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Opt Out: Women with Children Leaving Mid-Level Student Affairs Positions

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OPT OUT: WOMEN WITH CHILDREN LEAVING MID-LEVEL STUDENT AFFAIRS POSITIONS

by

Dana Hebreard

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology
Advisor: Dr. Andrea Beach

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
May 2010
This phenomenological study is about the decision-making process of women with young children at the mid-level student affairs position who decide to opt out of their career for a minimum of one year, and for some, return to higher education. The study is based on interviews with 17 mid-level college administrators and mothers of young children, infant to pre-teen, who chose to opt out of their careers rather than continuing to balance family and career. Though the individuals interviewed were each unique in their socioeconomic status, education, and career path, their issues and concerns were similar. They openly revealed the various compromises and tradeoffs they experienced as professionals and parents. They discussed the necessity of determining what one values in student development, whether one has stopped growing at one’s current institution, and why opting out would or would not be worthwhile.

Informed by related research (Bennetts, 2007; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Levtov, 2001; Marshall, 2006; Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1985), interview probes guided the exploration of personal and professional experiences that led these women to their current status. Common themes of the interviews noted that the participants felt that the lack of support and flexibility in the work environment and among their supervisors led to their decision to opt out of their career path for a particular period of time. Some
chose to return to their career after some time away while others went on a different journey. Participants in this research study described the role that factors such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in their career decisions. These factors are part of Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory which served as a contextual frame for the study. This theory posits a combination of personal emotional influences and external contextual influences on career decision-making. Although this study does not lay out a definitive path for women to follow in order to manage both motherhood and a career in student affairs, it does demonstrate a need for further research on the mutual benefits to employee and employer for flexibility in the workplace.
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This manuscript is dedicated to two special men in my life. My husband who helped me to finish the dissertation and my father who taught me the value of persistence.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although I have dedicated this to my husband, Michael, he also deserves acknowledgement for assisting with the manuscript – he has proofread and made suggestions, he has helped to keep me focused and made sure I kept balance in my life, and most of all he served as a sounding board throughout the entire process. I also am grateful to my brother-in-law, Robert Thiel and sister, Kara Masucci, who helped me throughout the writing process. My sister and our mom are both working mothers trying to balance family and career. We had many conversations about my research findings throughout this experience. My children, Patrick, Andrew, and Evan, are great kids who barely remember when Mom was not working on her doctorate or writing her dissertation. Though they would often lament the fact that I was always doing my “homework,” I pray that they learned a bit about responsibility and forging ahead through difficult times based on my experience.

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Dana M. Hebreard
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study is about the decision making process of women with young children working at the mid-level student affairs position, who decided to opt out of their career for a minimum of one year and, for some, return to higher education.

Background

In the past two decades, student affairs responsibilities at America’s universities have been increasingly undertaken by women (Jones & Komives, 2001). The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (2007) reports that female membership exceeds male membership by approximately 170%. Indeed, this fact parallels statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor (2008) which indicate that women make up approximately 59.5% of the total labor force in the United States. Of that number, 71% of such women are mothers (U.S. Department of Labor).

Mid-level student affairs professionals, like most career women, lead increasingly multifaceted lives and often work in lower pay positions that do not often reflect a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule. Their lives are integrated with both personal and professional responsibilities. Typically, these women have advanced expertise and skills in their areas of responsibility and in the profession (Hughes, 1999). They have generally invested time in their institutions and are valuable assets because they often keep their institutions functioning, while also influencing the style and tone of the campus (Ellis & Moon, 1991). Though their particular titles might vary from institution to institution, a common
thread is that these mid-level student affairs professionals are primarily enacting policies set by senior administrators and trustees. Yet, these individuals are leaders and followers. As such, they still need to balance their time in the office and appropriately communicate the goals and priorities of the institution on a daily basis to multiple constituencies. These individuals often see themselves as educators, student affairs specialists, and public servants who are committed to upholding the philosophy and values espoused in higher education and student affairs (Belch, 1990). For mid-level student affairs professionals with young children, the decision to opt out of a position they worked so hard to obtain might have a psychological impact on their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as a person's judgments of her capabilities to organize and execute a course of action (Bandura, 2000).

