WORKPLACE SUPPORTIVENESS, FAMILY OBLIGATIONS, AND ADVANCEMENT
FOR CAUCASIAN MALE STUDENT AFFAIRS’ MIDDLE MANAGERS

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In higher education, the field of student affairs, as demonstrated in previous research, suffers from high turnover, and often, the choice to leave the student affairs field seems to coincide with starting a family and simultaneously taking care of elder family members. Previous research has demonstrated that care-giving commitments hinder women in the advancement of their career and given the changing culture of shared care-giving responsibilities, the previous findings may now be true for men as well. This study focused on Caucasian male middle managers’ perceptions of the student affairs work environment in relation to their families and workplace supportiveness and advancement. I interviewed eight Caucasian, male student affairs middle managers about their perceptions about workplace supportiveness of family obligations in the student affairs field. The participants placed high importance on family and were no longer willing to risk family life for career success. All eight men talked fondly of their family obligations and were willing to change career paths to demonstrate how much they valued their families. In addition, these men frequently commented on the desire to represent cultural change. Therefore, student affairs divisions should implement supportive informal benefits across the board to all professional full time employees for increasing long term stability in the field of student affairs.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>vi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Affairs Qualifications</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Affairs Middle Managers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and Student Affairs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Affairs Working Realities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrition</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Satisfaction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Student Affairs Profession</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Affairs Profession</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Worker Norm</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Affairs Middle Management</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Responsibility and Work-Life Balance</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 29
  Research Design .................................................................................................. 29
  Role of the Researcher .......................................................................................... 29
  Sampling ................................................................................................................. 30
  Data Collection ....................................................................................................... 32
  Data Analysis ........................................................................................................... 32

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS .............................................................................................. 35
  Nate .......................................................................................................................... 35
  Hunter ...................................................................................................................... 38
  Eric ........................................................................................................................... 40
  Blake ........................................................................................................................ 43
  Tate .......................................................................................................................... 44
  Nolan ......................................................................................................................... 46
  Chris ........................................................................................................................ 48
  Evan ........................................................................................................................ 50
  Findings from the Thematic Analysis .................................................................... 52

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION ......................................................................................... 65
  Summary of the Study ............................................................................................ 65
  Interpretations of the Major Themes ...................................................................... 65
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 70
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Summary of Responses for each Theme ................................................................. 64
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Visual depiction of the ideal worker norm</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Reconciliation of workplace supportiveness</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The administrative unit within universities and colleges which is currently charged with the task of developing the student in a holistic fashion is called student affairs (Student Personnel Point of View, 1937). The field began as a result of fluctuating faculty roles, growing responsibilities faced by college presidents, and a surge in student enrollment in colonial America (Boyer, 1990; Rudolph, 1965). The field of student affairs has continued to transform since its inception as the result of the evolving university. Changes in the United States have driven the change within the university and subsequently the field of student affairs. Major changes have included the establishment of all-female and historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the change within the field from a male-dominated faculty to a female dominated staff, the G.I. Bill, the movement toward and away from en loco parentis, the protests of the 1960s and 1970s, and the development and implications of social media in the 1990s (Boyer 1990; Mills, 2000; Rudolph, 1965). Currently, student affairs responsibilities and activities include, but are not limited to, admissions, student activities and services, Greek life, housing, registrar, financial aid, student union management, and academic counseling.

Student Affairs Qualifications

The skills and abilities necessary for student affairs professionals in the field have been transformed to meet the current student needs. In 1982, Sandeen conducted a national study of chief student affairs officers (CSAO) and revealed that student affairs graduate preparation programs need to no longer primarily focus on counseling and
adjust to address on legal issues, budgeting, management, and research. Lovell and Kosten (2000) synthesized 30 years of student affairs research and reported that “to be successful as a student affairs administrator, well-developed administration, management, and human facilitation skills are key” (p. 566). Herdlein (2004) more recently asked CSAOs regarding the relevance of graduate preparation and reported the highest-ranking traits for new professionals to possess include the ability to “work with diverse populations, effective communication, budgeting, knowledge of politics, collaboration skills, leadership ability, flexibility, critical thinking, and work ethic” (p. 54). Once again, Herdlein (2004) concluded that change was necessary due to “the increased size and complexity of higher education institutions, rapidly changing demographics, demands for accountability, and shifting focus from service-centered to a learning-centered co-curriculum, calls for new approaches to meet increasingly high expectations” (p. 68). The student affairs field and its preparatory professional graduate programs in higher education continue to emphasize change, evolution, or adaptation to changing circumstances.

Student Affairs Middle Managers

Change has occurred in the student affairs field and through graduate preparation programs but none more so than the student affairs middle manager has experienced extreme changes as the professional who serves as a horizontal and vertical link in the higher education organization, must have strong interpersonal and technical skills, and as a hard worker, bears responsibility for executing policy changes and directly supervising new professionals (Rosser, 2000, 2004; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Young, 1990). Those roles provide little insight into all that is required of a middle
manager in student affairs. Young (2007) addressed the difficulty in defining the student affairs middle manager because individuals come into the field through traditional training and graduate programs as well as by transplantation by coming into the university setting from other fields. Young also argued that middle management encompasses so many different positions, titles, and job responsibilities that it is hard to define.

Young echoed Mills (1993) in that middle management covers all that is included in “managing information, managing funds, managing a career, and influencing the culture” (p. 33). Mills further provided insight that a midlevel manager holds significant responsibility and influence as one who understands both academic and institutional cultures and has the ability to impact both cultures.

The middle manager position is a key position in the institution. Middle managers must be comfortable with the only thing that is constant in an academic environment: change. Middle managers must be comfortable with change, facilitate change, embrace change, and empower others to change any time change is required by policy, procedure, students, faculty, staff, goals, or responsibilities. Ackerman (2007) argued “mid-managers frequently provide the stability that facilitates change within the organization” (p. 47). As a field, student affairs’ continually faces the ever-growing demands of academic institutions even while its professional turnover rate is high.

Gender and Student Affairs

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2009), 70% of master’s degree graduates of higher education or higher education administration are female, and 30% are male. Among master’s degree graduates of college student
counseling and personnel services, 70% are female, and 30% are male. Among
doctoral graduates from higher education or higher education administration programs,
63% are female, and 37% are male. And the frequencies for doctoral graduates from
college student counseling and personnel services are similar as 67% female and 33%
man. These numbers provide picture of a female dominated student affairs field.

Even though the degree frequencies suggest a female dominated field, Kulis
(1997) found women in higher education mainly occupy clerical and non-faculty
professional positions (36% and 24%, respectively), and males occupy the majority of
the tenured faculty appointments. The largest category for male higher education
employment occurs for tenured faculty appointments at 25% of men as compared to 6%
of women. Additionally, “proportionally more of the men than of the women are found in
top administrative . . . jobs” (Kulis, 1997, p. 159). Women are found in large numbers as
student affairs middle managers, while males make up a larger percentage of upper
administrators (Kulis, 1997). According to the American Council on Education (2000),
women represent 47.8% of lower and middle managers in higher education. Even
though the majority of masters and doctoral graduates in student affairs programs are
female, they are predominantly found in those lower-level and middle-management
positions (Kulis, 1997).

In research regarding the career advancement of women to the senior level
position, women have been observed to achieve the vice-presidential level, but as of
2005, only 40% of vice presidents were women (NASPA, 2005). The number of female
vice presents a discrepancy, given frequency of females graduating with degrees in
higher education administration, student affairs, or a related field. Apter (1993)
speculated that women may be unable to achieve the vice presidential level in greater numbers because of either individual choice or lack of adequate organizational support.

While more women are assuming senior level administrative positions, the vast majority are concentrated at the director, manager, and coordinator levels (Marshall, 2009). Many assume this concentration is due to the glass ceiling or the patriarchal nature of higher education organizations, yet Nobbe and Manning (1997) reported that women do not perceive advancing in the field in a positive light because they view the key to advancement as having to move their current or future families. Kuk and Donovan (2004) confirmed this concern among higher education women. Many of their female respondents reported being happy in middle manager roles because they already had enough stress associated with balancing work and family (Kuk & Donovan, 2004). Even though some women in the student affairs profession choose to advance or stay in current roles, others leave the field completely (Holmes et al., 1983).

Student Affairs Working Realities

One factor to consider is that the student affairs profession follows what is known as the ideal worker norm theory, a model still followed by male dominated professions including accountants, lawyers, academics, and business managers (Williams, 1999). Ideal worker norm theory operates according to the expectation that professionals work long hours with total commitment to the organization to a greater extent than to family obligations (Bailyn, 1993; Hewlett, 2007; Hoshchild, 1997; Moen & Roehling, 2004; Williams, 1999). This ideal worker norm theory is the traditional model of working (Hewlett, 2007). Drago (2005) revealed that current organizational policies reward a linear career model (i.e., continuous employment from the end of education through
retirement) and celebrate long hours working in person on site (i.e., face time) as opposed to flexible solutions (i.e., telecommuting). However, Schor (1991) and Hewitt (1993) found long work hours and continuous full-time work through retirement to be counterproductive, even though companies as well as universities still employ this model when determining employees” productivity and advancement.

Attrition

The realities of the student affairs profession include working long hours as well as evening and weekend events, requiring focusing solely on the job that can create a disconnect between working in the student affairs field to help others versus having a family in addition to a student affairs professional life (Holmes et al., 1983; Lorden, 1998; Marshall, 2009; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Attrition rates in the field of student affairs have been estimated to range from 40% to as high as 61% within the first 5 to 6 years of post-graduate employment (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Lorden, 1998; Holmes et al., 1983). Additionally, a 24% turnover rate in administration is problematic to any organization and leads to organizational brain drain each time experience, skills, and knowledge leave the organization (Blum, 1984).

Reasons for attrition among student affairs professionals and middle managers include women being less satisfied, high degrees of role conflict and ambiguity, low salaries, high stress, management styles of supervisors and administrators, and the need to balance various roles (Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinkowski, 1998a, 1998b; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990; Jo, 2008; Rosser, 2000; Scott, 1992). Evans (1986) argued that “women employed in the same position perceive their lives
differently depending upon the relational roles they play” (p. 19). More recently, Boehmman (2006) found that the long work hours, increased technology, use of electronic leashes, and changing gender roles have significantly and negatively impacted the work perceptions. It could be that the student affairs field experiences high levels of attrition because it has failed to address needs professionals have for workplace supportiveness throughout their careers. However, women with children are not the only professionals impacted by family obligations. Lorden (1998a) reported that “workers might be less likely to leave if efforts were made to ensure their needs were met” (p. 212).

Little research has been focused on males’ desires for increased involvement with their family responsibilities (Chethik, 2006; Cox-Otto, 2008; Williams, 2004). Gender schemas may play a role in what Drago, Colbeck, Wardell, and Willits (2001) regarded as the reason why employers view care-giving commitments by women more seriously than when males make the same requests. Men, as a result, feel less able to meet their families’ needs because the existing benefits seem targeted only to women (Brannen, Meszaros, Moss, & Poland, 1994; Hochschild, 1997; Twiggs, McQuillan, & Ferree, 1999). However, Quinn (2010) suggested that women find it easier to go against the ideal worker norm theory as less detrimental to their careers than do men. Some researchers have suggested that workplace supportiveness for family obligations may be a bigger priority to males (Cox et al., 2008; Chethik, 2006).

