader; she's an RA; she's coming back for a third year. Being able to see students like that grow and blossom is the reason why I love not only the field, but why I love being here.

Giving that student the RA experience to help her develop skills and come out of her shell was rewarding for Pam to see. Knowing that she had a hand in the student's development confirmed Pam's desire to be in this field. Pam explained,

> we have a lot of students who are very socially awkward, and being able to give them that confidence and opportunity in order to prove themselves wrong on who they think that they are is very, very rewarding for me; and that's why I love it here so much.

Pam felt gratification from impacting students' lives. In turn, that experience also affirmed her commitment to her institution and the student affairs field.

Holly talked about the importance of fostering relationships with students and how it was rewarding knowing she can make a difference in students' lives through those relationships. At her first institution, where she worked 1 year, she had developed some great relationships with her students, which made it hard for her to leave. For example,

> We had a student who her boyfriend passed away from a drug overdose, and she happened to be one of the students that I worked with on Panhellenic and wouldn't really leave her residence hall room. She was in one of our sorority halls, and she wouldn't leave; but . . . the first step we had her agree to, that felt good to her, was coming into our office and eating lunch every day. And so that happened right before I left; and so it was really hard knowing that I was leaving a student who we were kind of her . . . kind of helping her rehabilitate after that. I think it just spoke to the connection we have with students, that that felt comfortable for her. Maybe not going to class yet, but coming to

our office . . . it felt like a safe space. And so that really made it hard to leave, knowing that.

For Holly, these moments were the heart of her passion:

> We work a lot, right! We don't get paid a lot for it, right! And so a lot of the rewards that we get come from these relationships and feeling like something is better because you've put that time or effort into it.

Holly valued her relationships with her students, and being able to make a difference in their lives. She felt that gratification from impacting students' lives, which thus impacted her commitment.

Kim shared how important it was for her experience when she made had an impact on students. Whenever Kim had the "ability to make something click [with students], or help them have a moment or give them an experience," she shared those were the times that were "really valuable for [her], and those [were] the moments that make [her] life and [her] job so worthwhile."

Kim loves "the awesome relationships and the connections [she] gets to make with [her] students." She shared, "I had a student, and her mom was in town, and she specifically brought her mom to campus to meet me 'cause I'd been such an influence in this student's life; and her mom wanted to say, 'Thank you.'" That was "so rewarding" for Kim to have this student bring her mom by for 20 minutes to chat and say, "Thank you." Another example was when Kim got to take a group of students on an international, study-abroad trip:

> I got to study abroad [with] 17 students . . . and do some really intensive service work . . . to see some of them go out of the country for the first time . . . in their life; all that is incredibly rewarding.

Once again, the gratification from impacting students had a positive effect on Kim's experience.

Rick was a first-generation college student, so going to college was an honor and a matter he took very seriously. He wanted to pay that forward and impact students' lives in a positive way:

> I'm having the opportunity to make an impact on these students' lives. I'm having the opportunity to work with these students and hopefully help them get through college; and no matter what else is going on, that's still goal number one.

As a resident director working in housing, one aspect of Rick's job was doing student conduct, so he tried to make those interactions with students meaningful. Rick felt that he had some powerful conversations helping students learn and grow from those behaviors:

> The impact that you can make in someone's life . . . I'm able to see them grow and become successful. It's something that I've . . . really appreciated because it's like I have a chance for the opportunity to become a mentor and someone that they can really trust and depend on, and call on for support.

The gratification from impacting students' lives clearly had been meaningful for Rick. He shared stories about how he loved getting calls from former staff members whom he supervised:

> The thing that I enjoy the most is when I [get] calls from my former staff members and they're like, "[Rick,] I'm going through this dilemma. I'm deciding whether to go to graduate school or go get a teaching job." And it's like they value my opinion enough because of the relationship that I've built that they're willing to call me to see, to at least discuss with me, about these huge life choices they're about to make. So that's kind of the thing that it's just "How can I make an impact in someone's life?"

> Much like Rick, Glenda really "loves working with the RAs and students," and she

"didn't realize how fulfilling" the work would be. She had "never really worked in a place where the student's opinion was so valued," so she appreciated this work environment.

> Mary expressed the same sentiment as Glenda:

> You can just see a student who comes in never having been a leader and then work with them throughout the whole year and see them grow, which is why I really like it . . . This position is great because I work with students on such a close basis.

Participants provided various examples about how, as new student affairs professionals, they appreciated working with students. They felt gratification from making an impact on these students' lives.

Theme 5: Long Hours

One challenging aspect for the participants in this study was the stressful demand of the long hours expected of them in their student affairs positions. The interplay between their job responsibilities and their personal lives was a major struggle for the new professionals, and sometimes it adversely affected their commitment.

David talked about the "expectations being very high in housing," and how these types of positions have a very "short shelf life:"

> I think that it's probably one of the most difficult jobs out there because your emotional energy has to stay so strong . . . You're on call around the clock. People can knock on your door . . . You're on call 24/7 and . . . the emotional energy you need is so strong.

As a hall director, David was responsible for running a building with 800 people and 24 RAs. He had hundreds of conduct cases, and he described balancing all of the work as "very challenging." Not only was David required to be available 24/7 for his own building, but resident directors also had to participate in a duty rotation to be on call for the entire campus residential student population.

> Anytime you're on call here, you need to go to the hospital if a student goes . . . but you might wait at the hospital for 6 hours, and then come back and go to work and just not sleep; and it's kind of expected . . . there's over four thousand students on this campus and there's something always happening, you know . . . It just requires so much of your energy.

The long hours that were required to handle this job impacted David's emotional well-being and drained his energy as a new professional. He had to figure out a way to handle that stress. "I think stress management is something I had to grow in a lot; and to improve in that, I started running. So I became a runner, and I just completed a 208-mile relay race" (David).

He described these experiences as one of the reasons that he considered leaving the student affairs profession.

Like David, Suzy was in a live-in housing position and struggled with long hours, as well. Suzy said, "There's a lot of burnout that comes with working in housing." She actually considered leaving the student affairs field altogether because of the challenging issues with her work and the impact it had on her personal life:

> I thought I was depressed, and I really struggled with that this past year and a half. I couldn't figure it out, and I couldn't figure it out personally, and I realized that . . . when you live in, you bring home your work all the time. So it was just constantly weighing on me. And so that's what made me want to leave, is that I thought if I could remove myself from the situation, entirely separated myself from student affairs, I would be a lot happier.

Suzy's emotional well-being was affected when she thought she was depressed. To try to find balance, she needed connection with others separate from the workplace. However, people outside of the student affairs field did not understand the long hours she worked. Even having a dating life was difficult for her:

> Well, being single and living in and trying to date sucks. I walk past a 24-hour desk, and so I can't just bring in my date . . . I think dating, living in, is the one of the hardest things you can do.

Suzy intentionally found friends outside of the position. "I have an amazing set of friends outside of this job that have no ties to the university; so I get to unplug, and I love that. It's helped me find that balance."

Similarly to both Suzy and David, Pam was also a live-in resident director. At her first institution, she was in her new position for only one year. She had just graduated and moved with her partner to the Midwest to work in a very difficult residence hall. The building was an all-freshman hall, but it was "known for its drug use" and referred to as "the bad-kid building." Pam worked hard her first year to change the perception of that building, but it was a very challenging and an exhausting year:

It was very hard because the on-call system there was you call your RD [resident director] first; if they're not there, then you call your, like, senior RA [resident assistant] in the building; if they're not there, then you call the person on call. Well, my building was so heavy in, like, drug and . . . I mean just all sorts of stuff, I was literally being called like three or four times a night.

Pam struggled with balancing the long hours and demanding responsibilities while also being a newlywed. The combination led to her leaving that position quickly:

We moved so far away from our families and so fast . . . we were still trying to adjust, and my job was so incredibly demanding that we only stayed for a year. Because it wasn't realistic for any human being to have to deal with that, granted, and then to have to put my husband through it, too.

Pam realized that she needed to search for a job. She stated, "I can't do this anymore, like this is not a healthy way to live." The long hours and nightly interruptions were too demanding. Those competing needs of work demands with her personal life affected her commitment to that first institution.

Pam continued with another live-in housing position. At the time of the interview, she was at her second university and had been in the position for 2 years. The long work hours were still a struggle for her. Pam explained, "I've been married for 3 years now; like, I want to have a family . . . You know, the fire alarm getting pulled every night, I'm not really down for that." She was evaluating her next life stages and how those balanced with her chosen career path:

It makes it hard when I get called at 3 o'clock in the morning and don't go home until 5 or 6. [My husband] has to sit there and worry about me. But also it's like, a lot of times I get taken away from my family.

Pam said it was very difficult balancing her personal life because work had a direct effect on it. She recounted a situation in which her apartment flooded in the residence hall because a pipe had burst down the hallway; then she had several instances with the fire alarm going off in the middle of the night where everyone had to evacuate the building. She said, "we have to live through" these types of issues, so it was hard for her to watch her husband have to deal with it

too. Sometimes she did not even get to see her husband for 2 or 3 weeks during fall training.

She said it was a "very hard lifestyle to live, and it's scary thinking about bringing a child into

that . . . especially within housing."

For Pam, the interplay of the job demands and the stage she was at in her life was a huge

factor related to her commitment to the workplace. She felt that "sometimes we get taken

advantage of . . . like, we work crazy hours."