Because women are such an integral part of the workforce, the integrated roles of mother and working professional have been widely addressed by corporate America (Hewlett & Luce, 2006). However, significant challenges for women in student affairs have remained. Female mid-level student affairs administrators often commit evenings and weekends to work, and once they have children, the rigors of these expectations and family life lead to low retention (Marshall, 2004). Little research has been conducted in this area and what does exist focuses on the external barriers women face and how to break them down (Baugher & Martin, 1981; Bowers & Hummel, 1979; Kanter, 1982). The workplace environment, including work schedule, job demands, and employer support, have been suggested as reasons many working mothers leave the student affairs profession or are prevented from advancing to the highest levels of administration. Does this represent the ultimate achievement for countless women who believe that personal
and professional fulfillment are neither mutually exclusive nor a male privilege (Bennetts, 2007)?

Even with the quantity of research conducted to identify barriers hindering women's career advancement in higher education, and the steps to dissolve these barriers, the progress of women advancing into upper-level student affairs administrative positions has been relatively slow. Basically, women have a higher rate of employment but a lower likelihood of professional advancement in higher education (Glazer-Raymo, 1999). Some research has concluded that sexism is embedded in the structures, norms, and policies of organizations, which results in a glass ceiling or vertical segregation for women (Park, 1996; Valian, 1998).

In the professional domain, women find demanding hours, non-competitive wages, multiple roles, and pressure to re-locate incompatible with family life (Bennetts, 2007, Levtov, 2001; Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1985). In the family domain, conflict arises because women often take on a disproportionate share of childcare responsibilities, despite their increased presence in the workforce (Perna, 2001; Williams, 2000).

A significant pool of capable, highly productive employees is therefore being lost or is dissatisfied with their careers (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). In other words, “a majority of highly-qualified women find it difficult to conjure up smooth, cumulative, uninterrupted career trajectories” (Hewlett & Luce, p. 15). Indeed, Hewlett and Luce, in their 2005 Harvard Business Review Study of women who opted out of the workforce, indicated that more than half of their study group had chosen a “nonlinear” career path, making job choices so they have more time with their children. Approximately 38% accepted a
position not commensurate with their qualifications, one with fewer responsibilities and lower salary/compensation (Hewlett & Luce). In their study, 36% of individuals worked part-time, 25% reduced their number of hours within a full-time job, and 16% declined a promotion (Hewlett & Luce). In addition, penalties are often imposed for opting out, even for a short time. Women on average step out of their field for approximately 2.2 years, yet research indicates that those reentering their careers experience a loss of approximately 18% of their earning power (Hewlett & Luce).

Description of the Research Problem

The student affairs division of higher education was born out of an expanded educational sector, and the increased demands for care and support of students outside the classroom. The impact of gender has strong implications on the field of student affairs because the profession is often viewed as a service delivered in a seamless, meaningful, and integrated manner with the academic mission of the institution. Typically, student affairs is a cluster of departments devoted to a variety of student support services such as Housing, Activities, Counseling, Career Development, Financial Aid, and Judicial Affairs.

Much commentary has been generated regarding the fact that women are opting out of careers, but these articles do not examine the decision-making process behind this fact. Articles such as *How Does She Do It?* (Bauer, 2006), *The Opt Out Revolution* (Belkin, 2003), *The Case for Staying Home* (Wallis, 2003), and *Mommy Madness* (Warner, 2005), discuss the pros and cons of managing a career and family. Additional reports discuss the phenomenon of women obtaining the highest levels of education,
entering the workforce in record numbers, and then choosing to leave the workforce (e.g., Bauer; Belkin, 2003). The *Chronicle of Higher Education* published more than a dozen articles indicating that academia should be more supportive of employees who attempt to balance family and work responsibilities (e.g., Johnston, 2001; Miller, 2001; Walden, 2002; Williams, 2000; Wilson, 1999). Despite such pleas, many institutions of higher education are still in the early stages of developing alternative work schedule options, such as job sharing and flex time. This short-sightedness often results in mid-level career working mothers opting out of their professional career. As Belkin writes, "many women never get near that glass ceiling, because they are stopped long before by the maternal wall" (p. 1).