Jo (2008) studied the turnover rate among female middle managers and found these women were more likely to leave a job due to work family conflict. In fact, the largest obligation middle managers have outside of work are family obligations (Belch &
Strange, 1995; Jo, 2008). Middle level managers in student affairs are more likely to face challenges when trying to balance personal and professional lives (Belch & Strange, 1995). Nobbe and Manning (1997) suggested that the student affairs field needs to re-evaluate its expectations if female middle managers are to be attained. Unfortunately, student affairs leaders have not encouraged such change on a large scale.

One of the main issues surrounding workplace supportiveness in the student affairs field is the ideal worker norm theory. Student affairs administrators maintain the expectation of professionals working long hours and maintaining a linear career progression and total commitment to the organization (Bailyn, 1993; Hewlett, 2007; Hosheschild, 1997; Moen & Roehling, 2004; Williams, 1999). Hewlett (2007) and Drago (2005) revealed that current organizational policies follow this model in the 21st century. Workers are rewarded for longer hours of face time in the office (Drago, 2005; Hewlett, 2007). The ideal worker model reinforces work as the priority over family and diminishes opportunities for flexibility toward family balance solutions. While Schor (1991) and Hewitt (1993) found that the ideal worker model to be counterproductive, companies as well as universities still employ this model when determining productivity and advancement.

Blanket acceptance of the ideal worker model needs to change, especially for the student affairs field. Since its inception, student affairs has been ever changing in its roles and responsibilities as part of meeting the evolving needs of organizations and student populations. However, the profession has failed to meet the needs of its professionals who not only serve the students but role model appropriate professional
behavior. The lack of response by the profession itself to the changing needs of its professionals is demonstrated by decades of student affairs high attrition (Holmes et al., 1983; Lorden, 1998; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Rosser & Javinar, 2003).

Johnsrud, Heck, and Rosser (2000) found a high degree of turnover at the middle management level in student affairs. This attrition rate is compared with that of lawyers (19%; National Association of Legal Professionals, 2013), physicians (6.1%; Healthcare Finance, 2011), and business (13%; Chief Executive.net, 2011). Reasons for high student affairs attrition have been associated with women being less satisfied, the high degree of ambiguity, high stress, and the need to balance various roles (Blackhurst et al., 1998a, 1998b; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990; Jo, 2008; Rosser, 2000; Scott, 1992). Yet this does not adequately address the professionals in the field and the ever evolving needs. It was well known in the 1970s and 1980s that in order for a man to advance in the field, there was an expectation of marriage and that for a female to advance, there was an expectation that the female remain single so that she could focus on her career (Fowlkes, M. R., 1980). Yet the “typical” family dynamic has changed significantly since the 1980’s as evidenced by Chethik, 2006; Cox-Otto, 2008; and Williams, 2004. While the field has actively evolved to meet student needs, it has failed to address the professionals working in the field.

Career Satisfaction

Instead of investigating attrition, others have focused on career satisfaction in student affairs. O'Neil and Billimoria (2005) examined the life phases and how each phase is associated with various levels of career development. They found that women in the field experience positive associations early in their careers, report mostly negative
associations during mid-career, and at the end of their careers, report positive associations. Blackhurst (2000) reinforced this association when comparing middle management and senior administration: “Women in mid-level positions were significantly less satisfied with and committed to the student affairs profession than women in senior administrative positions” (p. 409). These findings are consistent with those of Bender (1980) and Blackhurst et al. (1998a, 1998b). The argument has been made that middle managers express career satisfaction. Research has demonstrated that increased satisfaction with family and work enhances productivity (Hass & Hwang, 1995).

Problem Statement

The field of student affairs experiences between a 40% and 61% attrition rate in the first 5 to 6 years of employment as compared to other fields such as law which has a 19% attrition rate, medical with a 6.1% physician attrition rate, and business with a 13% attrition rate (Chief Executive.net, 2011; Healthcare Finance, 2011; Holmes et al., 1983; Lorden, 1998; National Association of Legal Professionals, 2013; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). As demonstrated in previous research, high turnover creates organizational brain drain (Blum, 1989). Interestingly, the choice to leave the student affairs field seems to coincide with starting a family and simultaneously taking care of elder family members.

Purpose of the Study

A preponderance of research studies in student affairs have focused on women and minority populations when numerically it is the Caucasian male who is the minority in student affairs (Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinkowski, 1998a, 1998b; Fey & Carpenter,
While the Caucasian male has been documented to dominate upper administration and the academic and business functions in higher education, he has been overlooked as the focus of research specifically in middle management within student affairs. Previous research has demonstrated that care-giving commitments hinder women in the advancement of their career and given the changing culture of shared care-giving responsibilities, the previous findings may now be true for men as well. This study focused on Caucasian male middle managers' perceptions of the student affairs work environment in relation to their families and workplace supportiveness and advancement. Perceptions of workplace supportiveness and family responsibilities among Caucasian, male middle managers, and the desire to stagnate or leave the professional were considered.

Research Questions

The study was conducted to answer two research questions. Research Question 1 asked: How do Caucasian male middle managers in student affairs perceive the supportiveness of their work environment as it relates to work-life balance? Research Question 2 asked: How do Caucasian male middle managers in student affairs choose to stagnate or leave the profession in consideration of the need to balance work and family?

Definition of Terms

The terms defined for this study are listed below.

*Student affairs.* Student affairs tends to be an administrative unit within universities and colleges. Student affairs divisions and departments develop students in
a holistic fashion. Typically, a student affairs division focuses on co-curricular, or outside of the classroom, learning activities. Examples of student affairs areas include admissions, student activities, housing, registrar, financial aid, student union management, and counseling. For purposes of this study, student affairs also includes student personnel administrators, student development, and student services. The term student affairs was used to identify all of these departments.

*Family obligations.* Obligations outside of the work environment that include caregiving roles with family members such as children, spouse/partner, parents, or extended family.

*Middle managers.* Professionals in the student affairs field who report to the CSAO or to some other upper level administrator. These professionals typically have 5 or more years of experience in the student affairs field or supervise a professional staff member who reports to them per the organizational chart.

**Significance**

By continuing to shed light on the issues facing student affairs middle managers, this research may improve awareness of the need for workplace support of family obligations. Not only may this study address the need for the workplace to provide formal support of family friendly benefits, but it may also highlight the importance of the perception of workplace support for family obligations. Increased awareness of this issue has the potential to lead to policy changes, whether formal or informal, for the support of initiatives and benefits provided as related to the fluidity of work life balance. The study results could lead to improvements in work versus personal life supportiveness and positively affect student affairs attrition.
Limitation

The primary limitation to this study was that of a female researcher interviewing male participants asking their perception of fairness in the workplace based on gender.

Delimitation

A delimitation is that the participants that were interviewed only included those that work in the region of the Southern Association of College Student Affairs (SACSA). The states included in this regional association are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. In addition, the study may be only relevant to the student affairs population of middle managers.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter supports the study’s focus on middle managers’ perceptions of the student affairs work environment in relation to their families and organizational supportiveness and advancement. It contains a review of the relevant literature regarding a background of the student affairs profession, ideal worker norm theory, student affairs middle management, family responsibilities and obligations, as well as generational and gender trends. The chapter ends with an evaluation of student affairs workplace research needs.

Background of the Student Affairs Profession

Student affairs developed in response to the evolving university in colonial America. Changing faculty roles, an increase in responsibilities faced by college presidents, the surge in student enrollment through the passage of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 creating land-grant institutions, and the establishment of female only and traditionally Black colleges led to the need for the student affairs field (Boyer, 1990; Rudolph, 1965). Faculty focused on the academic rigor of coursework, and college presidents focused on keeping institutions running smoothly. The responsibility of developing students and managing students’ needs led to new types of departments and divisions.

The appointments of Professor Ephraim Gurney in 1870 at Harvard to serve as a disciplinarian to students and Dean LeBaron Briggs in 1891 at Harvard’s Radcliffe College to student counseling marked the beginning of the student affairs field (Komives & Woodard, 2003; Rhatigan, 2000). The profession further evolved through the
Germanic influence’s focus on the intellect rather than on the development of a collegial atmosphere; the Germanic influence further distanced faculty from students (Ward, 2003).

By the 1930s the emergent student affairs field found itself in a constant state of change, which led to the American Council on Education’s (ACE) 1937 report titled *The Student Personnel Point of View*. ACE emphasized the importance of understanding each student on an individual level. “The concept of education is broadened to include attention to the student’s well rounded development—physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually, as well as intellectually” (ACE, 1937, p. 109). The student affairs field continued to evolve dramatically in the next 12 years, and the original report was updated in 1949 to include elements of what was then known as a *student personnel* program, definition of student personnel work, and a broad delineation of the administrative structures of student personnel work (ACE, 1949).

The passing of the GI Bill in 1944 to ensure World War II veterans could be retrained for civilian jobs caused changes in higher education that led to that 1949 ACE report revision. Student enrollment experienced a never before seen surge in the growth of higher education because of 1944’s GI Bill (Cohen, 1998; Rhatigan, 2000). The GI Bill introduced college campuses to a new population of students, mainly war seasoned men of 20 years of age. The entering students were no longer only traditional aged 18 and 24 year olds; these veteran students needed colleges to provide resources for adults with families (Rhatigan, 2000). Therefore, the student affairs field as a consequence of societal change has evolved in response to students’ outside the classroom needs.
Student Affairs Profession

Student affairs is a profession that many enter because of the desire to help others. The literature suggests that the realities of the student affairs profession include working long hours and during evenings and weekend events. Focusing solely on the job can cause disconnect for professionals who chose the field to help others and who experience the reality of negotiating family obligations with student affairs duties (Marshall, 2009). This disconnect has resulted in research about attrition rates and reasons for attrition as well as lack of advancement in the field (Blackhurst et al., 1998a, 1998b; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Holmes, Verrier, & Chisolm 1983; Jo, 2008; Rosser, 2000; Scott, 1992).

Much research has been completed regarding the career advancement of women to senior level positions. Women have achieved the vice-presidential level yet their numbers are not reflected in the attainment numbers in the field. As of 2005, only 40% of vice-presidents were women (NASPA, 2005), but the majority of professionals trained for student affairs careers are women. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2009) reported 70% of master’s degree graduates of college student counseling and personnel services as well as higher education or higher education administration to be female. Again, an average of 65% of doctoral graduates from college student counseling and personnel services and higher education or higher education administration programs are female. Apter (1993) speculated that women may be unable to achieve the vice presidential level in greater numbers because of either their individual choice or because of higher education’s lack of adequate support.
Marshall (2009) discussed the fact that while more women have assumed senior level administration positions, the vast majority of student affairs’ women stagnate at the director, manager, and coordinator levels. While this phenomenon could be due to the glass ceiling or patriarchal organization structures, Nobbe and Manning (1997) reported that women do not perceive advancing in the field positively because they view the key to advancement as requiring geographic mobility. They are unlikely to want to move their current or future families as found by Kuk and Donovan (2004), who reported their female respondents were happy in middle manager roles because they already dealt with enough stress by balancing work and family. While many professionals choose to advance or stay in their current roles, others leave the field (Holmes et al., 1983).

Student affairs attrition rates have over time remained as high as 61% within the first 6 years of employment following graduation from a graduate training program (Holmes et al., 1983; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Blum (1989) stated that the 24% turnover rate in administration presented significant problems to student affairs organizations in terms of experience, skills, and knowledge needing to be replaced within them and causing brain drain among those left in the organization following departures. Leaving the profession creates organizational brain drain because these organizations lose valuable employees in whom much time and training have been invested (Halpern & Cheung, 2008).