She considered leaving the field altogether for her family's sake because "student affairs

is a very crazy lifestyle; there's no downtime." As Pam reflected on her experiences, she wished

graduate school would have prepared her more with how to find work-life balance. She felt as if

she had never learned the skills to take with her into the profession. The balance between her

next life stages and the long hours of the housing world within student affairs were having a

negative impact on her commitment.

Like Pam, Lindsey recognized that she would have different stages of her life in which

she would have to evaluate her commitment. She worked in orientation at the time of this

interview and had been in the position 1 year. At this point in her life, she felt definitely

committed to student affairs, but she did share that she may adjust her career path within the

field:

> I think throughout my lifetime, as I go through different stages of life, I'm going to want
> to be involved in student affairs in a different type of capacity. Like, for example, if I
> have a family one day, I don't think I'll want to work a job with these crazy hours or late
> nights. I mean I might . . .you never know. But what I love about the profession is that
> there are a lot of different types of things you could do within it that would align with
> your interests and your stage of life; and for me that's part of why I see myself long term
> in this field.

Lindsey experienced the long hours in her role, but her method of handling them would be to

choose a different career path within student affairs to attempt to balance the demands of the

long hours and her personal life.

Like Lindsey, Kim was not in the housing world. She worked in the student-activities realm. However, the long hours and competing forces between the job and her personal life were not lost on Kim. She expressed how she felt "stretched beyond [her] capacity and [her] limit, to the point where" she felt as if she was "going to break." During the spring semester of the second year of her position, she was so frustrated. "I was incredibly burned out, like I was done with our field . . . was questioning whether higher education was the field for me, and if I really wanted to do this for the rest of my life."

Because of that frustration, Kim made a concerted effort to try to balance the position and her outside life, but she struggled as she watched her supervisors and colleagues put in the significant hours. Kim believed that "entry level student affairs professionals do not get paid enough to work, like, 60 hours a week."

She lived by the motto "work to live," but that did not seem to be the same belief her supervisors and her coworkers held. She said her efforts to live with that view had definitely been challenging because

> The work-to-live and live-to-work . . . it's pretty apparent between myself and my supervisor, and supervisor's supervisor. Both of them are very much live-to-work. They call student affairs a lifestyle. They're often replying to emails before 7 o'clock in the morning. They're definitely working on the weekends, and they've vocalized that . . . One of them just graduated with his PhD [and] one of them is entering a PhD program. I mean, they very much are putting all of their time and energy into this . . . It's really hard for me to go, you know, "It's five o'clock; I'm going home." You're still here, and you're still working, and that's great for you; but I'm, I'm done for the day, and so I'm going to go home and go work out, go make dinner, spend time with my friends, or whatever that is, and feel like I'm not being judged for that, or I'm not seen as less of a professional because I choose to make that decision.

Kim worked long hours in her position but tried to make every effort to find that balance with those job demands. Her struggle was that she felt judged by her supervisors and her colleagues if she did not continue to put in the long hours in the workplace:

I am a hundred and fifty bajillion percent a professional who works to live as opposed to live to work. That view, that personal view, isn't shared with everyone in my office. Sometimes that can be tough to navigate when other professionals feel they need to be here before 8 and after 5 and on the weekends and for every single program that we do. I am, I guess, just not that committed. So what we do—I love what we do, and I think we do good work, but I don't feel the need to spend 7 days a week in my office; and I'm actually okay with that.

Kim questioned whether she wanted to move up in this career path:

Why do I want to move on and become a director or a vice president whenever you don't get that student interaction, and you work more hours in a week? So it's less time for those other things that I want to do in my life.

She even questioned whether she wanted to continue in the student affairs field altogether. "I don't want to spend sixty hours a week in my office, I don't want my work to be my entire life. That is kind of helping me reconsider what I want to do with my career."

Kim said she needed to feel a balance between her work and personal life. She does not "want to sacrifice the things that happened outside of work" because she needs "fun in [her] life, and going on vacations, and doing things after work" were important to her. The long hours had a negative impact on Kim's commitment to the workplace and possibly to whether she continued in the student affairs field at all.

Other participants also described how the long hours affected their desire to stay in the field and whether they want to move up in that career path. Linda contemplated whether she wanted to move up in the field because of the long hours she watched her vice president put into the position. "I hear about our Vice President of Student Affairs, and that she answers emails until 11 o'clock at night; and I think, 'Oh; I don't want to do that.'"

Mary shared that she also had questioned whether she wanted to stay in the field altogether. She explained that "it's not really like an 8-to-5 job, which isn't always the best thing because I always am working really late nights, a lot of weekends, and stuff like that."

Jack had switched out of housing from graduate school and pursued a position in student

activities and conduct. He stated that student affairs professionals have to have a strong

commitment to the organization to do this work in higher education:

> I think especially in higher ed, [commitment is] a really important thing given that even somebody in res life . . . you are 24/7; but even outside of that, I think there are very few jobs here where we start at 8, go home at 5; and I think that having that commitment to the organization . . . is a big part of it.

Jack shared that "we all work many late hours; we all are involved in many things beyond

whatever our title may be."

For each participant, the expectation of the long hours was an element that impacted them

differently with regard to their organizational commitment. Whether it was the impact on their

emotional well-being, the stage they were at in their life, or just the mere need to have balance,

the long hours of the student affairs positions had a notable impact on participants' experiences.

For some, this factor caused them to consider leaving the student affairs field altogether.

Theme 6: Emotional Toll From Mental-Health/Crisis-Management Response

Another challenging aspect for participants was the emotional toll that they experienced

from the mental-health and crisis-management issues they encountered and had to manage in this

profession. Many participants shared experiences in which they felt ill-prepared to handle

student issues related to mental health, yet they tended to be the first responders. Those

experiences took a toll on their own emotional well-being.

Working in student affairs, and specifically in housing, professionals see a significant

number of mental health issues that students are dealing with on a regular basis. As an example,

David discussed that

> there's a lot of mental health issues emerging in the field . . . I'm not sure that higher ed is ready for that. I'm not sure it's ready to deal with the crisis . . . Students don't necessarily have their meltdown in class . . . I think a lot of the crisis happens where they live and where they spend most of their time, which is in a residence hall.

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Student affairs professionals living in the residence halls can potentially be the first responders to these situations. David said, "it can be stressful and emotionally draining" because "you have to be ready to deal with things around the clock," and be ready to deal with "life cris[es] people have." The "responsibility is so high on our end" because "at times you're a counselor, at times you're an emergency responder, [and] at times you're an advocate for someone who is dealing with sexual assault."

Those experiences can take an emotional toll on employees who already feel overworked with the long hours in the field. David was no exception. He explained that those experiences can be exhausting, and employees in this profession are not equipped to handle them appropriately. David described mental health as an example of where he saw "a disconnect in leadership" in terms of "upper administration" being "out of touch with the reality on the ground level:"

> If you're expecting them to respond and to manage emotional crisis, provide some training in that sense; provide some mental health training; provide some certifications; provide some informal counseling training; and be flexible and understanding when dealing with those situations.

David described being "exhausted" from regularly having to handle crisis issues, and that this was another reason he considered leaving the student affairs profession.

Like David, Joe was working at his second university in a live-in housing position at the time of the interview. He served "on an emergency crisis response team as well as all the other resident directors so [they] cycle off about a week or two weeks a semester." Joe shared,

> I've just seen so many students struggle . . . I've seen students struggle emotionally; I've seen students at their lowest; I've had to deal with suicide attempts; I've had to deal with a suicide at the school that I worked with, a student suicide; I've had to deal with domestic violence.

He recounted a story about responding to an on-duty call for suicidal ideation; she was cutting. Joe talked about the conversation, and that "how gentle you have to be" really made him understand that he had "to be really careful" with what he said. He described it as "I'm just here for a moment, you know? A moment of this student's life; and what I say and what I do matters in this moment." How powerful is that statement? Joe described, jokingly, that working in housing was like a "catch-all job" because one moment he could be a counselor and the next, a medic because he knew CPR. His experiences reflect the demands on his role as a student affairs professional in response to mental-health and crisis-management issues.

Glenda discussed that the number of "mental health concerns [was] a lot higher here than [she] had previously worked in" at graduate school. Glenda "felt [I] had to do a lot of higher-level crisis response," which was almost "a reason for [her] to consider not coming back" to the student affairs profession.

> I think the biggest thing is the crisis response, because we're on a 24-hour duty rotation, and we hold the phone, hold the duty phone about every 5 to 6 weeks . . . Things that we do confront are pretty involved emotionally; and the common duty call that we have, beyond, kind of like, the alcohol and marijuana kind of things, is suicidal ideation, anxiety and depression, some domestic violence sometimes. So things like that that are a little bit emotionally intense . . . knowing that whenever I have this on, I could go on to a call or could end up at the hospital for a suicidal ideation, bipolar disorder, things like that. . . . I think that stresses me out because I know that I don't know much about it; but I do my best . . . that is probably a major source as far as my stress. . .

Glenda expressed that she did not feel prepared to handle the high volume and intensity of those mental-health and crisis-management situations. Even in the city in which she was located, "a lot of our mental health resources here are limited, and so I often feel very overwhelmed when I'm in that situation."