Career advancement has been traditionally defined as the progression of an individual into positions with increased responsibilities and/or compensation (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988). Women tend to be “stuck” in the mid-level or support staff position in student affairs. Hackett (1995) sees self-efficacy playing an important role in governing whether women lower their aspiration and settle for a career that is “good enough” rather than attempting to pursue more challenging careers. Student affairs administrators who experience career advancement have often accumulated several years of professional experience in various positions at colleges and universities. It has, on the surface, the appearance of a traditional linear career path. Indeed, over half of the student affairs participants in one study had at least ten years of professional experience in higher education (Coleman, 2002). Earning a doctoral degree further facilitates career advancement (Banner, 2003; Scott, 2003), but can also eliminate one from mid-level positions if one chooses to opt out of her career for a period of time. This, along with
other issues, can be viewed as a barrier preventing female student affairs professionals with young children from returning to the field of student affairs.

As previous sources have shown, the number of women in upper-level administrative positions in higher education is not increasing in proportion to women’s overall numbers in education and the work force. With this in mind, the purpose of this study is to provide insights into how women with young children make the decision to opt out of their mid-level student affairs positions, either temporarily or permanently.

Research Questions

Many institutions and careers do not have family-friendly policies or environments, and this is especially true in student affairs where late nights, erratic schedules, and overtime are commonplace (Marshall, 2004). As a result, many student affairs professionals find themselves having to make decisions that involve opting out of (or permanently leaving) their careers. Therefore, the need exists for further research focused on mid-level female student affairs professionals who have opted out of their careers, and their future related career decisions.

This research is therefore composed of two study groups of women in the field of student affairs: (1) women with young children who left the field for one or more years citing personal and/or professional reasons, and who later return, and (2) women who permanently resign from the field of higher education or student affairs. Several issues these women face in their decision-making processes are examined using qualitative interviews.
In addition to career attrition, little information is also available in the literature regarding how such professionals manage both career and professional roles (Cox, 2006; Marshall, 2004). This study demonstrates how some individuals redefined their career identities and either successfully navigated back to their professions after an absence or created a new path outside of higher education. It is important in this qualitative analysis to understand how such women in higher education, with children and families, considered their life decisions. To help address voids in the current research regarding attrition within student affairs, especially at the mid-level position, I used a phenomenological research method to provide insights into how women with young children chose to opt out of their student affairs positions, either temporarily or permanently, and how they negotiate the decision-making process involved.

Qualitative research methods, especially within a natural setting (Creswell, 1998), were best suited for this type of investigation because they provide a rich painting of the complexities of these individuals’ lives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research, according to Thompson (2003), offers researchers the tools for developing a deeper understanding of social phenomena, and each individual’s interpretation of the important events and processes in their lives. There are numerous factors that must be included in the selection of a methodology such as the setting for the research, the goals of the study, and the nature of the subject matter. Each of these factors are examined in Chapter 3.

The participants solicited for this research all shared a common experience (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). Each had advanced in their education to the master’s degree level, was a student affairs professional at the mid-level stage, was a mother of young children (defined as elementary school age or younger), and made decisions about their
career by opting out of a professional position in student affairs. In-depth, open ended interviews with 17 women were conducted to further understand the experiences of these individuals. It is important to assess the degree to which their decision-making and social cognitive processes impacted the ability of these women to re-enter their field.

The following questions directed this inquiry:

1. How do mid-level female student affairs professionals with young children make the decision to leave the field of student affairs for a minimum of one year?

2. For those female student affairs professionals with young children who left and later returned to the field, how did they experience these transitions? What barriers did they encounter (if any), and how did they overcome those barriers?

3. For those female student affairs professionals with young children who left and did not return, what was their rationale? How have they redefined themselves (if at all) to life after a career in student affairs?

4. How did these women’s career decision-making experiences fit within the Social Cognitive Career Theory (particularly the components of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals) framework?

Hackett and Betz (1981) recognized the importance of social cognitive perspectives in informing theory and research on career development. The next section examines the social cognitive career theory, which was used as a type of map that gave coherence to this empirical inquiry.
Conceptual Framework

The Social Cognitive Career Theory or SCCT (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) provided a helpful framework for understanding the career decision-making process of mid-level female student affairs professionals. SCCT is an application of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory to the process of career and educational interest formation and identification of career choices and pursuits. It highlighted the interactive roles of person, behavior, and environment that contribute to the formation of career interests and translation of these interests into goals, actions, and attainments.