Attrition among student affairs professionals and middle managers has been associated with women being less satisfied, high degrees of role conflict and ambiguity, low salaries, high stress levels, administrators’ management styles, and the need to balance various roles (Blackhurst et al., 1998a, 1998b; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Hamrick
More recently, Boehman (2006) found that the long work hours, increased use of technology and electronic leashes, and changing gender roles significantly and negatively impacted student affairs professionals’ perceptions of their work and their higher education organizations.

While some research has been focused on the high degree of attrition, other researchers focused on student affairs career satisfaction. O’Neil and Billimoria (2005) developed a model of women’s career development and its phases. They found that women mainly experienced a positive association with their careers during the first career phase occurring between the ages of 24 and 35, a mostly negative association during the second career phase between the ages of 36 and 45, and a positive association occurring between the ages of 46 and 60 as they near the end of their careers. This finding may justify the high degree of attrition found by Blackhurst (2000) in a comparison of middle management and senior administration.

Blackhurst (2000) concluded “women in mid-level positions were significantly less satisfied with and committed to the student affairs profession than women in senior administrative positions” (p. 409) in findings consistent with those of Bender (1980) and Blackhurst et al. (1998a, 1998b). However, despite the focus on attrition, Lorden (1998) reported that overall “job satisfaction [is] typically quite high” and emphasized that “workers might be less likely to leave if efforts were made to ensure their needs were met” (p. 212). Before discussing specific needs, a discussion of middle manager role in higher education organizations must be provided.
Ideal Worker Norm

Ideal worker norm theory is the organizational model that many professions follow. This model is categorized as having the expectation of working long hours and demonstration of total commitment to the organization to a much greater extent than to family obligations (Bailyn, 1993; Hewlett, 2007; Hoshchild, 1997; Moen & Roehling, 2004; Williams, 1999). This ideal worker norm is the traditional model for work. Hewlett (2007) and Drago (2005) revealed that current organizational policies reward a linear career model (i.e., end of education through retirement) and celebrates long hours with face time as opposed to flexible family balance solutions. This career dedication has been demonstrated in many professions to include accountants, lawyers, academics, and managers (Williams, 1999). However, Schor (1991) and Hewitt (1993) found this model's requirement of long work hours and continuous full-time employment through retirement to be counterproductive. Quinn (2006) even noted that graduate students exhibit bias avoidance behaviors against “care-giving and present an ideal worker façade” (p. 37). However, companies as well as universities still employ this model when determining productivity and advancement.

Student Affairs Middle Management

Young (1990) best described the middle manager as the position below the chief student affairs officer (CSAO) and above the entry-level practitioner. In relation to the organizational chart, the middle management position serves as both the horizontal and vertical link in the organization (Young, 1990). Rosser and Javinar (2003) stated that middle managers are very important to organizations and oftentimes serve as the primary contact for both internal and external constituents. Rosser (2004) stated that “by
virtue of their ‘middleness’ within academic organizations, midlevel leaders’ must find the balance between supervisors’ directions and the needs of those who require their support and service” (p. 319). Rosser (2000) argued that many middle level professionals are promoted because they “emerge as the informal leaders within their work units, display strong interpersonal skills, work hard, have the technical skills to perform well in the position, and are dependable” (p. 7). Janczak (2004) expanded on this observation to declare that middle managers provide the stability in the organization, especially in times of organizational change by a senior administrator because, these managers are typically promoted from within their units.

Middle managers are primarily responsible for implementing policy changes and serve as a direct supervisor for the new professionals in the field (Rosser, 2004). Rosser (2004) added that “despite their professionalism, their significant numbers and high turnover rate, midlevel leaders lack the visibility throughout the academy and have been of little concern to educational researchers, particularly at the national level” (pp. 317-318). Rosser confirmed that middle managers lack visibility in the field, yet Lorden (1998) stated that these managers would be less likely to leave if their “needs were met” (p. 212).

Jo (2008) studied the turnover rate among female middle managers and found that women were more likely to leave a job due to work-family conflict. The largest obligations middle managers have outside of work are related to their families. Student affairs midlevel managers are more likely to face challenges balancing personal and professional lives (Belch & Strange, 1995). Nobbe et al. (1997) suggested that student
affairs profession leaders needs to re-evaluate their expectations of female middle managers in order to promote retention.

Family Responsibility and Work-Life Balance

Researchers have addressed the process of career advancement for females in administration (Ironside, 1981; Rickard, 1985) and focused on attrition among females (Hersi, 1993; Richmond & Sherman, 1991), yet many have failed to take family life into consideration. Few researchers have discussed the role of work-life balance and its stresses among college administrators. Marshall (2009) commented that “the literature addresses various issues of women in administration, [but] all neglect to reference, mention, or consider the competing demands of childbearing and rearing made on female administrators” (p. 192). The few studies about family life and professional advancement portray a negative impact of having children. Nobbe et al. (1997) believed that childbearing negatively impacted the career progression of many women. Blackhurst et al. (1998a, 1998b) concurred that key variables related to increased job stress and burnout are marital and parental statuses.

Nobbe et al. (1997) discussed that few women feel prepared to balance the realities of work and family and found that “several had modified their original career goals and aspirations due to family obligations” (p. 102). Hirshman (2007) cited that the responsibilities of being a mother have increased mainly due to the expectation of multiple after school activities, sports practices, academic involvement, and other activities deemed appropriate to enhance the enrichment of a child. Blackhurst et al. (1998) reinforced Evans’ (1986) finding that role conflict increases when women must balance parental and professional roles. Evans (1986) found “women employed in the
same position perceive their lives differently depending upon the relational roles they play” (p. 19).

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) found that when people try to fill multiple roles that they identify highly with the result is conflict and lack of balance. Kuk and Donovan (2004) expanded on the generational research by Astin and Leland (1991) to research the perception of the status of women administrators. Kuk and Donovan (2004) interviewed women in the entry, middle, and senior levels of administration and found that women in all levels of administration reported family issues as having an impact on their careers. Interestingly, senior administrators reported obligations to aging parents as opposed to raising children (Kuk & Donovan, 2004). Matzat (1992) reported 90% of women administrators believed having children and working in the profession was manageable, yet 60% of those administrators were childless. Halpern and Cheung (2008) stated highly successful women make the clear choice of having “either a baby or a briefcase” (p. 5), suggesting the two events are mutually exclusive.

In related research, female faculty run into similar barriers deemed as “bias against caregiving” (Drago et al., 2005, p. 22). Drago et al. (2005) found that faculty even admitted to having fewer children to “achieve academic success” (p. 22). Drago et al. (2005) found that females exhibited bias avoidance including neglecting to ask for a decreased teaching load, not asking for maternity leave, or refusing to request a stop in the tenure clock. Female faculty members indicated that they exhibited these actions because they did not want their careers to be affected adversely (Drago et al., 2005). Williams (2004) added that women are less likely to take advantage of family policies because of gender stereotypes. In addition, Bronstein (2001) suggested that women in
the field still have to battle with the patriarchal nature of the academy. Quinn and Litzler (2009) concluded that females who are family focused with teaching experience are more likely to turn away from a career in academe (p. 78). However, Drago et al. (2001) studied faculty in general and found that both male and female faculty delay having children and families. Additionally, Drago and Williams (2000) discovered that the tenure track culture operates as a model with a full-time faculty member’s career path being supported by a full-time homemaker.

The impact of family obligations has been noticed by professionals in training before they enter the field full time (Golde, 1998). Golde (1998) found a relationship between graduate students’ decisions to leave graduate school and the desire to balance family and work. Quinn et al. (2009) commented that the ability to balance work with family responsibilities may be an indicator about career goals and aspirations. Quinn et al. postulated that the combination of graduate socialization theory, work-family, and bias avoidance indicates an association between the perception of the ability to achieve balance between work and family and the desire to choose a career outside academe. Quinn et al. (2009) concluded that students focused on family desires are likely to turn away from an academic career due to the perception of a lack of work-family balance in higher education. This may be attributed to “the demands of professional careers [leaving] little time or energy for children or for family commitments” (Drago et al., 2011, p. 1222). However, the impact of generational trends on family obligations may impact career decisions.
Generational Trends

Quinn et al. (2009) suggested that there may be generational differences in the desire to achieve a work-family balance. Quinn et al. stated that younger generations are more likely to require a work-family balance when compared to older generations. In additional research regarding generational trends, individuals from Generation X (born 1965-1980) and the Millennial Generation (born 1981-2000) place more emphasis on the value of family involvement than previous generations (Cox-Otto, 2008; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Chethik (2006) revealed that today’s fathers spend more time with their children than previous generations of males. This shift in fatherhood roles is significantly different than previous generations’ fatherhood norms related to the work-family balance as a gender issue.

Another generational trend may seem in direct opposition to the feminist movement’s fight to achieve equality. While thought of a trend of the past, some women who have not yet graduated college have already decided to end their careers or take time off when they have children because of perceptions about challenges and inabilities to balance work and family (Bush, Mentzer, Grisaffi, & Richter, 2011; Story, 2005). Evans and Kuh (1983) reported that women were more likely to leave their positions or not view themselves as remaining in the field for their entire career. Matzat (1992) found that women administrators who were no longer in the student affairs field typically were married with children. Bust et al. (2011) observed that many women choose careers for balancing work and family, and “in a sense, by never opting in, they will never have to opt out or be forced out” (p. 86). Folbre (2001) discussed how women
take care of children and family members for love instead of money as part of the motherhood norm.

Belkin (2003) believed many women stay at home entirely or work only part-time in a career due to family obligations. Belkin provided a picture of very well-educated women choosing to leave their careers to focus on family obligations. These women prior to making this decision had achieved a high level of career success but chose to leave their careers. Many of Belkin's interviewees highlighted the choice not to maintain the long hours or frequent work obligations so they could concentrate on their families. While some researchers stated that this trend is only among affluent households, Cotter England, and Hermsen (2007) found that in the last 15 years, men whose salaries were in the lowest 25% income bracket had the highest percentage of wives who stayed at home to fulfill childcare responsibilities.

Belkin (2003) depicted the recent trend in becoming a stay-at-home mother as supported by United States Census data. The percentage of new mothers returning back to work fell in 2 years from 59% in 1998 to 55% in 2000. Belkin also noted “two-thirds of mothers work fewer than 40 hours a week” (i.e., part time; para. 13). This observation directly conflicts with ideal worker norm theory that requires dedicated focus on the career in order to advance. However, it may explain the high levels of attrition in the student affairs field. As the consequence of this decision, if qualified professionals leave the field to care for families, can they come back when those obligations have ended? Belkin (2013) argued in a 10 year follow up to the 2003 report that in many fields, they can, but not exactly to the same level at which they were employed before off ramping (Hewlett, 2007). In addition, the financial implications to the decision to off
ramp from a career have become more apparent. Hirshmann (2007) found that women may never regain former income statuses after choosing to leave employment. Absence from careers includes not only the loss of 20% to 30% of earning potential but also the loss of long term contributions to retirement plans and benefits. Hewlett (2007) also found that when women leave careers for family obligations, they find it hard to return to former organizations. However, women with children are not the only professionals impacted by family obligations.

Gender Trends

While discussing the role of family obligations, many researchers continue to follow a gender schema that assumes females take on the familial care-giving responsibilities. In 1999, Virginia Valian developed a theory regarding gender schemas and the role these schemas play in everyday life, especially the role gender schemas play in professional life. Valian discussed these roles as “a set of implicit or non-conscious hypotheses about sex differences [playing] a central role in shaping men’s and women’s professional lives” (p. 2). Valian believed gender schemas to be unintentional rules followed by society. “Schemas based on sex, age, race, class, or sexual orientation have different contents, but all schemas influence how we perceive and treat group members” (Valian, 1999, p. 3).