These experiences had taken an emotional toll on Glenda, causing her to feel stressed and overwhelmed. As a new professional, she had this heavy responsibility to help address these issues with students. Because of that, she wrestled with the notion that

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I'm at the table of those decisions. I'm kind of an entry-level person. You know, like, am I the most equipped person at this institution to be making these decisions? So, that's something that I've struggled with a little.

The mental-health and crisis-management issues are a significant responsibility for student affairs professionals. Those scenarios can involve suicidal ideation, sexual assault, mental breakdowns, depression, anxiety, injuries, and more. As a result, responding to these issues can take an emotional toll on employees, as they have described as participants through their experiences.

Summary of Results

Personal connection, supportive supervision, workplace support from colleagues, gratification from impacting students, long hours, and emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management emerged as structural themes that framed the experience for these 13 participants. The participants who had good personal connections, supportive supervision, and workplace support were more committed to their institutions. Their gratification from having a positive impact on students' lives is what kept the participants committed to the student affairs field. However, the stressful demands of the profession as a result of the long hours and the emotional toll to their mental health and their limited crisis-management skills caused many participants to consider leaving the student affairs field altogether.

Essence

The structural themes that emerged from the lived experiences for these participants and framed the phenomenon included personal connection, supportive supervision, workplace support from colleagues, gratification from impacting students, long hours, and emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues. Through textual-structural synthesis, *Cultivated Relationships* emerged as the essence of this study. At the core of the participants' experiences were the relationships with their supervisors, colleagues, and students.

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When the relationships were developed, encouraged, and fostered, participants exhibited a connectedness to the institution and the student affairs field. When that connectedness with their supervisors, colleagues, and students was not developed, coupled with the long hours they faced and emotional toll they experienced from responding to mental-health and crisis-management situations, participants would disengage. That disengagement would cause participants to consider leaving their institutions and the student affairs field altogether.

When I think about the definition of *cultivate,* the word is described in a number of ways: to develop a skill or foster the growth of; to improve by labor or care; or to make friends, further, and encourage. As I reflected on the participants' lived experiences, the word *cultivate* emerged from the structural themes of personal connections with colleagues and supervisors, supportive supervision, workplace support from colleagues, and gratification from impacting students.

In personal connections, participants needed that positively fostered relationship with their supervisors and colleagues. When participants described the supportive supervision, they desired positive reinforcement, feedback from a caring place, and autonomy that fostered professional growth through encouragement. Participants needed that healthy, cultivated relationship with their supervisors, and the acknowledgment they experienced through supportive supervision.

When participants described the gratification of impacting students' lives, they shared how the impact of the work they did through their interactions with students was significant for them. Many discussed paying it forward and the rewarding feeling they had knowing they had developed relationships with students and made an impact on their lives. Participants believed they were able to foster growth in their students, which brought the participants joy in their work.

Cultivated Relationships was the essence of this study that described how the new student affairs professionals experienced organizational commitment at their institutions. However, participants who struggled with the long hours and emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management concerns considered leaving their institutions and the student affairs field. If participants experienced those issues and also did not have the cultivated relationships, then disengagement would occur and their organizational commitment would be adversely affected.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

I examined the lived experiences of 13 employees who had been in the student affairs field from 1 year to 4 years. The three research questions I used to guide this study were

1. How do new student affairs professionals experience their role on campus?

2. What makes new student affairs professionals organizationally committed to their current institution?

3. What makes new student affairs professionals organizationally committed to the student affairs profession in general?

To address these research questions, I interviewed 13 new student affairs professionals who had experience ranging in Greek life, orientation, leadership, volunteerism, housing and residence life.

How Do New Student-Affairs Professionals Experience Their Role on Campus?

Personal connection, supportive supervision, workplace support from colleagues, gratification from impacting students, long hours, and emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues were structural themes that both framed the professional experiences in student affairs for these 13 participants and answered this first research question.

Participants found gratification in their roles when they felt their work made an impact on students. Those experiences were also positively impacted when strong personal connections were fostered with their colleagues and their supervisors. They specifically described how important it was for them to have good supportive supervision and workplace support from colleagues. This finding was illustrated through the structural themes discussed earlier in this chapter. However, participants did experience exhaustion from long hours and an emotional toll from the mental-health and crisis-management responses required of them, which caused them to consider leaving the field (discussed in the findings related to Research Question 3).

What Makes New Student-Affairs Professionals Organizationally Committed to Their Current Institution?

When participants described their experiences at their institution, the conversations always led to the personal connections with their supervisors and colleagues, supportive supervision, and workplace support from colleagues. *Cultivated Relationships* is the essence of this study. Those cultivated relationships that emerged from the structural themes were salient to the participants' roles and answered this second research question. When there was personal connection and a supportive workplace between the participants and their supervisors and colleagues, they were more likely to stay and feel vested in their institution. This outcome was apparent through the structural themes that emerged. However, participants gave a few reasons why they would consider leaving their institutions. Those reasons included career advancement, having been taught the 2-to-3-year rule, lack of leadership, and being closer to family.

Career advancement. Career advancement was one of the main reasons the new student affairs professional participants indicated they would consider leaving their institutions. When

there was no opportunity to gain new skills or advance in their career, they were more likely to leave.

David was leaving the institution a week after I conducted my interview with him. He was taking an assistant director role in housing at another institution. He had only been in the position 2 years at the current institution. He was transitioning from a resident director, entry level position to an assistant director, midmanagement level position.

Linda talked about how "our field is so fluid and everybody kind of moves to increase their opportunities." She felt she needed "more experiences" because she aspired to be a dean. She did not want to leave the institution but would be forced to do so in order to diversify her experiences. "I just need to change my opportunities. I need to learn a new system. I need to learn a new functional area" (Linda). If she continued to stay in the field, Linda wanted to become a Dean of Students. In order to get there, she believed she needed to get some other experiences in some specific areas:

> If I stay . . . in this field, I think a Dean of Students would be . . . the area that I'd like to be at, and kind of the job path that I'd like to take; and so I really want to get some different functional areas. I really enjoyed my orientation experience, and I want to do more with admissions and orientation. I also want to do more with student leadership or student government. I think that would be a really good place that I want to increase my knowledge about . . . because I have some of that crisis-management and conduct experience that the Dean of Students may have, but I want some of those other areas that may be in their purview.

For Linda, leaving the institution was the only option to gain the experiences for the path she wanted to take because there were no opportunities at her institution.

Joe intentionally pursued the housing arena as a new student affairs professional to get a varied experience: "I thought about leaving, for other opportunities." He brought forth the concern that there was nowhere to move upward at his current institution if he wanted to advance his career. "The lack of opportunity is one of the reasons why I would leave this institution"

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(Joe). He indicated there were a lot of one-person departments at his university and it made it "challenging" to consider "longevity at the institution." There was nowhere at his current institution that he could advance his career to the next step.

Suzy talked about wanting to move upward in her next position. To achieve her career goals, she wanted to "move up" and not "do [a] lateral move" (Suzy). Suzy said moving up was "not going to happen here" at her institution. Suzy's major passion was training and development, so she had started a search for positions that had that focus, with more responsibilities. She had been in the position 2 years at the time of the interview.

Holly explained, "I think about upward movement. I'm probably not going to be a program coordinator forever." And so I think, "Sure, I've thought about leaving, but not in the immediate. It's more about that future career longevity."

For Kim, the lack of mobility upward was a factor for potentially leaving the institution. "I probably am going to leave [because] there's very little upward mobility . . . I'm going to outgrow this job, or I'm going to need to move on to job 2 to further my career" (Kim).

Career advancement to obtain new experiences was an important factor for these participants. If there was not opportunity to advance or gain new skills at their institution, then they would look elsewhere and leave the institution.

Taught the 2- to 3-year rule. As I conducted the interviews, I found it interesting that so many new student affairs professionals were taught by mentors and colleagues to expect to stay 2 to 3 years in their first position. I was even taught that concept when I started in the field, almost twenty years ago. The principle is not written in our coursework in graduate school, but yet it is a message that is almost engrained in all of us as we begin our careers.

Suzy was conducting a limited job search after 2 years in her current position. If she did not get any of the jobs she applied for, she would start a "full-blown search, just because . . . 3 years . . . it's about that time." Like Suzy, Glenda said, "I've committed my life here for at least 2 or 3 years."

Pam had the 3-year mindset as well. When she was hired, the institution embraced that thought process. "When I came in, it was very much 'You do your 3 years and you're out.' Like 'We only keep you for 3 years.'"

Lindsey explained, "I always want to be learning and growing; and maybe after 3 summers here, [it] would be probably a good time to find somewhere else where I could learn and grow."

Rick was committed to doing a few years and leaving. He said, "I will at least do 2 years, if not even 3." His supervisors pushed that same thought process. "When hired…they said coordinators are usually on a 3-year rotation; and so, my mindset was always 3 years" (Rick).

Colleagues of Laura who were new to the field also were making those 2- or 3-year moves. However, she wanted to stay longer because she felt she had more to learn. Laura planned to stay more like 4 or 5 years:

> I think I actually felt [pressured]. I see more people staying 2 or 3 [years], and so the 4 to 5 was like, part of it was almost like a mini challenge to myself . . . I'm internally very competitive. I was an overachiever from the start, and . . . so in my head it's like, "I'm going to dare myself to stay four to five years because no-one else does. And, you know, that's going to be my own little competitive edge, is that I stayed 4 or 5 years; I didn't leave after 2.