According to the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), human behavior is viewed as the product of relationship among personal, behavioral, and environmental influences (Bandura, 2000). From this theoretical perspective, self-efficacy plays a vital role in a person's decision-making processes regarding her career. Efficacy beliefs influence career motivation and aspirations, levels of interest in intellectual pursuits,
career achievements, and the determination to reach a goal (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs provide answers to questions pertaining to specific tasks (e.g., Can I balance work and family? Can I get that promotion? Will I be a good parent?). Our beliefs about our abilities play a central role in the career decision-making process. In bridging self-efficacy with the decision to “opt-out,” it is important to realize that self-efficacy affects choices, behaviors, and persistence. It reflects a person’s confidence in her ability to successfully execute a particular task or behavior (Conyers, Enright, & Strauser, 1998). For women, self-efficacy might be undermined because of traditional gender-role expectations and by the limited number of role models that could assist with the development of self-esteem and career self-efficacy (Mayo & Christenfeld, 1999).

An individual’s self-efficacy effects how his or her own perceptions influence actions and coping behaviors, the situations and environments that individuals choose to access, and the persistence in performing certain tasks (Conyers, Enright, & Strauser, 1998). Historically, many women have lacked confidence in their ability to succeed academically and to pursue career-related tasks (Betz, 1994; Hackett & Betz, 1981). Low self-efficacy and a lack of confidence in career decision making may cause psychological distress (Quimby & O’Brien, 2006). Furthermore, as with ethnic and racial stereotyping, societal attitudes play an important role in the formation of self-efficacy beliefs and the career development process for women (Conyers, Enright, & Strauser). Finally, Hackett and Bentz suggested that traditionally feminine experiences in childhood often limited a woman’s exposure to the sources of information necessary for the development of strong perceptions of efficacy in many occupational areas. Lowered perceived efficacy along important career decisions could, in turn, unduly restrict the types of occupations considered and affect performance and persistence in the pursuit of a chosen occupation. The role of self-efficacy is central within this study.

Significance of the Study

The number of women entering the student affairs administration profession has risen significantly over the past several years (Rosser, 2003). Yet too few women in higher education have senior leadership positions (Marshall, 2004). In addition, women continue to exit student affairs positions at a greater rate than men (Blackhurst, 2000).

Within institutions of higher education, the number of women holding positions in student affairs or enrolled in student personnel preparation programs has grown
significantly, causing heightened awareness of gender issues in the profession (Holmes, 1982; Johnrsud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000, Taub & McEwen, 2006). Additionally, mid-level administrators represent the largest administrative groups within the college and university system, comprising as much as 64% of the total administrative staff positions (Montgomery & Lewis, 1996; Sagaria & Johnsurd, 1992). For student affairs professionals, the desire to create a work and life balance is often filled with ironic twists. On the one hand, student affairs often emphasizes the needs of the “whole” student (Marshall, 2004), yet the culture of student affairs dictates long hours of work for inadequate pay. There is an unwritten expectation that student affairs professionals put their own needs last and students’ needs first.

For women in mid-level student affairs careers, these ironic twists create the perfect recipe to question whether or not to continue employment. The mid-level nature of their role, lack of recognition for their contributions, and limited opportunity for career growth or advancement often leads to frustration (Marshall, 2004). Adding young children to the mix results in further complications. Such female student affairs professionals as a whole have articulated continued concerns about family-work conflicts and glass ceiling cultures (Johnston, 2001; Miller, 2001; Walden, 2002). Therefore, organizations such as the National Association of Student Personnel Administration (NASPA), have called for more research on these issues.

Various researchers have indeed focused on work-family and glass ceiling issues within higher education. Some focus on family-friendly policy issues in general (e.g., Mason & Goulden, 2004; Trombley, 2003), but most have focused on the career culture of faculty, in which there is a tenure timeline (e.g., Fogg, 2003; Wilson, 2003; Young,
2003), and on balancing motherhood while on the tenure track (Wolf-Wendell & Ward, 2001). Some researchers have studied women in senior higher education leadership positions (Marshall, 2004; Scott, 2003; Warner & Defleur, 1993). However, few studies have considered female administrators with children at the mid-level of their careers (Marshall).

In studies where the career patterns of women in student affairs were considered, the influence of motherhood on the employee was seldom considered (Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski, 1998; Earwood-Smith et al., 1990; Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990). When motherhood was a research component, the women had often already achieved advanced positions of leadership, and as a result, may have already established increased flexibility and decision-making power because of their roles (Marshall, 2004; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). Too few studies have considered the positive aspects of balancing motherhood and career (Berwick, 1992). In a similar vein, those who have specifically studied student affairs professionals regarding work/family issues have focused on those in senior-level administration or entry-level positions (Chaudhuri, 2005; Marshall).