Gender schemas may play a role in what Drago et al. (2011) believed to be the reason why employers view care-giving commitment requests by women more seriously than if males make such requests. Hochschild (1997) and Twiggs, McQuillan, and Ferree (1999) discussed the continued societal view places the responsibilities of care-giving upon the women regardless of their work situations. Traditionally, men have been
viewed as family breadwinners (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005), and men who report having care-giving responsibilities deviate from their expected role are thought to be nontraditional. Brannen et al. (1994) demonstrated this view when they found that men feel less able to make family needs visible because the benefits that exist seem targeted to women only. Quinn and Trower (2009) validated the gender schema when they found that women rate family employment policies as higher in importance than their male colleagues. However, Quinn (2010) suggested that women find going against the ideal worker norm theory as less detrimental to their careers than do men.

It is important to note that some researchers suggested that family work balance may become a bigger priority to males. O’Brien (1992) found that men value their roles in their families and want to be active parents. This finding was reinforced Golden (2007) who stated that “greater involvement in childrearing . . . leads to more positive outcomes for fathers themselves, their marriages, and their children” (p. 265). When reviewing family-friendly initiatives and research, the majority have been focused on the needs of women with multiple roles but failed to identify the multiple roles that men play (Barnett, Gareis, James, & Steele, 2003; Noor, 1994).

Hass and Hwang (1995) stated that there is a need to demonstrate the advantages of fathers taking on additional childcare responsibilities. Advantages to the organization include increased family satisfaction to enhance work productivity (Hass & Hwang, 1995). Bush et al. (2011) stated “future fatherhood studies may explore the ways in which fathers perceive that they balance family and career” (p. 89). William (2004) emphasized the lack of research: “Unfortunately, few studies analyze the employment barriers faced by fathers who seek an active role in family care” (p. 20).
Research Needs

Nobbe and Manning (1997) noted that very little previous literature regarding women and family obligations exists. Little to no literature regarding men’s perceptions of the workplace’s supportiveness of family obligations (i.e., parental care, extended family care, and children) can be found. As recently as 2001, Levtov argued that “the realities of combining a family and a career may be incompatible with the current values of the profession” (p. 17). I argue that further research must be completed about perceptions of student affairs as a family-supportive or ideal worker norm defined field. McCrate (2002) stated that workers seek jobs offering flexibility and the ability to handle the obligations of family. This study was conducted to interview Caucasian, male middle managers of the student affairs field to find out what they perceive regarding work versus family.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focused on Caucasian, male middle managers’ perceptions of the student affairs work environment in relation to their families and organizational supportiveness and advancement. Perceptions of workplace supportiveness and family responsibilities among Caucasian, male middle managers and the desire to stagnate or leave the profession were considered. This chapter outlines the research methods for this study. The sections cover the research design, the role of the researcher, the sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis details.

Research Design

This qualitative study was explored through interviews with Caucasian, male student affairs middle managers their perceptions about workplace supportiveness of family obligations in the student affairs field. The qualitative format was used to yield “important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity” (Patton, 1990, p. 172) and because this method provided “rich, thick descriptions” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). The data was organized into themes to understand connections between the application of the ideal worker norm theory (see Acker, 1992; Gherardi, 1994; Mills, 2002) in student affairs organizational and promotional structures and the importance of workplace supportiveness in organizations according to Caucasian, male student affairs middle managers.

Role of the Researcher

The primary instrument in this study operates through the human element (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, my interest in this topic has grown from my
educational and professional background. I have worked in the field of student affairs for over 10 years in various areas such as student development, student center management, recruitment, and academic services. I currently serve as the Assistant Director of Student Services at the University of North Texas Health Science Center, School of Public Health and am a doctoral student at the University of North Texas. My interest in the topic comes from my observations, experiences, and conversations with colleagues in the field. Also, I have been questioned about my professional journey by students and colleagues enrolled in master’s programs and entry-level positions. In addition, I regularly face the challenge of work-life balance as a wife and mother of two children, all of which happened during my doctoral studies and while I was advancing in my career.

Sampling

The study population consisted of Caucasian, male middle managers in student affairs who work in institutions of higher education in the Southern Association of College Student Affairs (SACSA) region. SACSA is a voluntary professional association that consists of student affairs’ professionals and student affairs and higher education graduate students within the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The SACSA region was chosen because of the role of the traditional family roles that are predominant in the south.

Caucasian, male middle managers were chosen to be interviewed in this study. They were selected based on their level within their institutions. Caucasian males at the
entry level and upper administrative level were not chosen to participate in this study. Caucasian, male middle managers were contacted via email, and individuals were asked if they were middle managers and willing to be interviewed for this study. The researcher interviewed eight male, middle management professionals from all types of higher education institutions, as the focus of the research included position level, family obligations, and family supportive work environment but not the type of institution hosting participants' current employment. The eight interviews provided rich, in-depth perspectives.

The ensuring sample diversity included the following: (a) years of experience, (b) family context including relationship status and care-giving responsibilities, (c) representation of different age groups. The interview method is the “preferred tactic of data collection” because it obtains “better data or more data at less cost than other tactics” (Dexter, 1970, p.11). In addition, interviews allow for greater depth and meaning to the research question because the researcher “cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world . . . the purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 1990, p. 196). The small sample was appropriate for the qualitative method as the intent is to yield “important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity” (Patton, 1990, p. 172) and “rich, thick descriptions” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). The interviewing format consisted of a semi-structured interview using certain questions that all participants were asked yet allowed for further clarification and discussion of other topics that lead to depth of meaning (Merriam, 1998).
Data Collection

A request for participation was emailed directly to each potential participant. The initial email provided an introductory description of the study along with an invitation to participate in an interview. The content for the recruitment email sent to the participants is included in Appendix A.

All interviews were conducted via Skype and were recorded and reviewed at a later time. Skype-based interviews were recorded using the Amolto-Skype plug-in software application. All interviews were transcribed in order to transform participant's words into written text for subsequent referral and analysis (Seidman, 1991). Hand-written notes were taken during each interview to record important nonverbal observations. In order to maintain the anonymity of the participants, a pseudonym for the participant was created at the time of each interview. All identifying information such as the name of the university at which the participant is employed and the position held by the individual being interviewed was omitted or masked as part of the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Workplace supportiveness is a multifaceted concept, which has many components. Because the purpose of this study was to understand Caucasian, male middle managers’ perceptions of workplace family supportiveness and if workplace family supportiveness is perceived differently based position within the organization, I coded responses based on themes obtained from the semi-structured interviews and the responses from the participants. Data was analyzed simultaneously and responses were coded as they were received in order to organize them into themes.
NVIVO software was utilized to code and analyze data. As the data was coded and themes emerged, a constant-comparison method of data analysis was be used. The emerging information was reviewed and questions or ideas that developed from the theme were noted in reflective notes (Merriam, 1998). This process occurred throughout the data gathering process in order to constantly compare results among participants and to allow for a more thorough analysis of the interview results.

Verification

Interview participants reviewed the analysis to verify that the researcher interpreted their responses correctly as part of the verification or member checking process to ensure triangulation (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation was also addressed through an audit trail (Merriam, 1998) that involved checking transcripts for errors and code monitoring for ensuring no “shift in the meaning of codes during the process of coding” (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Transferability was addressed by providing rich, thick descriptions to allow readers “to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211).

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure confidentiality of research participants, several steps were included such as assigning pseudonyms to all participants and locations, and the inclusion of the process of member checking to ensure the accuracy of the researcher’s observation or descriptions. Again, neither the university nor the state in which any individual works was listed in the results.
Plan for Narrative

The overarching goal of this qualitative study was to collect themes regarding workplace supportiveness of family obligations. The data was used to determine how these themes vary for Caucasian, male student affairs middle managers by age and family obligations and how workplace family supportiveness leads to stagnation or attrition from the student affairs field. Findings could provide foundational information for future research about workplace supportiveness in student affairs in order to facilitate cultural shifts to the profession’s work environments.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study was focused on Caucasian male middle managers’ perceptions of the student affairs work environment in relation to their families and workplace supportiveness and advancement. Perceptions of workplace supportiveness and family responsibilities among Caucasian, male middle managers, and the desire to stagnate or leave the professional were considered. A total of 10 Caucasian male middle managers were interviewed for the study; however, the audio recordings for two of the sessions were corrupted so the final analysis was performed on the eight remaining interviews’ recordings with Nate, Eric, Blake, Tate, Nolan, Chris, Evan, and Hunter. This chapter provides information from the interviews, an overview of the results of the data analysis and the presence of overarching themes. The results provided demonstrate the interrelatedness of family obligations and the perception of workplace supportiveness.

Nate

Nate was a middle manager in student affairs who was currently pursuing a doctor of philosophy in the field. He was married with one son under 5 years old. Nate was responsible for approximately 6 different departments with over 25 professional staff reporting to him.

Entry into the Field

Nate stated that “like others in the field, I didn’t go into college or university believing this [student affairs] was a thing. Ultimately, I had a “dynamic undergraduate experience where I was very involved and connected and had a mentor who really invested time and with whom I developed a great friendship.” Nate finally decided to go into the field when he “looked up one day junior year thinking: I want to do what that guy
does.” At that point, Nate started exploring his options and decided to go to school to earn a master’s degree. Nate had worked in the field for over 10 years in a variety of different areas of student affairs including residence life, student development, and orientation. He hoped to finish his doctoral degree in the next year and a half.

One of Nate’s mentors indicated to him that the reality of student affairs is working long hours and that the best advice that he could give Nate was that “when you accept a new position to spend your first year in that position going to everything and learning the importance of each activity so that you know what you can say no to the following year.” The goal was to familiarize himself with his department to know what required his hands-on attention and what could be delegated so that others could handle the task.

Typical Work Week

When asked about his typical work week, Nate laughed and indicated that his work week was anything but typical even though he understood the intent of the question. Nate commented that his daily schedule started as early as 7:00 a.m. and ended around 5:00 p.m. Nate was also responsible for coming back to campus three to four nights a week for evening events. Many nights Nate left work by 6:00 p.m. but returned at 11:00 p.m. to work until early morning on the following day at which time he left and started again the next day, or as he stated “go home and then rinse and repeat.” Nate was constantly busy with eight to 10 meetings throughout the typical day, and his schedule was already filled up to 3 to 4 weeks in advance at any given time of the year. He joked about being excited when his email inbox contained only as few as 150 emails.
Workplace Supportiveness

Nate described the institution at which he worked as being very supportive to his family obligations. “More importantly,” he added, “the focus is on care for the employee as a person above the task.”

Family Supportiveness

Nate described his wife as being very supportive of his career; they talked about his career development from the beginning of their relationship. He indicated that they communicated frequently by utilizing technology to stay connected when he has to work late hours such as using Face Time, etc. They also share calendars to keep up to date on all work and family responsibilities. Nate indicated that family obligations determine his career choices. Nate specifically stated:

We’re not a couple that said any job anywhere, and I think that for the rest of my career, we are going to be wired that way. We are going to make decisions that will keep us closer to family or closer to things that matter to us.

Career Goals

Nate developed a great passion for the field, and he and his wife were very intentional about his career decisions. While Nate maintained his career aspirations, his goals were not about a specific position or title. Nate cared far more that “I can wake up every morning thinking that I can make a difference. It’s not just a job that I’m going to.” He did comment about hearing his colleagues’ goals of “I want to be a vice president of student life” or “I want to be a president.” While Nate indicated he did not aspire to promote to the upper level of administration, he did originally appear to be hesitant when admitting this and commented that this may make him appear “unambitious.” However, those titles were not his goal. He indicated again about his family’s influence

37
on his career decisions, so his goal was to finish his doctoral degree and make his next career choice before his son entered school to ensure his son would not have to transition to a new school, new area, or new group of friends.