Kim expressed concern that new professionals are taught this notion that they should expect to be in the position for 2 to 3 years and then move on to the next role:

> I don't know where this comes from, or I don't what you recommend to students who are going to higher education. But for me, my first year in the job is not going to be a 2- or 3-year job and out. I don't know, kind of, why . . . I guess in grad school I was always taught that your first job would be 2 years and then you move . . . I just think that that

was a huge misconception that was told, that you could do anything for 2 years and then just move on, and . . . get a promotion or take a bump up . . . That's totally not how it works, I feel like . . . I was told is that you would sit at your entry-level job for again, 2 to 3 years, and then, after 3 years max, you would take a second, better job; you would take an assistant director job, and you would take that bump for no less than $10,000. That's also not true.

Kim said that was not going to be the plan for her. She said that she still had a "lot to learn here," and she was "trying to be patient with the opportunities" that she did have in the position. Kim wished professionals in the field had not told her it was just a 2- to 3-year stint, and then you'll move on. She would have reframed her search process a little differently:

I'm going to be making not very much money for a lot longer than I thought, . . . and that also kind of sucks, to know that I'm going to be in [Midwest city] a lot longer than I anticipated. [It's] not necessarily a bad thing because I love my life in [Midwest city]; but had I known that information whenever I was job searching, I probably would have been a little bit more picky as to where I ended up, knowing that this wasn't going to be a 2- or 3-year job; this is going to be a 4-, 5-, 6-year job before I moved on and moved up.

A number of participants shared how there is a mindset in the student affairs field that new professionals in their first positions after graduate school should last around 2 to 3 years. Because of that mindset, many started to consider leaving the institution to move onward.

Lack of leadership. Several participants described frustrating experiences because of the lack of leadership, whether it was from their supervisor or within the department. For instance, Joe indicated that he "thought about leaving [the institution] numerous times. A lot of times because of the leadership within the department that I work or lack thereof." He described that the issues with leadership were related to "no vision" and "poor personnel management." Similarly, Pam said the "hardest part" of her job is the "lack of leadership, the lack of communication with what's going on." Several elements seemed to appear from the participants' comments about their experiences related to poor leadership: 1) no unified vision; 2) notable turnover; 3) poor personnel management; and 4) trust issues.

No unified vision. Joe felt that the supervisor and the department had a "lack of vision," and that was one of the reasons he considered leaving the institution. He felt supervisors were more focused on "butts in beds" than the student-development experience. He also shared that he did not feel the supervisors gave the resident directors a purpose or direction from a big-picture perspective:

> Lack of vision is still an issue—not knowing what our role is [as a resident director] greater than our building. I understand my role within my building. I understand what my job is within my building; but with regards [*sic*] to the department and what its goal is, I still believe it's going under the . . . approach [of] . . . put butts in beds. And so, it started to feel like things are getting better, but the vision hasn't changed much—you know, the goal, butts in beds. "Let's get butts in beds" . . . And that's not . . ., in my opinion, a very student development-friendly approach. And so, as opposed to looking at students like dollars and cents, trying to figure out "How do we give them a great experience?"

Joe believed the department was "not necessarily progressing at the rate that I think it could." He felt that those in charge were not willing to figure out solutions together because "there wasn't a lot of support in figuring out the answer to that problem." He perceived that there was not a real plan of action or consolidated response to handle these issues. Joe indicated that he would evaluate the upper leadership much more closely in his future job searches because he felt that it had a significant impact on his experience at his current institution. "I didn't realize how influential and how impactful leadership is; and so, I would definitely look at "What type of leader is it that's over the department" (Joe). Joe was concerned about the lack of vision from his current supervisor and upper administration.

Suzy talked about her supervisor not giving her what she needed in terms of goal setting and providing a vision for the department. Suzy said they "don't do a lot of assessment" or "evaluations" and when they do them, they "don't apply what [they] have learned from that." Suzy also did not feel that her supervisor was knowledgeable or passionate about her role, and thus did not give Suzy or her colleagues any focus:

I need more structure and knowledge. I think from my supervisor, she's very much a lead from the trenches and not a lead from a head person. She wants to be the team member with the RDs and, for me, I need to see someone ahead of us setting goals for us.

Suzy said her supervisor did not do "a lot of long-term planning . . . not a lot of goal setting."

Similar to Joe and Suzy, Pam described her experience in the same way. "We don't really have, we don't ever sit down and do like goal setting and say like, these are our goals as a team, this is our goal as a department" (Pam). Pam indicated they were

not making progress as a department . . . Because it's like "How long do you stay and put up?" It's almost like an abusive relationship, like, "How long do you stay and wait for it to get better before you just walk away?"

Pam was frustrated by the lack of vision. "It really makes you question why you're here, and why you're doing this, and 'Why is this so important?' especially when your bosses aren't showing that" (Pam).

Mary expressed the same frustration. She said it was "difficult to work under somebody when you don't always . . . have the same vision." Mary had been in her student activities position for a year and had a new supervisor join the team. She felt that the supervisor focused on hosting activities for the sake of it versus taking on the student development approach. The vision was not mutually shared.

Rick had a similar experience in that he felt there was no unified vision for their department or within the university. He was concerned that students were "falling through the cracks." Rick expressed frustration because

everyone is working toward their own personal goals. We're not working together toward university goals, and it's like, "Well, how do we make sure that we're all working in one chord to make sure that we have students that aren't walking around with 2.5 GPAs?" or . . . how we can all help one another. And so I just think that communication at the university amongst the different departments is very poor.

Rick did not feel they had an overall vision or long-term focus to meet the needs of the students. He gave another example with a breakdown in communication as it relates to vision.

Rick explained that an announcement was made about building residence halls, but no one in residence life knew about it. Rick said, "How did [administrators] not talk to the professionals in residence life to discuss which type of residence halls you need on campus?" The lack of unified vision had a negative impact on his experience.

Holly's experience was not as negative. She explained that not having a vision and a focus was challenging. Her department was in fluctuation because of personnel changes. She talked about how they really were not able to develop a vision because of these fluctuations. They were not "able to develop a strategic plan because [they did not] have all the staff fully in place yet" (Holly). She struggled "thinking of new ideas . . . because I'm just not sure of the direction in which we're going." Making changes or developing new ideas were difficult because she did not know how to justify it to the students. "I don't feel like I can do that because I don't have the overall plan for our department."

These examples illustrate that, for these participants, not having a unified vision adversely impacted employees' work experience. For these employees, it led to frustration, confusion, and a lack of trust in the work environment.

Notable turnover. Several participants shared how turnover caused a lack of leadership, which adversely affected their experience as new student affairs professionals. Pam talked about how turnover created a challenging dynamic that caused lack of direction and support. At her current institution, "our boss had also just started 6 months prior and had no clue what she was doing. And so that has been . . . and continues to be very challenging. . ." (Pam).

In addition to having a new supervisor, the upper-level supervisor had been assigned some new duties, which caused him to be unavailable and pulled from providing the guidance and support that Pam believed the team needed:

We never see him; we might like, run into him on rare occasions, and . . . like, his passion, I feel confident saying his passion is housing. He was moved into this role and didn't have a choice; so, you can almost see the life sucked out of him . . . he's . . . why I came here, and so seeing that transition happen has been very hard.

For Pam, that turnover in the upper-level positions had an impact, especially because the upper-level supervisor was a reason that she had chosen to come to her institution. This turnover had caused lack of direction and support, which thus caused Pam to feel frustrated. It had been a "challenging" experience for her.

Holly indicated there was a lot of turnover in her office area. She explained that "It's kind of been challenging because I would say the overall theme for my experience at [the institution] thus far has been change" (Holly). She described having a new director, and that they were in the process of a search for another coordinator and a graduate assistant. Holly said it has been "difficult to talk about the future when you're not really sure who's going to be there."

Mary also talked about how the turnover was in her new position. She switched from being that undergraduate student to the role of program adviser. Her office lost the director that supervised her position, so she talked about how difficult the transition was for her. She explained she "didn't have anybody to go to" and that she "didn't have a mentor" (Mary).

The participants shared that the turnover caused a lack of leadership that needed to be in place to provide guidance to these new student affairs professionals. From the participants' perspectives, the turnover caused the experience to be very challenging.

Poor personnel management. Some participants talked about how poor personnel management was a negative experience for them. Accountability issues and hiring practices seemed to cause tension for these participants.

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As an example, Joe believed there was a lack of leadership because there was no accountability and "what I have called just poor personnel management. Lack of accountability on a lot of ends with regards to personnel, but then really poor hiring decisions." He explained that his supervisor was hired a short time before he joined the institution. The housing team had certain expectations of their supervisor, but those were not coming to fruition. Joe perceived his new supervisor as someone who lacked "passion" and "drive." For his boss, the position just appeared to be a *job*, not really a career. He said it would be a "little bit easier for me to trust and follow you in your example, 'cause actions speak louder than words." Joe was frustrated and had been considering leaving the institution many times because he felt upper administration did not hold his supervisor accountable. He said administration acknowledged Joe's supervisor was "not meeting . . . expectations. 'We agree she's not meeting some of our expectations,' and then, on the other end, [we were told] 'You need to get over it'" [Joe].