A primary consideration of this research is not merely to develop a chronology of events which fueled each woman's career decisions. More importantly, this work serves to illuminate the manner in which the women in this study interpret and assign meaning to the decision making process, and the influence of interpretation on a larger collective perspective. Phenomenological methods are intent on capturing the richness of individual experience and have been utilized in various settings, including education (Tesch, 1988).

It was important, therefore, to focus on women who are (or were) mid-level student affairs professionals because, in general, mid-level professionals play an essential
role in administering programs, services, and functions that are central to the institutional mission of colleges and universities (Rosser, 2003). Despite female student affairs professionals’ commitment, loyalty, and dedication, high turnover rates exist (Marshall, 2004). There is little national research that examines the work-life issues that may have an impact on student affairs professionals’ job satisfaction, morale at work, intentions to leave the field, and attempts to return to their profession (Grant, 2006). This is extremely disconcerting given the significant amount of academic time and resources spent on professional development.

Overall, the costs of career interruptions are high, particularly when one considers the heavy investments in education and training that are often necessary to achieve professional success. Individually, women bear these costs directly in the form of lost salary and blocked or slowed advancement. Rose and Hartman (2004) estimate that women’s annual earnings fall by thirty percent (controlling for education and hours worked) when they are out of the labor force for two to three years, which is the average amount of time that high-achieving women stop out (Hewlett, 2005). Cumulatively, interruptions account for as much as one-third of the gender gap in earnings and partly explain the relative absence of women in the upper reaches of most professions.

The Role of the Researcher

I am interested in the lives, both personal and professional, of women student affairs administrators that have chosen to resign from their positions. Until recently, I worked as a career counselor in my institution’s career center. One day, I was struck by numerous conversations from women across campus who visited the career center, to
seek advice and guidance. The experiences these women conveyed were not unique. Students, career professionals and alumni alike were grappling with how to balance work and family. Both the decisions - to work outside the home or stay home with young children – come with a cost. For women employed outside the home, there are child care costs and the emotional guilt over leaving their children. Career-track women who choose to stay home with their young children also pay a price in lost income, status, and the sense of a lost career.

On a personal note, I have seen too many highly qualified women forced to opt out of their chosen field or make career decisions that made them unhappy because of the challenges inherent in balancing career and family. Women in higher education have been advanced by the feminist movement in the United States over the past four decades. Nevertheless, the numbers alone do not offer support of advancement or equality in the workforce. As a career counselor, I often met with women who had left their professional careers to raise children. These women became active members of their communities through school volunteering, church committees, and part-time jobs. When I met with them, many were interested in returning to their chosen field of study.

However, their path to re-entry was often wrought with hurdles to overcome. I found the stories shared by these women possess a commonality. Each individual overcame personal obstacles in her life as a working mother and developed strategies necessary to succeed. Some of the individuals succeeded by re-entering the field of student affairs. Other individuals chose a different path in life. Yet it was important to hear the voices of a diverse group of women to understand their perspective. As a feminist, a mother, a student of higher education, and a student affairs administrator, my
own opinions were considered throughout this research. Personally, my career path has always been in the student affairs profession through work in residence life, student activities, career development, and now academic advising. My decision to focus on mid-level women with young children, who have opted out of the workforce, is a reflection of a need to fill a serious gap in research as well as bridge to my own experiences as a counselor and advisor. I approach this project sensitive to the issues associated with my voice. As a wife, mother of three, career professional and doctoral student, I am currently living this project in my own “real time” laboratory.

Omission of Working Fathers

In conceptualizing this study, I have not intended to downplay or ignore men’s challenges as they occupy dual roles as career professionals and fathers. However, stopping out is less common among men. Approximately 24% of men voluntarily leave their careers for a period of time, compared with 37% of women (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Often, men “opt out” for reasons other than childcare or eldercare. Data reveals that 12% of men compared to 44% of women cite family time as a reason to leave the workforce (Hewlett & Luce). Instead, men’s decisions to leave the workplace are often related to career changes (i.e., earn a degree, start a business, or switch careers). Therefore, it was suggested in the Hewlett and Luce study that males’ “off-ramping” decisions tend to be about strategic repositioning in their careers.