Hunter

Hunter was a single, male middle manager who oversaw one specific area within a large division of student affairs. He supervised one professional staff member and five graduate assistants. While working full-time in the field, Hunter managed to earn both master and doctoral degrees and had accumulated over a decade of experience in the field. Hunter intentionally put his professional life before his personal life and commented about being well aware that most all of his friends and colleagues have families. Hunter admitted to having “goals that I wanted to accomplish before I let life happen.” Hunter explained that the reason for putting his professional life before his personal life was not because of pay or promotion but because he grew up watching his parents and family struggle. He frequently commented about receiving a lot of pressure from his colleagues who constantly asked him “what’s next?” Hunter held firm that while he has specific ambitions, he really would like to focus on now in his current position.

Entry into the Field

Hunter entered the field after getting involved on campus during his undergraduate years. He was involved in orientation, fraternity life, and many other student organizations. He was also a student ambassador. Hunter’s original goal was to become a high school teacher. However, his involvement in extracurricular activities led him to work in the Greek life office when he was an undergraduate student. The Greek life director at his undergraduate institution became his mentor and introduced him to the field of student affairs. As a result, he enrolled in a master’s program in
student affairs while working in a graduate student assistant position and worked full time in the profession before going back to school to earn his doctorate.

Typical Work Week

When asked about a typical work day, Hunter reported being required to be at work during “university hours which are 8 to 5” and being required to work all evening and weekend events. When discussing his typical day, Hunter exclaimed that his department promoted “work-life balance.” Then chuckled as he said, “We do promote work life balance, but then we’re on email until 11:00 at night!” He compared his responsibilities to the academic side of the university and noted “they have a very defined work schedule. They’re not dealing with the 24/7 issues like we have in student affairs. There’s a lot expected of us all the time.”

Workplace Supportiveness

Hunter perceived his institution to be very supportive of family obligations. Hunter reported that his supervisor was very attentive to employees in the department and tried to monitor each person’s schedule in order to ensure that no staff member works 60 to 70 hours a week. Hunter’s supervisor tried to be a good example and promoted a flexible schedule in order to prevent burn out within the department. Examples of flexibility included being able to work from home occasionally on projects, coming in late if the employee worked late the night before, or scheduling staff who live further away to arrive later due to traffic.

Family Supportiveness

In terms of family supportiveness, Hunter’s family was very supportive of his career. Hunter anticipated moving closer to his family after he gained enough experience to move to a new position. Hunter commented,
So, when I had to move to [another state], I really had a lot of guilt, you know, like who’s going to take care of them, you know, and that was very hard for me, so, when I go home for a week or so, I still kind of struggle with that. I just hate that I can’t be there as much as I used to be for them. I’ve got two older siblings. They’re married with kids, and so it’s not as easy for them to take care of [our parents]. For my parents, as well, dad’s got some health issues, it’s hard being away.

Career Goals

Hunter commented that right now, he was really where he wanted to be in terms of his career. He earned the doctorate, held a great job, and enjoyed mentoring students and having a role with graduate students in a local university’s master’s program. He did not feel driven at this time to go out and publish or to obtain a dean or vice president position because those positions are too high level.

He had noticed that other Caucasian, male colleagues to be competitive and prepared to move every 2 years in order to earn promotions. However, Hunter said “that’s just not where I want to be.” He stated that the “focus for those positions is to manage the bureaucracy. You’re too far removed from the students, and you rely too much on your direct reports to inform you of what is going on.” Hunter said he would be content moving one position higher which would still be considered a middle management position. He would want the position to have the perfect balance of additional authority and student involvement.

Eric

Eric was a middle manager in student affairs who was married with two children under the age of 5 years. He had held an earned doctor of philosophy for at least 6
years. While he did not have to directly take care of his parents at the time of the
interview, he anticipated having to do so in the very near future since many of his family
members had begun to experience significant medical issues in the past 5 years. He
had already switched jobs in order to live closer to his parents.

Eric had experience working in student activities, Greek life, and residence life,
and had over a decade of experience in student affairs. In terms of work
responsibilities, Eric worked at an institution with an enrollment under 10,000 students
and directly supervised one area within his institution’s division of student affairs. Eric
supervised one professional staff person, but due to the nature of his work and the
available staffing resources at his institution, Eric held the majority of the responsibilities
for his department.

Entry into the Field

Eric entered the field of student affairs almost defiantly. His original career goal
was to become a lawyer, but his mentor was in student affairs and persuaded him to
join the field. Once he made the decision to pursue a career in the field of student
affairs, he strategically chose a master’s program and made sure to gain experience in
a variety of areas at a broad range of institutions. After working for a few years, he
returned to school to earn a doctor of philosophy.

Typical Work Week

Eric’s typical work week was consistently filled with meetings, student events,
and appointments. Eric worked well over 40 hours every week and commented that he
has many late night events that cause him to be at work until 11:00 p.m. He did
mention that his tried to serve as a role model to students about managing family
obligations so he purposefully scheduled late appointments or events for one or two nights per week. His goal was to work late just two nights per week as opposed to four.

Workplace Supportiveness

In terms of workplace supportiveness, Eric commented that his institution very much followed the long hours at work, over family, with lots of face time, or ideal worker model. He mentioned that previously his institution allowed more flexible work hours and occasionally he could work from home as long as the job got done. Eric could not stipulate when it occurred but a management shift largely changed the flexibility to where, to be viewed as a “poster child” employee, he had to be seen in the office more often regardless of his output. He specifically commented that the employee that was regularly bragged on by a supervisor was one who accomplished very few goals for the area but was able to “shoot the breeze” throughout the day, unlike those with families who were balancing both obligations.

Family Supportiveness

Eric was married, had two children, and commented that his wife was supportive overall with his career choice. However, Eric believed that she would have preferred his workday to be more like an 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. lifestyle. Eric said his wife typically was very understanding of his long work hours, but he felt he was missing out on many of his family’s important events.

Career Goals

Eric’s career goal was to become a president of a university. He already had work experience in a variety of areas and believed he needed to “get a few more years in” before he could start looking into positions to help him move toward that goal.
Blake

Blake was a middle manager in the field of student affairs, was married with a child under 5 years of age, and was responsible for the care of an extended family member under the age of 18 years. Blake had over a decade of experience in the field and was currently in a doctoral program that he hoped to complete in the year following the interview. Blake supervised three different departments in a division of student affairs with over 35 professional staff, some of whom were part-time. Blake did not intentionally pursue the field of student affairs and did not have any desire to remain in the field.

Entry into the Field

Blake entered the field of student affairs unintentionally. He had been a student worker during his undergraduate career and basically continued into the field professionally. He had obtained a master’s degree in business and was working on a doctorate in higher education at the time of the interview. Blake was more interested in the business and technological aspects of the university.

Typical Work Week

Blake’s typical work week allowed him to experience more work life balance than he ever had before his current position. He attributed the work life balance to his current supervisor and indicated that his work week is closer to a 40-hour work week than ever before. Blake added that he had flexibility with his hours so if he needed to come in later, he could, and he did work overtime. His supervisor’s main expectation was for him to complete his projects and make sure his staff is available when students need assistance.
Workplace Supportiveness

Blake commented that his supervisor was very supportive of his family obligations. His supervisor has allowed the staff to take off for children, sick parents, and extended family. Blake did mention that he thought his supervisor’s policies were because his supervisor was also a Caucasian male who had to manage significant family obligations throughout his career, and the supervisor's experiences left him more understanding than most supervisors.

Family Supportiveness

Blake reported his wife was very supportive of his career choice but was less supportive of him working late at night since their child was born. Due to the additional family obligations and because his wife was also working, Blake needs to provide more help at home during this season of life. He mentioned that she was very supportive when he remembers to communicate an event ahead of time, but her level of supportiveness changed since the addition of a child to the family.

Career Goals

While he was very well regarded in his position and was highly dedicated and hard-working, Blake’s career goal was to become an upper-level administrator of information technology at a university. Blake’s goal was to leave student affairs and to enter the academic side of higher education in order to become the chief information officer at a university. This goal has been his desire since entering the field, and he has always chosen positions leading him to that goal.

Tate

Tate was married with a child under five. He supervised the residence life area within his institution’s division of student affairs. Two professional staff and two
graduate assistants reported to him. Interestingly, in his career, Tate had the opportunity to grow not only his position but also the department from one staff to a total of five staff members for this specific area.

Entry into the Field

Tate came into the field of student affairs with a business background. He entered the field of student affairs because he was a student worker during his undergraduate career. Tate worked his way up by gaining experience in one specific area of student affairs. Tate also earned a more business-focused graduate degree by obtaining his MBA. Even though he worked in student affairs for over a decade, he remained in residence life for most of his career and enjoys the structural and policy side of his role.

Typical Work Week

Due to the nature of his job in residence life, Tate reported never having a day off. Even though he had office hours during specific times of day, he was always on duty, 24 hours a day. He mentioned that his job performance was based on effectiveness. He explicated the following:

It’s not 8:00 to 5:00 or 7:00 to 4:00. It’s based on . . . a project. This is what you do; you do it until it’s done. If it takes you 30 hours, it takes you 30, or even if it’s 70, so I mean that’s what I’m used to.

Workplace Supportiveness

Tate commented that his office environment and university culture were very family friendly, much more so than he was comfortable with himself. He reported being drawn to the field because he enjoyed his undergraduate experience, but he realized that most campuses do not allow children to come to campus during work hours or
allow staff to have as much flexibility as his campus. He mused that his campus culture really changed and shaped his view on future career choices. While he understood the business environment, he appreciated the workplace supportiveness he received at his campus. Tate also said it is “the norm” for his staff to bring their families to campus events.

Family Supportiveness

Tate commented that while his work and family were very supportive of each other, working in residence life comes with some distinct disadvantages. He related an incident when he was walking through campus with his daughter and had to discipline students who were disobeying university policy. This situation caused him and his wife to request special permission to live off-campus. He felt living on campus while being required to serve as a disciplinary authority could threaten the safety of his wife and child.

Career Goals

Tate’s career goals include moving and gaining a promotion whether that next job be in the field of student affairs or in a business setting. Tate said he would stay at his current institution for the next 3 to 5 years due to having extended family support nearby while his daughter is young.

Nolan

Nolan was a single male. He had recently divorced and held an earned doctorate with over 5 years of experience in the field. Nolan supervised two professional staff and typically worked between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. with responsibility for attending occasional evening events. Nolan was experienced working in both the academic as well as with the student affairs sides of the university.
He had worked in a variety of areas such as student development, leadership programs, and community engagement.

Entry into the Field

Nolan is an individual who entered the field accidentally. He worked for many years as a high school teacher. When he returned to school to obtain a doctoral degree, he ended up working as a graduate assistant in the education department due to his research interests. While working as a graduate assistant, a full-time position opened at the institution and he transferred into the position. He reported really enjoying working in the field as a result.

Typical Work Week

Nolan’s work week was well over 40 hours, and his view of the field of student affairs and his department was the following:

It’s not so much that we pay you for seat time. You may work 40 hours. It’s not that you’re paid to man a seat for 40 hours. You understand what your job is. You understand what your role is. There’s an appreciation of that at this level. We know that they go above and beyond; they do stuff at home; they don’t just work between 8 and 5. So, if something happens and they do need to take off, whether it’s for a sick spouse or a child, you need to be flexible. You just figure out a way to make sure all the requirements of the job are being met.