Like Joe, Pam really struggled because she did not perceive her supervisor as being committed to the job, and felt her supervisor was making poor decisions. "It became this very terrible dynamic."

Pam also discussed how there was lack of accountability by upper administration and her supervisor. She shared that it was "very hard for [her]" to see the lack of accountability:

> We, as a department, don't really have a professional code. I've had situations where my coworkers have been drinking with students, have slept with students, and all sorts of stuff . . . in the back of your mind, you're thinking nothing's happening because our department is very nonconfrontational; and so, because of that they don't hold us accountable. And so for things that we do get held accountable for, they're very silly and in the broad scheme of things are very unimportant.

Pam talked about how embarrassed she was because colleagues around campus seemed to know that there were poor personnel management issues within the department. She felt that the supervisor did not provide accountability or professional development to help them grow so

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they "all suffere[ed]" (Pam). She described her supervisor as a "very 9-to-5" employee, and that

she treats her work as an "office job." Pam did not perceive that "there's a commitment to the

staff as a whole or [to] individuals . . . I don't see there being a commitment in our growth." She

did not feel that her supervisor tried to develop them as a team, which caused many challenges.

Pam felt that the team did not get the guidance they needed, which caused a breakdown with the

colleagues.

> We are not a unit by any means. At the end of the day there's a lot of backstabbing that happens; everyone's out for each other almost, but it's like these issues: Everyone knows but it never gets addressed, nothing ever happens to it . . .

Pam disclosed how inconsistencies in accountability within the team caused challenges.

For example, one of her colleagues failed to turn something in on time and was written up for it;

however, Pam failed to do the same thing and it was never discussed with her. She described it

as "awkward" when she explained this to her colleague. It "creates hostility because when you

do [get] held accountable, it's not the same across the board." The poor personnel management

created hostility and anger within the staff toward their supervisor. "I think there's a hostility

because of the lack of accountability."

Rick struggled with the upper administration not holding his supervisor to a higher

standard. "Our direct supervisor, she's terrible. Because she is the involved with the

inappropriate relationship with [a] colleague, and she's the one that can't get over the person"

(Rick). The tension and negativity between his supervisor and his colleague carried over into the

rest of the team. Rick was frustrated because he felt that

> . . . personal disagreements because of things that happened in the past . . . [were] reasons why some people are not coming back. There were reasons brought up professionally why they were asking her to leave; but we all knew it was because she doesn't get along with one of the assistant directors, and part of that stemming from the relationship they had the year before, which was probably an inappropriate relationship . . . The assistant director wasn't able to put it behind, and whatever fallout from that relationship has now kind of boiled over into the [team]. And for me, that was one of the hardest things to take

because the one that's being pushed out was probably the best coordinator we had on staff, the most knowledgeable and the most understanding and the most supportive. She wasn't anticipating to leave . . . when she found [out that she] had to leave, she had [a month] to be gone.

Rick was so hurt by the news of his colleague being forced out by this supervisor that it "made [him] almost consider leaving." From his experience, he was frustrated by poor personnel management because the wrong people were being held accountable.

Rick also conveyed how the institution really needed to focus on hiring the right people. He said his supervisor had been a coordinator and was just promoted, but he did not feel she had the qualifications needed for the position:

> I don't think qualified enough individuals were in positions to work at the university. Some of the roles that we . . . like, I mean, even now, [the] HR department . . . we're not even posting jobs on . . . highereducationjobs.com or chronicle.com. They're just posting it in local areas or in the newspaper; and I was like, "How are you going to get a qualified individual who has a master['s], bachelor's or master's degree if this is the only institution that's churning degrees? Yeah, our graduation rate is 29 percent, and yet you're only putting it in the local papers? Like, where are you going to find the workforce you need, qualified workforce you need, to help these students?" And it's that whole process is frustrating because we don't have a lot of professionals that are actually trained.

Rick was frustrated that there was poor personnel management from his supervisor and the institution. In particular, his experience with his supervisor almost caused him to leave the institution altogether.

Participants' experiences were adversely affected when there was no unified vision, and when there was turnover and poor personnel management. These patterns caused frustration for employees and made them not want to be at their institution.

Trust issues. Trust issues was another concern for several participants. Several of them described their experiences in different ways, but at the core was the lack of trust in their supervisors, which adversely affected their work experience.

Suzy explained, for instance, that she was frustrated and did not trust her supervisor because of the way she was treated and devalued. "[I] will present something, and it's not good but . . . someone else will present something that's completely the same and it's the greatest idea ever. So, like, that's something that I really struggled with" (Suzy). For example, Suzy had suggested to her supervisor that they do "some kind of winter training for the RAs," to be more intentional; but her supervisor shot down the idea in her one-on-one meeting. Almost two hours later, one of the other hall directors brought the same idea up in the larger staff meeting, and the supervisor "thought it was a great idea." Suzy confronted her boss, but her boss "didn't really have an answer for it." Suzy did not trust her supervisor, and the lack of trust had adversely affected Suzy's experience and commitment to the institution. As a result, she was searching for another job at the time of the interview because she did not feel she was getting the support she needed to be successful.

Suzy relayed another story wherein she was accused of something quite serious in her position. Her concern was that she was not given the benefit of the doubt or even treated fairly in the process by another one of her supervisors. Because of this, she felt she lost out on a new opportunity at this institution:

> I was supposed to get [a new position], and because of the whole rumor-mill situation, it's not happening. And so that's something that just so disappointed me [voice cracks] . . . because you hear, "I'm going to support you, and I'm going to give you what you need," but then [crying] when you're not heard, there's no support. That's not support in my opinion, and . . . I've always subscribed to the philosophy that, if a student comes to me and says, "My RA did this," I'm typically going to believe my staff over the student just because they have that training support, and there's that trust, there's a mutual trust. I'm going to do my fact finding, but I'm never going to accuse you before I know all the facts; and I'm always going to hear you. And that didn't happen; and so, for me, that was a huge letdown . . . I mean, the first sentence he said was, "There's no proof you didn't, but I want to hear your side."

> And so it's just like, yes, he's going to hear it 'cause he has to do his fact finding; but initially it's an uphill struggle. Like it, it was never a level playing field when I came to that situation. It was always an uphill battle. So that was really tough, he asked me about

it, and he said, "Did you do it?" And I said, "No, I didn't do it." But that was after he had already said, "There's no proof that you didn't, but tell me…" It was a "first accuse, and then listen," and that's just not . . . I mean, even in judicials, you don't . . . it's basic student development, you know? You don't do that initially; you always let them tell their side of the story first, gather your evidence, and then go forward. So, I think that was a big struggle.

Suzy was "definitely hurt" by this experience and the way her supervisor handled the matter. She felt that no one listened to her, and that her experience at the institution "has been a big struggle" and "testing [for] 2 years." She did not trust her supervisors to listen to her, give her the benefit of the doubt, or treat her fairly. These negative interactions between Suzy and her supervisors adversely affected her experience, and thus her commitment to the institution.

Joe provided several examples of his lack of trust with his supervisor that affected his experience. The first involved a policy wherein Joe's supervisor had instructed the resident directors that RAs were going to have to abide by his specific interpretation of the policy. The resident directors disagreed and hashed it out with their supervisor. In the end, the resident directors agreed to support their supervisor's interpretation of the policy, which was not going to go over well with the RAs. The supervisor met with the RA staff during winter training and provided the policy interpretation:

> The policy interpretation had already started to be given down by our associate director, and then in comes someone that is his boss saying, "Hey, that's not how I see it." And so ultimately, we walked out of the room, kind of like "What just happened?" The person that we were told or assumed had the last say doesn't have the last say . . . there's that constant . . . "Who's the leader? Who's the director? Who makes the last call? Who has to live with that call?" And that still hasn't been decided.

This situation created "a lot of confusion." Joe and the other resident directors felt like they were prepared to support whatever the decision was; but now that the interpretation had changed, they were like . . . "I don't know if I have the right support if I have to enforce this. Whose interpretation am I going by?" And so, it was just very confusing. Based on that

experience, Joe said, "it's difficult to trust when you have those issues." It was frustrating for Joe because he did not have faith in his supervisor to lead and make the right decisions.

Joe really struggled with this experience because he felt as if there no ownership in mistakes and a defensiveness in the decision-making process. This story was a prime example. He felt frustrated and stifled as a new professional. It caused him to question the leadership.

Joe did not believe he could trust his supervisor to own those mistakes or provide those who reported to him the right guidance within their decision making. Joe also did not feel that he could challenge the leadership.

Another example was when Joe provided feedback for assessment, and the work he contributed was ultimately dismissed. He valued assessment and felt that it was important for the department. He had some experience with the assessment process at his previous institution and asked if he could contribute with the department's current project. Joe had given feedback on the survey "4 months before the survey was due," and when he asked about it in a meeting, the supervisor responded with "well, that's not my job; my job is to do this survey and to keep this consistent."

Joe did not feel valued, and he felt that his time was wasted. He did not trust that his supervisor would listen or support him. He made his statement about the survey in an open staff meeting, and he was disappointed that his supervisor was not challenged "by any level or authority within the department." Not only did he not trust his supervisor, he also did not trust the upper administration to challenge the complacency of leadership. So "the thought of leaving [the institution] crossed [his] mind a few times" (Joe).