Workplace Supportiveness

Nolan’s workplace was very supportive of family obligations and promoted the philosophy that when the supervisor shows care for the person, the person performs for the organization. Nolan believed it was important to “make it very clear and evident: I
care about you as a person, first and foremost, and through that help them to grow and develop.”

Family Supportiveness

Nolan indicated that he realized that his staff must have support from their families to be successful. If a person’s home life was causing stress, the person would not perform well at work.

Career Goals

Nolan’s career goals were to find a balance between student affairs and academic affairs. He did not want to be a vice president of student affairs. He saw himself transitioning out of student affairs and into academic affairs. He mentioned that “God laughs when I make plans” and said, “If you were to ask me 10 years ago if this is where I’d be, I would not have guessed.”

Chris

Chris was married with two children aged 5 years old and under. He worked his way up in the field of student affairs by gaining experience in a variety of areas including career services, student leadership, student development, and civic engagement. He currently supervised 15 full-time positions among 10 different student affairs areas. He described himself as an overachiever and very driven.

Entry into the Field

Chris entered the field of student affairs because a lot of people took the time to mentor him. He started as a student worker during his undergraduate career and gradually moved up from undergraduate student worker into graduate assistant, then onto interim director and a full-time position. Once he decided to join the field, he followed a traditional career path by moving up the promotion ranks one level at a time.
Typical Work Week

Chris’ immediate response was “there is no typical work day.” He commented that there are always student issues on campus or some new mandate or something needing research. Chris’ employees typically see him in the office from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., but he usually spent 1 to 1½ hours going through email before work and 2 hours at night catching up on email because he had no time during the workday to review emails. Chris reported attending approximately six to eight meetings every day because expects to do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Workplace Supportiveness

Chris believed the culture of his work environment was very family oriented. He stated that “if you’re not happy as a person at home, you are not going to be happy and productive professionally.” He indicated that his supervisor allowed employees to have flexible scheduling to come in late or leave as early as needed as long as the job gets done and the office is covered for students who have questions or concerns.

Chris said, “I never really formally have to ask for vacation, unless it’s a big university event or something like that.” When I specifically asked if he felt as if he was treated equally in terms of family obligations as compared to a female, he laughingly stated, “with my supervisor, yes. That’s my answer!” Separating family life from work was difficult for Chris who benefitted from the workplace support as follows:

You don’t want to just think about your kids 3 hours at the end of the day. You want to transcend those boundaries, and I think when you are able to do that, people are much happier, and you enjoy your work. And when you enjoy your work, you’re much more productive, as we know. I think that would be my
advice. Really think about the environment and what you want to produce and do you really want people to be happy.

Family Supportiveness

Chris described his wife as “an amazing individual and has always been very supportive.” When Chris first entered into the profession, he communicated very clearly what life was going to be like for the two of them as a family because of his career in the field of student affairs. Chris realized that as long as he remembered to communicate upcoming events and plans to his wife, she would remain very supportive. He also indicated that his wife worked at a full-time job and that his work environment was actually much more supportive of family obligations her work environment.

Career Goals

Chris’ original career goals were “to be the top leader at the top institution,” and originally had dreams of becoming a vice president of student affairs. He still had not ruled out the career aspiration to become a university president, but after gaining experience in the field, he “recognizes that the environment is more important to me that the prestige of the institution.” Chris also admitted that having a family challenged his perception of success.

Evan

Evan, a former therapeutic counselor, had been married to his wife for 25 years. He had two children. One of his children was in high school, and the other was in college.

Entry into the Field

Evan spent most of his career outside the area of student affairs. His background was in counseling individuals with social trauma and behavioral issues.
However, Evan ended up feeling burned out from worrying about his patients all night long. He then took a job working on the academic affairs side where he reported to the dean of a college. He had since transitioned into the field of student affairs.

Typical Work Week

Evan noted that his typical work week is closer to the typical 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. work week. However, he always took a laptop home with him to answer emails and work on projects in the evenings. In addition, Evan indicated his current position to be the first time he had throughout his career to work hours more akin to the 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. workday.

Workplace Supportiveness

Evan indicated that his workplace was very supportive of family obligations. Not only did individuals in his department benefit from flexible scheduling, but males were also able to take full paternity leave. While he realized that this practice should be allowable, the department had an initial hesitation toward a male taking full paternity leave. However, the department realized that “if you truly care for the person, your individual perception of what you would do cannot factor into the decision and color your view of the person.”

Family Supportiveness

Evan said his family was always supportive of his career goals. They even moved five times in order to further his career. He attributed his career drive but also his level of family attentiveness to his father. Evan commented the following about his father:

I’m going to point to my dad, he probably influenced my whole career because growing up he was as close to a workaholic as I’ve ever seen. He would leave
the house by 5:00 [a.m.] and would not get home until about 2:00 a.m. He worked on Saturday’s and would go into the office on Sunday’s. . . . I remember growing up thinking I was going to have to follow in his footsteps, and I was freaking out, and my dad pulled me aside and talked to me, and I probably don’t remember this perfectly, but he said the words I now use: “You need to love what you do, you don’t have to do [this] if you don’t love doing it. Do what you love to do.” And that kind of led me to knowing I’m okay to get a degree in [xyz] even though he didn’t understand it.

Career Goals

Evan had experience changing his career goals, because he began his career as a counselor. He continued performing a counseling role when he moved into the field of student affairs as part of a career services department. In terms of career goals, Evan never aspired to reach the top level of the field in student affairs and enjoyed working with students on a daily basis. However, Evan’s ultimate goal was to become a career center director at a large university.

Findings from the Thematic Analysis

The data analysis procedure began once the interview audio files were transcribed into text documents and uploaded into NVIVO. The transcribed interviews were coded using line by line coding during the initial review. The transcripts and codes were then further reviewed throughout the analysis process to ensure no “shifts in coding” occurred and to verify no errors occurred during the transcription process (Creswell, 2009, p. 190).

Data reduction occurred after re-reading the transcripts and analyzing the initial codes. After reviewing the transcripts and initial codes, some of the initial codes were
collapsed into codes that more accurately depicted the true meaning of the statement (Saldaña, 2013). The coding of the eight participant interviews led to the development of themes (Saldaña, 2013). The themes were established via the collective voice of the participants. To a large extent, the themes represented the participants' use of everyday language in order to more accurately provide the participant’s perceptions and insights.

Findings for the First Research Question

This question asked how Caucasian male middle managers in student affairs perceived the supportiveness of their work environments in relation to work-life balance. When analyzing the eight participants' perceptions of workplace supportiveness, the following three major themes emerged: presence of informal benefits, care for the person, and gender privilege. Table 1 summarizes the total number of responses provided by each participant.

Presence of informal benefits. The presence of informal benefits such as flexible scheduling, work from home, and unofficial compensatory time, reported as the term comp time, was prevalent throughout the interviews. The participants consistently mentioned that even though their departments always followed the formalized benefits process through their institutions’ human resources departments, the most valued benefits were informal. Blake explained:

My supervisor is fairly flexible in terms of if you need to take off for child needs and things like that, and that yes, even as the male in the relationship, he allows you to take off. He doesn’t have any problem with it, and I think that is probably because he had the same experience raising children.

Chris described his support for flexible scheduling of work hours:
More informally if a staff member needs to have flexible scheduling for a week, we definitely accommodate that, that’s not a big deal. I’m a big believer in comp time. If we have an event on the weekend and individuals want to come in late on Monday, they can certainly do that.

Evan discussed his experience with workplace support for flexible scheduling:

My current boss is the most family friendly boss I ever could imagine. She says that she doesn’t want us here if we are worried about our family. She told me when I first got here, “You are going to work more than 40 hours a week. I know that, so I’m not worried if you have to go home at 3:00 because you have to do something for your kids or family.”

Hunter added the following to Evan’s discussion:

My current supervisor has two kids. You know, she tries to emulate [and] be a good example for us, that you’ve got to go home and take care of others or change some things up or what not, whatever it takes to get the job done. She’s probably provided the most flexibility that I’ve ever seen with a supervisor. You know, she’s very liberal about comp time and stuff like that, because with a lot of us, we are a one person show within our office.

Tate discussed the informal benefit of being able to bring staff members’ children to the office:

When I bring her in the office for the most part everyone asks to see her. [I] try to keep a balance because it is appropriate because of [the institution’s] family values, so at times yes bring them in, but at certain points, no, they need to go, and knowing where that balance is, so I mean if we are not doing anything in that
afternoon and there is nothing scheduled or issues that are urgent, yes, it’s okay. But if we have a student or a parent walk in that has an issue, the baby needs to go, unless if it’s sick, and we are just taking care of [the baby], and we just shut the door and keep [the baby] secluded so it’s not interrupting anything.

Formalized benefits were rarely mentioned. They were only discussed in the context of an abuse of informal benefits. Nate described the nature of the conundrum presented by the work from home benefit:

*Working from home has always been a complex question, I think. It is ripe for abuse, you know. I’d have to understand what you’re accomplishing. It’s like are you really paying attention to your family when you’re working from home or are you really paying attention to us or are you just giving halvsies to both?*

*Care for the person.* Another clear theme was about showing care. All participants indicated a desire for their supervisors to care for them as individuals. All eight indicated believing they should do the same for their employees. The participants consistently mentioned wanting their supervisors to treat them as unique individuals first and then focus on them meeting their job requirements. Nolan stated, “I would say focus on the people, and then look at them as professionals, secondly.” Evan provided details about the importance of showing care:

*I had a male working for me, and his wife had a baby, and he ended up taking 12 weeks of leave to be with the newborn. I did catch myself thinking that while that’s not me, I’m not in his situation, he’s not married to my wife and I’m not married to his. I think you have to take yourself and your own personal situation out of things like that because there is so much judgment that goes on from other*
people and what they do and what they should be doing, making a judgment based on your own personal situation and that's not the situation they are in, that will be probably my advice for anybody, because there is too much finger pointing and talking and comparing oranges and apples to each other. And it makes it difficult for a supervisor to deal with all that kind of stuff because it becomes a negative within that kind of office.

Nate framed the idea of the importance of the supervisor caring for others as follows:

You should authentically treat them like individuals. What so and so needs is not what so and so needs, and adjusting your approach to them, it is one of the more nuanced things you do as a supervisor and how you create equity in the midst of treating them as individuals.

Chris depicted care for others and workplace supportiveness when he provided an example of a holiday party:

I invite everybody to my house, over a couple of weeks before Christmas, and we do a gift exchange, but it’s not just them, it’s their families too. I think it’s important. I don’t like the idea of having a Christmas party at work, because that’s only my professional side, so I can be a little bit more vulnerable in bringing my personal side into it. So, I really encourage others to step outside the box and do the same. Anytime an employee comes to me, and says, "Hey, this came up, do you mind if I come to work late tomorrow?" or “[I need to] take a couple hours off today because of x-y-z and my family/child?” I am like, “Hey. Do it.” Ultimately, if you’re not happy as a person at home, you are not going to be happy and productive professionally.
Blake addressed how important being cared about was for his family:

I take my child 3 days a week, so I may get here a few minutes late. I have never had him gripe about that, or if I'm working from home. [My supervisor] is very flexible and encouraging [me] to spend time with family, take a vacation. You know he wants you to take a vacation. If you have to pick up children and that, he is flexible with that as long as you are getting your job done.

Eric discussed what the experience of lacking care from his supervisor and department:

It’s gotten progressively worse, but I have deliberately set up road blocks where I do get engaged with my kids. Now the most stressful times during the year, I don’t have to say it, that it ebbs and flows, but right at the beginning of the year because students demand a lot from me and being a one man show in all essence, it demands being on campus a lot and it forces me to have to reintegrate into my family when I’m done. I’ve been a one man show in a lot of respects for the last several years in my department and so whenever something comes up I had to be on campus, and you know that pulls me away, and it created some areas where in the mornings probably two or three times during the week the kids don’t want me to leave, and you know, I don’t know that I need to put into words the kind of feeling that that creates for somebody. But does it say something that during [the beginning of the semester] my family flees town. You know? I don’t necessarily think that speaks volumes about how family friendly we are at this stage in the game either.

Hunter provided a specific example of an experience during which a supervisor did not demonstrate any care of him as a person:
There were times in my previous position that that happened. Yeah, for an example, you know, I had cancelled [my original plans to go out of town] to catch up on some assignments, and then I let my boss know that, and it was expected for me to go chaperone a late night party for a student organization on campus because I was in town then. It was like, well, you know, had I not been in town, who would have done this? Because I was not originally scheduled to be there and so, I kind of felt disrespected because since they knew I was taking the time to focus on studying, it was like, oh, well now you need to come in and do this work.

*Gender Privilege.* The third theme was a perception of female privilege. This theme was most often discussed when discussing extended leave times. Even the participants who depicted their workplace of being highly supportive of family obligations still mentioned female privilege. Blake described his perception as follows:

For other middle managers, it is important to understand that when supervising employees that people have lives and people have families and especially if they are males, their wives/spouse can’t do everything, and [the male] needs to be able to pick up the slack there.

Eric addressed the perception of female privilege when he stated:

I see a lot of on-campus developmental opportunities going to my female colleagues. I see a lot of flexibility going to my female colleagues. In some part, I think it’s because they actually have additional staff members in their departments, but a lot of that is headed their way, and it’s not headed mine and it’s kind of, it’s kind of, interesting because I’ve made the comment as far as my
immediate supervisor and her supervisor, I like both personally very much and I’d trust them with my kids, but I don’t know that I’d trust them with my job anymore. Nolan mused that he “would definitely say” female privilege existed, but he added:

Well, I will give one caveat. If I were to go back and look at it, I mean obviously when you look at maternity leave, I mean, when something gets to be an extended period. I’m not sure what that would look like, if maybe a male chose something that was more extended than maybe a day or two, so maybe if it started looking more like paternity leave or things like that. I don’t have any reason to say that it would be tricky but that part I really have no idea on, to be honest.

Minor Themes

In addition, two minor themes were presented. One was the presence of family supportiveness and the second was an external expectation to promote. The men that had family responsibilities all reported that their family was very supportive of their career, the expectations involved, and the long work hours. All men indicated that they had a discussion with their wife regarding the expectations of the job prior to getting married or prior to joining the field of student affairs. While many of the men jokingly indicated that they had to revisit that conversation occasionally, they overwhelmingly described how supportive their wives were of this career choice. The second minor theme was the realization that there was an expectation for males to promote in the field regardless of the participants’ career plans. Hunter reported feeling constant competition, “I have some friends, some Caucasian male friends who are very competitive and they’re constantly looking for the next move up…but for me, it’s not a
Blake indicated that he felt pressure from his supervisor to move up even though at this time, he is trying to assess what that will look like for him and he indicated he wanted to stay where he was due to family obligations. In addition, many of the males who commented on the desire to stagnate indicated that they were aware this made them appear to be “unambitious” when in reality these men were making conscious choices to create the career path that would benefit themselves, their family, and their respective organizations.

Findings for the Second Research Question

This question asked how Caucasian, male middle managers in student affairs chose to stagnate or leave the profession in consideration of the need to balance work and family. One major theme developed when discussing the participants’ career intentions. This theme related to the intent to stagnate due to family obligations and was formally labeled voluntary career stagnation.

Voluntary career stagnation was developed from the expression of two ideas. First, that the ideal worker norm, as seen in Figure 1, was viewed as traditional, old, and outdated because of focusing on face time at the office, work over family, and linearity in the career path. Those individuals that indicated they wanted to remain in the field were more likely to indicate that the ideal worker norm model for today’s workplace should focus on care for the person, flexibility in scheduling, and a varied career path. Of note, the participants stated that all middle managers expected to work long hours, to be stressed, and to be under pressure. Also, the first point most were quick to make involved no work life balance with the emphasis placed on balance. They placed value on having workplace flexibility as long as the job got done and as long as their students’ needs were met.
Second, the men who perceived having a high level of workplace supportiveness indicated being happy with their positions, in terms of choosing stagnation. They also reported choosing their current positions based on workplace supportiveness regarding family obligations. Chris provided the following explanation:

Do you want a happy, engaged workforce? My experience has been that I see workplaces that are not inclusive. They don’t support the individual and their families and they’re not curious, you know, about what an individual is doing about their families. People aren’t happy. They take off work for vacation and sick all the time that they can. And when they’re there, they are destructive. They’re the ones in the back playing mine sweep on their computer, and you and I both know what I’m talking about. Learn more about their families, not just take an interest and ask questions, because that’s all talk, but having genuine interest
that is followed up with actions. People see that, and I think they’re drawn to
that, and they want to be involved in places where they’re not just working, but
they can bring their family into that as well.

Blake described the voluntary choice to stagnate as a strategic career move as follows:

I would be hesitant to switch departments, especially, while I am in school.
Because I have always been fearful of that, working for someone that you know,
they may say, "no, you may take off," but then hold it against you. I think those
benefits and talking to colleagues that I work with here, you know, you have to
think about those benefits when you move over to another department because
they may pay me $5,000 more, [but] are they going to really be on you about,
you know, work life balance, like you need to be here all the time, that sort of
thing. So, I would seriously think about it before I move to another department.

Chris discussed voluntary stagnation in terms of how he defined success and being
available to his family in the following statement:

I think having a family has challenged my perception of success, and what I
value and so right now more of my priority is shifting into [how] I want to be a
good husband, I want to be a good dad. If I have to commute 30 minutes to
work, that’s fine, because I think also with my own personal ambitions, I have to
realize that my wife certainly has professional ambitions . . . But, in terms of
career, I have been at my institution for 5 to 6 years. I don’t know if I am going to
stay here long term or not, but I know one of the first things that comes up to my
mind is how is it going to impact my family. And, umm, what does that mean for
them long term. In terms of where we live, how we live, how much time do I
spend at work versus my children, especially now at this young age. So, it’s
definitely a contributing, a significant factor.

Hunter commented about wanting to be closer to his parents, suggesting his next move
could be lateral as long as he moved geographically closer to them:

Yeah, that and the workload, you’re constantly on. After a while, it just wears you
out. Thinking long term, my next move needs to get me closer to home. I don’t
get to see my family as often as I would like to. It’s just kind of the nature of the
job right now and hopefully things will work out.

All of the participants commented that feeling workplace supportiveness for their
family obligations is very important to them even if they did not currently need to receive
the informal benefits. In addition, some participants mentioned that they either chose to
leave a previous position due to a lack of workplace supportiveness for their family
obligations or intended to leave their current position in order to pursue a work
environment that would be more supportive to family obligations. None of the
participants who left their previous positions had a desire to leave the field entirely, but
they voiced their awareness that they might have to make a lateral career move to
obtain the level of workplace supportiveness for their family obligations that they
desired. Tate discussed this realization in the following:

First, know what your priorities are and where they lie because everyone is
different and everybody’s family is going to be different and knowing those
differences because every institution and every person is going to be different
and it may not be the best fit for you at this institution because of it. You may
have to understand that because I want these pieces, I may have to accept a bit
of a lower salary or different hours and different things like that and a different role versus wanting the top level, higher pay, knowing what your commitment’s going to be. So, I mean, it’s just kind of knowing what the family piece is going to be so know what you need and want once it matches that of the institution.

Table 1

Summary of Responses for Each Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Informal Benefits</th>
<th>Care for Others</th>
<th>Gender Preference</th>
<th>Stagnation</th>
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<td>133 (83%)</td>
<td>25 (56%)</td>
<td>29 (56%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages note the number of responses coded per theme in relation to the total number of responses provided per topic.

**It is important to note that one limitation to presenting this material in this manner is that these percentages may not accurately depict implication of significant themes as some participants may be more verbose than others.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This study focused on Caucasian middle managers’ perceptions of the student affairs work environment in relation to workplace supportiveness of family obligations. Perceptions of workplace supportiveness and family responsibilities among Caucasian, male middle managers and the desire to stagnate or leave the professional were considered. This chapter contains a summary of the study, interpretations of the results as they relate to the research questions, along with a discussion and recommendations for practice and research.

Summary of the Study

Eight Caucasian, male, middle managers who work at institutions who were members of the Southern Association of College Student Affairs voluntarily participated in 1-hour in-depth interviews to discuss their perceptions of workplace supportiveness as related to their family obligations. Additionally, they discussed their perceptions of workplace supportiveness as impacting their decisions to stagnate or leave the profession. All interviews were video and audio taped via Skype. The completed interviews were transcribed. The transcribed data were entered into NVIVO and coded to find emerging themes. To facilitate the accurate depiction of the findings, I utilized document analysis, member checking, and reflexive journaling.

Interpretations of the Major Themes

From these interviews, a vivid picture emerged of the Caucasian, male, middle manager in student affairs. The interviews revealed that Caucasian, male, middle managers value family and that while many of these men at one time aspired to become
the highest ranking student affairs officer, they had re-evaluated their priorities and analyzed what impact holding an upper administration position would have on their family life. These eight men were quick to point out that the change of heart career-wise was not due to a desire to balance family and work, because no true balance could be achieved. Long hours were part of the job; however, they were not willing to sacrifice their families for their jobs. These men revealed that they felt both internal and external pressures to earn promotions, to constantly achieve, and to always improve but they were unwilling to risk their family lives for career ambition.

When analyzing the perceptions of workplace supportiveness of family obligations, three major themes became evident: (a) presence of informal benefits; (b) care for the person; (c) gender privilege. I identified one major theme from the participants’ discussions of their career intentions: voluntary career stagnation. Figure 2 depicts the interactions of compromising the ideal worker norm as part of the participants demonstrating their experiences with workplace supportiveness.

Presence of Informal Benefits

When describing various benefits available to them in their jobs, all participants placed value on the informal benefits provided within their departments. These benefits primarily included flexible scheduling, undocumented compensatory time, and the ability to work from home. Each participant explicitly clarified that he always followed the institutional human resources procedures when utilizing formalized benefits such as sick and vacation days.

The participants reported they received flexible scheduling, compensatory time, and the ability to work from home with extensive freedom as long as they performed their job duties well and they met their students’ needs. All eight participants expressed
their understanding that they received these informal benefits via verbal understandings with their supervisors. When I asked for clarification about how these benefits were activated, none of the participants indicated needing to use any type of formal, documented process with their supervisor or with their employees, unless the leave taken was for an extended period of time such as paternity leave.

Figure 2. Reconciliation of workplace supportiveness with the ideal worker norm model.

Care for the Person

All participants indicated having the desire to be listened to, viewed, heard, and understood as a person. The idea of care for the person was initially mentioned by one
of the participants but was echoed by all. All participants mentioned that their current supervisors treated them like individuals first and then like employees as part of the job.

In addition, the participants mentioned that they would choose to leave their current position if the work environment changed away from showing care for the person. If they as individuals were no longer valued over getting the job done, they would seek employment elsewhere. Some participants mentioned that they had previously left positions because their supervisors did not value them or show care for individuals as people.