Rick did not have trust in his supervisor either. He felt that the supervisor was incompetent and was not professional. He gave several examples. Rick indicated that his

supervisor had an inappropriate relationship with an employee that had been broken off for a while; however, the supervisor still had a power role over the employee. This particular colleague, whom Rick respected and admired, had several crisis issues related to students that occurred over a short time period, which took an emotional toll when his colleague

> actually broke down and cried in front of the other coordinators. It was a bad week for us as a university—two suicides, two sexual assaults, and it all happened in this one area . . . this coordinator's area.

Rick said,

> I went to my supervisor and I was just like, "[My colleague] is having a really tough time; you need to just reach out to her, check in on her . . . she just needs that bit of support."

The supervisor turned the situation into an argument with Rick's colleague. The supervisor took the feedback from Rick "as a personal slight that [she was] not being supportive enough, instead of just going out and seeing how [she] can help in this situation [for that colleague]." Rick was frustrated with his supervisor for taking the feedback out of context and making it personal with the coordinator. It was "very frustrating" and created some "trust issues."

Rick talked about another situation in which they were in a search process for professional staff positions. The search was unsuccessful with all but one of their top candidates. Because he was involved in some of the prescreening of candidates recommended to the search committee, Rick emailed his supervisor with a suggestion to go forward with some other candidates in the pool whom the search committee deemed hirable. The supervisor responded, "Well, our search committee reviewed the files, and they deemed them not hirable." Rick felt she had "completely lied to [him] because [he] was sitting right across from the search chair, who [said] . . . we deemed everyone hirable." Rick said he did not trust his supervisor based on these actions, and he provided yet another example that involved his evaluation and how vague

his supervisor was with her feedback. Because he did not always go along with her perspective, he was concerned that she was reaching for things and not being truly constructive with her input:

> I just had my evaluation . . . and part of the evaluation was I'm not able to see the bigger picture. And I asked for examples. I was like, "Can you give me examples?" She said, "Well, you're still going through transitional issues." I said, "Well, can you give me [an] example of what I'm doing that's struggling with transition?" And so when I asked for those feedback [*sic*] as far as "Can you give me a specific example of what I can do as far as transition," I got nothing . . . like, everything in my evaluation was so vague.

Rick felt that he challenged his supervisor on some issues, and because of that, he was concerned that she was digging up vague or unrelated references for his evaluation and had no basis for offering him constructive feedback. He felt he received an unfair evaluation because he was not given anything useful to improve upon.

Rick had major trust issues with his supervisor because he believed she was incompetent in her position, and also that she was not providing the appropriate support for him and his colleagues. As an example, relating to one of his colleagues, he said his supervisor had been a hall coordinator at the institution and then was moved up into the assistant-director role. He said, "I don't think she had proper training or the proper schooling or experience to do it because she's not doing a good job; like, she's doing a terrible job." He explained that a colleague

> had a student . . . trying to jump off one of the buildings . . . he [the colleague] had tried to reach out to that student, and he had done all these things, and he was actually going to talk to our supervisor about it. And the whole time he was talking to our supervisor about it, she was ruffling through papers, not really paying him much attention . . . He came to me 'cause . . . he was just so frustrated with her.

David's lack of trust in his supervisor came from how he was treated. He felt demeaned as an employee. He shared a story about a "terrible experience" in a meeting he had with his supervisor. As noted in a previous section, David was told, "You have no personality; you can't connect with staff or students, and I think you're [an] entitled, little spoilt brat." He was

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devastated by the experience, especially given that his boss never "came to visit [him] in [his] office, or ever stopped by." His boss "never came to see [him]" and never gave him "that hands-on support that [he] needed." To have an absent supervisor, and then have that supervisor offer "a summation about [David] that [he] was spoiled and entitled" was a frustrating experience for him.

David also talked about how his supervisor would "laugh at me when I did or said anything; and that was kind of discouraging." He even talked about being sexually harassed, and then laughed at in a meeting. These negative experiences with his supervisor in his first year of his new position had a significant impact on him. He did not trust his supervisor because of the treatment he had received.

> If you can't treat people with integrity, and if you can't maintain their [*sic*] own integrity and dignity, you can't manage people. Because when, the moment you, the moment you harass, the moment you break someone's trust, the moment you hurt someone like that, you've taken a step to disengage them.

These interactions caused David not to trust his supervisor, which adversely impacted his experience as a new student affairs professional. As he reflected, he shared that he had learned some things that he will be sure to do as a supervisor in the future:

> I'm just going to stay levelheaded and just going to help them out with whatever challenges they're experiencing . . . it comes down to . . . respect; you know, trust . . . and just some of those fundamentals moving forward.

Being closer to family. Being closer to family was another factor for participants in choosing whether to stay or to leave their institutions. Linda said she "took this job for the reason of being close to family." She had gone away to the East Coast for graduate school and then realized that she needed to be close to family and friends when she looked for her first new professional position:

> I knew that I wanted to be close to family. I wanted to be at least in a place where I could drive, and I knew that within 7 hours was drivable. Before, I had to buy a plane ticket to

visit family, and that was not a part of my experience that I liked in grad school. So when I looked at jobs, that was the deciding factor . . . location was huge.

Like Linda, Jack had gone away far from home for graduate school. He talked about feeling like a "fish out of water":

When I began looking, it was a very geographical search . . . I was looking . . . to stay near family. I moved with a partner, so trying to make sure that it's something that we're both comfortable with and knowing where our families are located . . . it was mainly a decision based upon where our families were located, as well as just the part of the country, the Midwest that we're most familiar with.

Joe had taken his first job 1,100 miles away from home, and he stayed only a year. He selected his second job to be closer to his partner. "I got a new job only as a resident director once I proposed to my now wife, who was working in [a city two hours away]. So, we were looking for . . . somewhere in the . . . area." Joe shared, "Being that far away from my family is not something that my wife and I would have looked to do long-term." For Joe, proximity to family was salient, causing him to leave his first position after 1 year.

Pam had a similar story. Although there were many factors to her leaving, being closer to family was one of those. She was at her first institution 1 year before she left. "We moved so far away from our families and so fast and then we were still trying to adjust, and my job was so incredibly demanding that we only stayed for a year" (Pam). When I interviewed her, Pam had been in her current position 2 years. She said,

I almost left in the fall. . . I really want to be back [home] . . . there's just something nice about being close to home. . . it's like every time I go home to visit it's like I want to be back, now.

Being closer to home was prominent for Pam, causing her to question whether she should stay or move on from her current institution, and thus having an impact on her commitment.

Similar to Joe and Pam, Holly also had been at her first institution 1 year. As she conducted her job search for the second position, she was keeping her partner in mind in terms of

the location. "We kind of both were looking and agreed to apply to positions that would allow one of us to stay in our current location, while allowing the other to do what they enjoyed" (Holly). Like Holly, Lindsey shared that "the only thing that would potentially make me leave is [that] I do have a partner, and he lives far away." Kim shared a similar story. She explained,

> Other things in my life are a priority to me, including my partner and my family and things like that. And so, at some point, my supervisors know this, that I will leave [institution] and look for whatever that next step is.

Holly, Lindsey, and Kim all had partners that made an impact on whether they stayed or left their respective institutions.

Rick also moved with a partner when he began his new professional position. They moved from the East Coast to the Midwest, which was a significant change:

> I moved out here with my wife. She never wanted to leave, get this far away from [the East Coast] in the first place. And so that . . . I heard that from day one. Like, "Hey, we can't be here forever, we need to find some way out." And so that's always been in the back of my mind as far as leaving.

Being closer to family was on Rick's radar from Day 1 upon entering his new position and played a significant role in whether he stayed at this institution.

Much like Rick, Laura expressed that the only reason she could think of leaving her institution was because of family. "I think the only thing I think about a little bit is that I'd like to be closer to my family" (Laura). She loved her institution and her experience as a new professional. This was the only significant factor that impacted her commitment to her institution.

Being closer to family and partners was significant for the participants in this experience. For some, that factor played a key role in their job searches and their commitment levels to their institutions.

What Makes New Student Affairs Professionals Organizationally Committed to the Student-Affairs Profession in General?

Finally, in this study, the gratification that participants experienced from impacting students' lives was the primary theme that positively impacted their commitment to the student affairs field, which answered this third research question. Participants expressed how rewarding it was impacting students' lives through those relationships cultivated with students. This is part of the *Cultivated Relationships* that emerged as the essence of the study.

As Joe explained, "I'm just here for a moment, you know—a moment of this student's life; and what I say and what I do matters in this moment." Linda shared, "I want other students to have the opportunity that I had to get a degree . . . I want to help push them a little further every day. So, I think I have a strong commitment." Suzy indicated, "I think for me, seeing the long-term development of students . . . I love seeing them grow, develop and work, and watching them develop as individuals." Pam expressed that working with students was "very, very rewarding" for her, and "being able to see students grow and blossom is the reason why I love not only the field, but why I love being here." Joe shared how he "enjoy[s] the opportunity to give back or pay it forward…for the next group of students." All the participants mentioned how the gratification they felt from impacting students' lives was a huge part of their organizational commitment to the student affairs field.

Although the new student affair professionals in this study believed that the connection they had with students was important, their experiences did not come without some personal costs to the participants. In this context, two structural themes that emerged were the long hours and the emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues. Most participants worked extensive hours beyond the typical 40-hour work week. For those in

housing, in particular, the job was hard to get away from when they lived where they worked. For participants, balancing the work hours with their personal lives was difficult. They also shared how they were not equipped to handle the required mental-health and crisis-management response. One participant discussed how graduate programs do not really prepare students for those situations. These two overarching themes caused the participants to consider leaving the student affairs field.