These eight men said care for the person “does not mean that you are lovey dovey or touchy feely” and visually shuddered as they said those words. They said care for the person was focused on really understanding the employee as a person, getting to know the employee individually, and engaging in the employee’s life. These men acknowledged that their work environments were quite different from the work environments their fathers’ had. They expressed feeling fortunate to have found institutions that foster this type of environment.

Gender Privilege

The participants indicated that all benefits should be available to all employees regardless of gender or family obligation. They expressed understanding that this type of culture can be hard to create due to both the factors associated with the ideal worker norm theory and the specific traditional family role distinctions present in the South. Some of the men indicated even with the availability of the informal benefits in their departments or divisions, they perceived females to be the common recipients of those benefits. All of these men acknowledged that they understood why females were the
most common recipients and encouraged all of their staff to utilize these informal benefits.

The men did believe that gender privilege definitely existed. The privilege was predicated on the perception of workplace supportiveness. Even as some of the men perceived their workplace as highly supportive of family obligations, they noted women were looked upon negatively for utilizing the benefits but for different reasons. For example, if a man needed to leave the office early, it was perceived generally as “just because he has to” which implied male privilege. If the participant did not perceive his workplace as being supportive of family obligations, he indicated that females received the privilege, while males were viewed negatively for utilizing the informal benefits.

Voluntary Career Stagnation

The major career theme involved the men choosing to stagnate in their careers due to family obligations. These eight men placed high value on family and indicated a lack of desire to disregard their families in order to earn a promotion to a higher level position at another institution. They refused to uproot their families after their children became established in their communities. They held a high level of appreciation for their spouses’ career ambitions.

It is important to note that these men did not indicate a lack of desire to promote in the future nor did the participants indicate a lack of ambition to continue to develop additional skills while remaining in their current positions. These men acknowledged that their career paths were different than the traditional career model with implications for the ideal work norm theory. Also, none of the participants indicated any desire to leave the profession due to workplace supportiveness of family obligations. However, it is important to note the nonverbal cues present when discussing stagnation. Verbally,
these men indicated that they were confident in their decision to stagnate due to family obligations but the nonverbal communication indicated a hesitancy to admit this, participants would look down and somewhat hang their head when addressing the perceived “lack of ambition”. They did mention undergoing changes in their career goals that led to voluntary career stagnation even if only during this season of life. These men acknowledged “what you are supposed to do” in the field, but they also knew “how long you were supposed to stay in one position before you moved.” As the bottom line for voluntary career stagnation, they were unwilling to risk their familial quality of life for their careers.

Conclusion

The Caucasian, male middle manager in the field of student affairs today places a high importance on family and is no longer willing to risk family life for career success. All eight men talked fondly of their family obligations and reported family obligations as causing a certain level of stress at times. The men were willing to change their career paths to demonstrate how much they valued their families. In addition, these men frequently commented on the desire to represent cultural change within the field. They wanted to serve as role models not only to their families but also to their students. They had internalized this desire to be change agents as an obligation to change the profession’s culture for future student affair practitioners. It should be noted that these men primarily responded to questions regarding workplace supportiveness by addressing how they managed rather than how they are managed. The response was based on an action rather than a feeling. Additionally, comments regarding workplace supportiveness of paternity leave illuminate that many paternity leave policies are
created reactively rather than proactively within an organization. This research highlighted the need for the field of student affairs to increase informal benefits such as workplace flexibility. This is congruent with the data found in the 2012 National Study of Employers which reported that “87% [of organizations] allow at least some employees to take time off during the workday to attend a family event without loss of pay” and that “organizations that fail to adopt these options run the risk of being outperformed by competitors...and organizations who offer more flexibility will have a competitive edge in recruiting and retaining employees” (p. 8 and p. 3, respectively). In addition, this study further confirmed research regarding the importance of work life benefits and the perception of organizational support (Casper, W.J. and Harris, C.M., 2008) yet conflicted with prior research indicating that men do not take advantage of flexible scheduling (Allen, 2001; Hill, Hawkins, Martinson, & Ferris, 2003; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006). Of importance is the reflection of paternity leave, while all participants indicated a presence of workplace supportiveness of family obligations, many of the men failed to consider paternity leave. This may be due to the negative effect paternity leave has on the male career as evidence in research by Allen and Russell (1999). However, research has also indicated that dual-income households report a high stress level related to work-family conflict (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1996).

Recommendations for Practice

The most important implication for practice from this study is the importance of family and the awareness that these eight middle managers in student affairs choose to stagnate in their careers because of the importance of family. Higher education’s upper administrators should note that employees are willing to work long hours and are
committed to students but are no longer willing to allow work to become the center of their lives.

Many of these middle managers indicated wanting to spend time with their families, particularly on special occasions, and during the hours between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., which they realized coincided with work events. The men perceived their divisions and departments as being supportive of family obligations and valued having the ability to integrate family into their work world, to use flexible scheduling, and occasionally to work from home. Nate clarified “no one wants to check their family at the door” when they come into work. While this mentality represents a change from the traditional ideal worker norm model and every participant acknowledged the opportunity to abuse these privileges, not one participant indicated having had a problem with the flexibility within their department. In addition, most of these men indicated that they actually worked more hours when they have flexible benefits, because they are committed to demonstrating that they will get the job done. Therefore, student affairs divisions should implement these informal benefits across the board to all professional full time employees in order to promote long term stability in these departments, to reduce the high turnover that the profession currently experiences, and to ensure a pipeline of qualified professionals can be developed for assuming high level positions such as chief student affairs officers and vice presidents of student affairs. In addition, student affairs administrators should recognize that these men want to feel valued as a person and that includes family obligations. No longer is it acceptable to only praise work efforts but to also acknowledge the employee as a whole with all of their expectations, goals, and objectives. This is not a recommendation that the level of rigor
or workplace output is diminished but that by simply acknowledging that an employee has obligations outside of the workplace, valuing the employee as a whole person similar to how they value their students, the employee will strive to demonstrate just how productive and dedicated they are to completing the tasks. Finally, the last recommendation for practice is that all administrators need to realize that both males and females place high importance on family obligations and both informal and formal benefits should be made available and encouraged for all employees. By providing equal opportunity to take advantage of all benefits, administrators may find that their workforce is much more productive. To truly implement the ideal worker norm as prescribed would require a complete cultural change. A change of attitudes and behaviors would be needed. Implementation would be more conducive to larger departments with multiple levels of staffing and would require smaller departments to significantly cross train all staff. It should be noted that these recommendations do not call for significant action at this point but do serve to highlight the awareness of a need to further research this population and the idea of family supportiveness, the ideal worker norm, and the male middle manager. This further disputes the female-focused workplace supportiveness needs as researched by Kuk and Donovan (2004) and adds support to the generational trend of male involvement in care-giving (Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, & Siddiqi, (2013) and Williams (2004)). This also provides evidence that the role of males in family involvement are changing. Research over the last two decades frequently discussed the lack of involvement of fathers in child-care responsibilities (Grych & Clark, 1999; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine, 1987) yet these men consistently indicated playing a larger role in family life.
Recommendations for Research

Quantitative research possibly using a survey could further explain workplace supportiveness for family obligations for Caucasian, male middle managers. The survey could be used to seek the statistical significance most often desired when analyzing a sample from a population. Future researchers could analyze the components of the ideal worker norm theory in detail using a quantitative survey method. The study could examine the interrelationship of family obligations and workplace supportiveness from a quantitative view. These two variables present many component parts to be further analyzed from a male perspective. Additional research could also study workplace supportiveness of family obligations from an organizational perspective, in that, previous research has indicated that employees who utilize workplace benefits are less likely to advance in their jobs, receive fewer raises, and are perceived as having less career dedication (Cohen & Single, 2011; Judiesch & Lyness, 1999; and Rogier & Padgett, 2004).

A quantitative study utilizing a randomly sampled group of student affairs middle managers could also further explore gender and ethnicity as it relates to family supportiveness of family obligations. Decades of previous research has indicated that males experience negative consequences when behavior does not follow predetermined patterns (Valian, 1999; Dipboye, 1985; Nieva & Gutek, 1980). Allen and Russell (1999) found that parental leave negatively affects men’s ability to receive organizational rewards. This could be due to the societal expectation that men are required to exhibit an achievement-orientation and strong work ethic (Cleveland, Stockdale, & Murphy, 2000). Yet, this is inconsistent with Lundberg & Rose (2000)
longitudinal study which found that “husbands in households work fewer hours yet earn
more per hour after the birth of their first child” (p. 707).

In addition, a longitudinal study of Caucasian, male middle managers would
provide additional insight into this population to see if their career ambitions change
throughout their life and if their original career ambitions are ever attained or if their
focus on family ultimately changes their overall career goals and trajectories. A
longitudinal study could be used to analyze the change in middle managers’ perceptions
of workplace supportiveness throughout each life stage.

One recommendation for future research would be to address the limitation of
researcher gender. The male participants in this study may have responded to
questions while still reinforcing what was acceptable within their gender schema (Valian,
1999). Previous research has demonstrated that males exhibit bias avoidance of family
responsibilities because of the predetermined gender schema of the male’s role as the
primary breadwinner. While I attempted to develop rapport with all men in the study,
there could have still been a reluctance to comment outside the appropriate gender
norms. This could have also been due to the fact that the United States was the only
industrialized county without a standard parental leave policy until 1993 when Bill
Clinton approved the Family and Medical Leave Act which primarily focused on women
(Feldman, Sussman, Zigler, 2004). Feldman et al. (2004) reported on the glaring
difference between the United States and Scandinavian countries who offer “18 months
of fully job-protected unpaid [paternity] leave” (Kamerman, 1988; Ondrich, Spiess, &
Yang, 1996: Wood, 2002). Further research should also ask specific questions, such as
type, amount, and scope of family responsibilities as this research did not focus on the level of family obligation.

Additional studies could also compare the productivity of a student affairs division that allows for flexible scheduling and care for the person to the traditional model of 8-5 with the only option of formalized vacation and sick leave.

Further research on this population of professionals is necessary because many of the participants commented that this topic was timely, since as Nolan said, “No one does research on Caucasian males anymore; this should be interesting.”
APPENDIX A

REQUEST FOR VOLUNTEERS MESSAGE SENT THROUGH EMAIL
June 2014

Dear Participant:

My name is Misty Smethers, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Texas in the Department of Counseling and Higher Education in the College of Education. I am interested in inviting professionals who work within the Southern Association of College Student Affairs region to participate in my study investigating experiences with workplace family supportiveness. The purpose of my study is to understand the Caucasian male middle level managerial student affairs professional experience in relation to workplace family supportiveness. Family is defined to include children, parents, grandparents, spouse, significant others, and extended family members. I would like to formally request your participation in this study. If you consent to participate, please sign the attached consent form and return a scanned copy. If you are not interested in participating, please reply “I am not interested in participating”. If you have any questions or concerns with this request, please feel free to contact me at misty.smethers@unthsc.edu or contact Dr. Kathleen Whitson at Kathleen.whitson@unt.edu.

Sincerely,

Misty Smethers, M.A.E.
Example Interview Protocol

1). Describe how you became interested in the field of student affairs.

2). Tell me about your current position.

3). How do you feel as a white male in student affairs?

4). Tell me about your family.

5). Tell me about your career goals.

6). Tell me about your perception of work-life balance in student affairs.

Additional follow-up questions will be asked as determined by responses to the above questions.
REFERENCES