Wrap-Up

This chapter presented the results from the interviews obtained from 13 participants that described their lived experiences as new student affairs professionals. Six structural themes emerged from the data analysis of the interview transcripts: (a) personal connection, (b) supportive supervision, (c) workplace support from colleagues, (d) gratification from impacting students, (e) long hours, and (f) emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues. *Cultivated Relationships* emerged as the essence of this study.

All the participants felt committed to the field because of the work they did with their students. However, the study found that the interactions participants had with their supervisors and colleagues was salient for their commitment in those first few years of employment. If they did not have solid working cultivated relationships, specifically with supervisors and colleagues, and faced long hours and exhaustion from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues, then participants' commitment levels were adversely affected.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study presented in Chapter 4, I identified and organized six structural themes that framed the participants' experiences: (a) personal connection, (b) supportive supervision, (c) workplace support from colleagues, (d) gratification from impacting students, (e) long hours, and (f) emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues. *Cultivated Relationships* emerged as the essence of this study. In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the results as they relate to the literature and their implications for practice. I also offer recommendations for future research.

In the discussion of the results, I will relate the antecedents found from this study's structural themes to Meyer and Allen's (1991) organizational commitment model. Antecedents are external factors that contribute to the development of employees' organizational commitment. Pulling from the structural themes and subthemes, the antecedents from this study included personal connections, supportive supervision, autonomy, feedback from a caring place, positive reinforcement, workplace support, and gratification of impacting students, which all positively affected participants' level of commitment. Conversely, the long hours and the emotional toll from having to respond to mental-health and crisis-management issues were antecedents that had an adverse impact on their level of commitment.

Based on the results of this study, I offered implications for practice for midmanagement-level professionals to include intentional training for supervisors on how to supervise employees; reframing the student affairs approach regarding employees serving 2 to 3 years in entry-level positions; training and self-care for employees who regularly handle crisis-management issues; coaching related to work-life balance; intentional crafting of opportunities for career

advancement or skill expansion; and professional development or training to build collegial workplace dynamics.

Discussion of the Results

In Chapter 2, I provided an overview of the literature related to organizational commitment. The literature described this commitment from two different perspectives: attitudes and behavior (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Mowday et al. (1982) explained that attitudinal commitment involves the process by which employees come to view their relationship with the organization and behavioral commitment involves the process by which employees are locked into an organization.

Most referenced in the literature was Meyer and Allen's (1991) organizational commitment model, which comprises three aspects of commitment: affective, continuance, and normative. In this section, I connect how the findings related to organizational commitment presented in Chapter 4 relate to this and other relevant literature.

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is about the emotional attachment that an individual has to an organization (Boehman, 2007; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Antecedents for affective commitment fall into one of these various categories: personal characteristics, structural characteristics, and job-related/work experiences (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Steers, 1977).

Personal connection was a structural theme identified in this study's findings, and it supports the idea that the structural characteristics related to "employee/supervisor relations . . . and [the] feelings of importance" were salient for affective commitment with the new student affairs professionals in this study (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 70). For example, with Linda, "I think I always try to make that personal connection . . . no one cares how much you know unless

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they know you care, and I have always taken that to heart." David said, "I want that personal connection"; and he shared that "it's going to take time to build a relationship to start; and I think that's really important . . . set[ting] up a good foundation." Suzy shared, "I think really developing the individual relationship . . . is important."

Most of the participants' explained personal connection with supervisors and colleagues was salient to their experience and commitment. Lindsey explained, "it'd be really hard to do this position if you didn't care" and "I always want to ensure . . . the people I interact with feel like they matter, and that they belong, and that they have value." Many of the participants felt the same way. If they did not feel the personal connection with their supervisors and colleagues, then they were less likely to have the affective commitment as defined by the literature.

Supportive supervision was a structural theme in this study, and autonomy emerged as a subtheme. Autonomy was one of the descriptors of the job-related/work-experience antecedent for affective commitment (Angle & Perry, 1981; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Steers, 1977). Participants valued the autonomy their supervisors provided them in their work.

Glenda indicated that "I really have a lot of autonomy . . . I was looking for that sort of trusting environment." She described "how liberating trust can be in the work setting." Glenda was given the autonomy to be "[as] creative . . . as I want" and "work on things that are important to me"; so that was "phenomenal." Holly said her supervisor was "empowering" and the "administration trusts us." Lindsey said, "I think something that I really value about here that I think makes me feel connected and committed to working here is the true genuine focus and encouragement of innovation." When the participants did not get that autonomy from supportive supervisors, they lost confidence in themselves and felt stifled in their work environment, which adversely impacted their affective commitment to the workplace.

Two factors that were not discussed in the literature related to affective commitment is how supervisors provide constructive feedback and positive reinforcement to their employees. In this study, both of these subthemes emerged from the primary theme of supportive supervision. Boehman's (2007) research did show that having a supportive work environment leads to affective commitment for student affairs professionals; however, he raised the question, "What are the characteristics of a supportive work environment?" (p. 318).

I think my findings, in this aspect of the study, add to the literature. I believe both factors would fall under the job-related/work-characteristics antecedent to affective commitment. Participants wanted feedback from a caring place, meaning they desired constructive guidance from their supervisors to help them develop, without tearing them down, and also positive reinforcement. When they experienced supportive supervision, it had a positive impact on their commitment.

Glenda explained that she appreciated her supervisor "engaging in very honest dialogue" and "coaching us"; but that when supervisors give feedback through negative "offhand comments," it "etches away at your motivation." Laura said she did not "need a gold star. I don't need the award in front of everybody . . . just slight nudges along the path to . . . make sure that I'm going in the direction." Lindsey shared the following about her supervisor, "I feel like there is an investment not only in me, but in my desires and what I want to do for this program; so, I think that makes me feel extra committed." When participants lacked those two factors in supportive supervision, they felt disconnected from their work. When the participants experienced feedback from a caring place, and positive reinforcement, they were more likely to have affective commitment.

Workplace support from colleagues could also fall under the job-related/work-experiences antecedent for affective commitment. Participants appreciated having supportive colleagues who were encouraging to one another.

Jack shared how his colleagues were "invested in my success." Rick said his colleagues were "people I've been able to lean on." Holly said her colleagues "cared about each other," and they were "people that we can bounce ideas off of and learn and grow together, support one another, be a united front in decision-making, consistently communicate things to students and stake holders. Have fun together." Those positive, collegial interactions with colleagues had a positive impact on their affective commitment.

Personal importance to the organization was identified as one of variables in the antecedent job-related work experiences for affective commitment (Buchanan, 1974; Steers, 1977). In the findings, the gratification of impacting students was salient to the participants' experiences, which I believe aligns with this notion of personal importance. Each of the participants expressed how much it meant to have an impact on students in the work they do.

Joe explained how "serving students is my way of giving back," and "seeing that I was actually making a difference really is what solidified for me." David said, "I really like working with students . . . it is rewarding because, at the end of the day, at the end of the year, you get to see how things transformed." Linda stated, "I want to help push them a little further every day, so I think I have a strong commitment." Jack said, "I enjoy the opportunity to give back or pay it forward." Suzy said, "I love seeing them grow and develop." Pam said, "Being able to see students like that grow and blossom is the reason why I love not only the field, but why I love being here." Rick shared, "I'm having the opportunity to make an impact on these students' lives."

The participants' perceived their personal importance through the gratification of impacting students' lives. The findings showed evidence of a positive impact on the participants' affective commitment to the student affairs field.

However, two findings seemed to adversely impact the participants' affective commitment level. One was long hours, and the other was the emotional toll from having to respond to mental-health and crisis-management issues. Boehman (2007) shared from his study how graduate faculty and student affairs professionals cultivate the notion that the student affairs field "is about working making a difference in the lives of college students…but at the same time begin the socialization of the workaholic culture by creating expectations that long hours, low pay, and other sacrifices are the norm" (p. 321). Boehman (2007) explained that the workaholic culture does not support affective commitment and causes "entry level professionals to question their commitment to a profession they see as a calling" (p. 321).

Similar to Boehman's (2007) research, participants' in this study experienced long hours, which adversely impacted their affective commitment level. Long hours caused many to consider leaving the student affairs field. As examples, David worked in housing and described it as having a "short shelf life" because "you're on call around the clock…24/7." Suzy stated, "burnout . . . comes with working in housing." Lindsey worked in orientation and talked about the "crazy hours" and "late nights" associated with the job. Kim worked in student activities and shared, "I was incredibly burned out; like, I was done with our field . . . was questioning whether higher education was the field for me and if I really wanted to do this for the rest of my life." For most of the participants, the long hours were taking a toll on them, causing them to question their affective commitment, not only to the institution, but also to the student affairs field.

Long hours were not the only reason participants questioned their commitment. The emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues was another finding that impacted their commitment level.

David shared that "it can be stressful and emotionally draining" because "you have to be ready to deal with things around the clock" and be ready to deal with "life crisis's people have." He was "exhausted" from having to handle crisis issues on a regular basis. Joe shared, "I've seen students struggle emotionally; I've seen students at their lowest; I've had to deal with suicide attempts; I've had to deal with a suicide . . . I've had to deal with domestic violence."

Glenda shared, "I think the biggest thing is the crisis response, because we're on a twenty-four-hour duty rotation, [and it] stresses me out." She shared that "a lot of our mental health resources here are limited, and so I often feel very overwhelmed when I'm in that situation." The emotional toll from responding to these mental-health and crisis-management issues was "a reason for [her] to consider not coming back" to the student affairs.

I believe the emotional toll from responding to these types of issues falls under the job-related/work-experiences antecedent to affective commitment. The emotional toll that participants experienced from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues had an impact on their affective commitment. These experiences appear to have raised questions for some regarding whether they wanted to stay in the student affairs field.

Continuance Commitment

Continuance commitment refers to the associated costs of leaving an organization (Boehman, 2007; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Employees stay with an organization "because they need to do so" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). "Anything that increases perceived costs can be considered an antecedent" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 71). Becker (1960) referred to the

perceived costs as side bets that may be work or nonwork in nature. Perceived costs, or side bets, could include losing attractive benefits, giving up seniority-based privileges, uprooting family, or interrupting personal relationships (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Maybe someone is close to being vested, or retirement, and stays in the position because it would be a huge loss if they left the institution early.

The findings from this study did not reveal any connections to continuance commitment with the new student affairs professionals. This result may be because participants were only in their positions for 4 years or less. This may be an area to explore further with qualitative research among new student affairs professionals.

Normative Commitment

Normative commitment is about the feeling of obligation that an individual has toward an organization (Boehman, 2007; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Employees feel they "ought to remain with the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) posited that correlations between affective and normative commitment are generally quite high. I think my findings could support this notion in the literature. When study participants felt those personal connections, supportive supervision, workplace support among colleagues, and the gratification of impacting students' lives, they felt valued. As an example, David said, "When I have mentors, when I have support . . . If I think someone believes in me, I'll produce 10 times the amount of what I produce now . . . I'll work so hard." Jack felt "valued" by his supervisor, colleagues, and the institution. He said it was "really evident at my institution" that he and his colleagues were a part of a "bigger goal." Participants in this study who felt their supervisors and colleagues were invested in them with a supportive work environment were more invested in the institution and their work.

Implications for Practice

From this study, there are implications for practice such as intentional training for supervisors on how to supervise employees; reframing the student affairs approach regarding employees serving 2 to 3 years in entry level positions; training and self-care for employees who regularly handle crisis-management issues; coaching related to work-life balance; intentional crafting of opportunities for career advancement or skill expansion; and professional development or training to build collegial workplace dynamics.

The results of this study emphasize the need to provide training for midlevel student affairs supervisors in how to support and engage new employees. Although participants shared stories of their personal connections and supportive supervision that would make them feel more committed to their roles, they also shared many stories of lack of support and negative reinforcement. Many participants in this study were in tears when I interviewed them. Tull (2006) likewise shared in his study "that the lack of synergistic supervisory relationship could lead to greater intentions to turnover among new professionals" (p. 474). Participants in this current study valued the supportive supervision through constructive feedback, but they needed it to be framed from a caring place coupled with positive reinforcement with the work they were doing. Based on the data that emerged from the participants' lived experiences, incorporating professional development and training on how to manage employees and provide constructive feedback with a caring approach is essential for supervisors.

Boehman's (2006) study revealed that professionals in student affairs will remain committed to the field if there is a supportive work environment. I think the findings from the current study support the literature and emphasize the need that we should provide more training for midlevel student affairs professionals on how to supervise and support employees.

Participants gave reasons they considered leaving their institution. One subtheme that emerged was that everyone "knew" they were expected to job search after 2 to 3 years in the entry-level position. The idea of teaching new professionals this 2-to-3-year rule for the first position out of graduate school needs to be rethought by professionals in the field who are grooming new employees through graduate programs or in their first positions. I was taught the same idea when I started the field. It takes a significant amount of time, energy, and resources for institutions and professionals to continually hire and train new employees. Why do we invest in new employees and then send them on their way after 2 or 3 years? There is value to keeping employees for a longer period of time while still giving them the experiences they need to hone and expand their skills. Supervisors could look for and intentionally create continued growth opportunities within their institution for employees to obtain or enhance transferable skills.

Another recommendation for practice is training and self-care for employees when they are responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues. From this study, the exhaustion and emotional toll these experiences took on the participants, particularly if they did not have adequate resources to help and support them, was evident from the data that emerged. Whether in graduate programs, assistantships, or through professional development training with new student affairs professionals, it may prove to be helpful to provide this needed training and self-care to prevent burnout for employees. For many of the participants in the study, the response required when they encountered mental-health and crisis-management issues took an emotional toll on their well-being and caused them to reconsider whether to stay in the student affairs field.

Boehman (2006) noted in his study of professional commitment in student affairs that "attention needs to be paid to the development of the 'workaholic' culture that takes place in graduate and entry-level positions," and that strategies need to be considered for work-life

balance (p. 157). This study supports that notion, as well. The expectation of long hours was evident in the participants' experiences. Whether dealing with long hours or crisis management, self-care strategies need to be discussed and managed by the supervisor more in the workplace to combat burn out.

Another implication for practice is intentionally crafting opportunities for new student affairs professionals to advance or gain new skills at their institution to assist with career advancement. For these participants, if there was not opportunity to advance or gain new skills at their current institution, thoughts crossed their minds about potentially leaving their positions to gain those experiences elsewhere. Although this suggestion might not always be feasible for internal career advancement because of limited funds, there are other ways to give professionals experiences to gain skillsets that might motivate them to stay longer in their roles. Designing new opportunities for staff might be a consideration for planning and action by midmanagement-level supervisors.

The last recommendation would be for individuals going into the student affairs field to receive on-the-job professional development training to build collegial workplace dynamics. Personal connections and workplace support among colleagues were very important to the participants in this study. Supervisors can facilitate activities and training in the workplace to help build collegial relationships and connections. This is not intended to say everyone has to be best friends; the idea is that they will have the training necessary to know how to support one another appropriately. Participants expressed how much they valued how they can "help each other do [their] jobs the best [they] can" (Jack). Mary explained that we "guide each other through the process." Rick observed that his "colleagues are great . . . those are the people I've been able to lean on."

Positive personal connections and workplace support among colleagues led to more affective commitment for these participants. Facilitating intentional workplace training and observant supervision of individual employee needs could prove to be useful in building collegial workplace dynamics among colleagues.

To address the ongoing needs related to career advancement and skill expansion, intentional constructive feedback, and coaching with work-life balance, supervisors could create individual development plans for new student affairs professionals. Each employee is unique, and each one's perception of the workplace environment will vary. Creating ongoing individual development plans tailored to the needs of each employee may address the issues that arise and that impact the organizational commitment of everyone.

Recommendations for Future Research

As an outline for recommendations for future research, I believe more qualitative studies should be conducted in the field on the organizational commitment of new student affairs professionals' organizational commitment. There is limited research in the literature related to student affairs organizational commitment, most of which is quantitative in nature. I believe more qualitative research could ascertain more of the factors that are antecedents to affective, continuance, and normative commitment as outlined in Meyer and Allen's (1991) model.

I would also recommend a longevity study to see what happens to new student affairs professionals. Are they still in the field or not? In either case, what were the final events and factors that impacted their decisions to stay or leave? I know some participants from this study are no longer in the field; however, I do not know what their final reason was for leaving. It would be interesting to go back to all the participants after a period of time to learn more about

their experiences and whether they decided to stay or leave their institutions or the student affairs field.

I would also recommend further study on the generational perspective between entry-level professionals and midmanagement supervisors, to identify whether there is a difference in work expectations between those entering the field and those who are supervising the new professionals as those expectations relate to organizational commitment.

Final Comments

Although this study cannot be generalized, it does provide insight into how the participating student affairs professionals experienced their new roles. Six structural themes were identified: personal connections, supportive supervision, workplace support among colleagues, gratification from impacting students, long hours, and emotional toll from responding to mental-health and crisis-management issues. *Cultivated Relationships* emerged as the essence of this study because at the core of these participants' experiences was their relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and students.

I believe this study gives merit to the perspective that midlevel supervisors need to establish a good foundation for new professionals, with supportive supervision through feedback from a caring place, and positive reinforcement while giving employees the autonomy they need to be successful. Supervisors can also facilitate activities and training in the workplace to help build collegial relationships and connections, develop strategies to respond appropriate to crisis-management issues that arise, and to create ways for employees to foster self-care. All of these strategies could assist with crafting an overall supportive work environment.

As Boehman (2006) stated, affective and normative commitment can be increased with a supportive environment when "employees are empowered, mentored, and shown they are

valued" (p. 160). Implementing the actions outlined here could potentially create a work environment that supports improvement in the commitment levels of new student affairs employees.

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APPENDIX

Guiding Questions

1. Tell me a little background about you.

2. Describe why you chose to enter higher education and the student affairs field.

3. Have you heard the phrase "organizational commitment"? Describe what organizational commitment means to you in the workplace.

4. Describe your commitment to your current institution.

5. Describe your commitment to the student affairs profession.

6. Have you thought about leaving the institution? If so, what factors made you think about leaving?

7. Have you ever thought about leaving the student affairs field? If so, what factors made you think about leaving the profession?