In this study, I chose to focus specifically on women due to the existing differences in how parenting roles are divided. Women continue to shoulder primary responsibility for child care in the early years (Perna, 2001; Williams, 2000). In addition,
in the United States, women are expected to be mothers before professionals, while men should be career professionals first (Bennetts, 2007; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Smith, 2009). When men spend time in a parenting role, they are often praised (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988). Female student affairs professionals who are also mothers are likely to administer to the academic and emotional needs of students during their workdays, and do the same for their families as well. It would often seem that their days and nights just might be a continuous role of educator and nurturer (MacDonald, 1994).

Lastly, the literature cited in this project frequently uses the word “women” as a far reaching term without reference to differences in ethnicity, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, age, and ability. There is not an assumption that these women share the same issues and expect similar resolutions – which is not reality, so generalizations need to be considered with care. When I started this dissertation, it was important for me to remember that this was not “male bashing” or “excuse generating.” Rather, it was to understand why highly educated women in student affairs choose to step out of their chosen field. Chapter 2 includes a summary review of related research, followed by the methodology of the study in Chapter 3 and a profile of the results and implications in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 6 offers my conclusions and recommendations.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, the role of women in the workplace – and more specifically in the field of student affairs – is examined. Recently two trends have appeared in the media: stories about women advancing into new nontraditional roles, and stories about women going back to traditional roles, including opting to focus on family, instead of career (e.g., Bauer, 2006; Belkin, 2003; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Porter, 2006; Story, 2005; Tischler, 2004; Warner, 2005). These media stories parallel lives of women in student affairs positions in institutions of higher education.

Student affairs positions are unique because they are typically service-oriented positions that attract altruistic persons who are not in the profession for the money but to make a difference for the future. Research conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (2002) reported that for mid-management level positions, 60.3% at public institution were held by women. The number increased slightly to 64% at private institutions. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2008), women make up approximately 59.5 percent of the total labor force in the United States, equaling over 65 million women working outside the home, and well over half of the mothers with young children nationwide. This means women make up a higher percentage of the student affairs positions (60.3%) than in general positions nationally (46%). The growing number of women in administrative positions in higher education makes it crucial that
environments become more gender-neutral where the facts and the necessities of motherhood can be easily blended into the work routine (Trombley, 2003). Because mid-level student affairs positions are often occupied by women, the identification of factors impacting their perceptions of career advancement could contribute to the breakdown of obstacles that hinder women from advancing to senior-level positions (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000). This chapter looks at women in the workplace and explores broad topics such as higher education research and concerns, economic and geographic considerations, and socialization in the workplace.

Feminism and Women’s Work

Feminism can be described as social theories, political movements, or moral philosophies which are all largely motivated by, or related to the experiences of women (Rosser, 2003). Although the feminist movement has given women access to higher education, it has not necessarily changed organizational cultures of these institutions (Rosser). Acker (1998) suggests it is difficult to theorize about organizations from a feminist perspective because “both traditional and critical approaches to organizations originate in the male, abstract intellectual domain” (p. 142), which conceptualizes organizations as gender neutral.

During the women’s movement of the 1960s, Betty Friedan (1963) published *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that described the roles of women in industrial societies and, in particular, the full-time homemaker role. In this volume, Friedan critiqued suburban white women’s socialization and experience as intolerable. She wrote: “The problem that has no name – which is simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to
their full human capacities – is taking a far greater toll on the physical and mental health of our country than any known disease” (p. 32). Not much has changed in the 50 years since Friedan wrote about the “problem with no name.” Women are still trying to grow to their full human capacities. Today, many women are trying to achieve career success while maintaining a strong family life at home (Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1993) which often leaves them with “no time” and the decision to opt out of the workforce becomes an attractive option. Those women who opt out face many obstacles because simply taking 3 years off work will potentially cause a 37% cut in earnings compared to women who remain in the work force (Bennetts, 2007).

Equality has always been feminism’s goal, but the definition of equality varies. Some individuals think equality is about the number of men versus women in power and balancing this ratio (Rosser, 2003). Others believe it is more about values and the differences between men and women (Rosser). As with most aspects of life, a combination of these two definitions might be necessary in order to create a political and cultural shift in the workplace (Rosser). According to Webster’s Dictionary, feminism is a movement to achieve full social, political, and economic equality of all people, but Baumgardner and Richards (2000) indicate that feminism is different for each person.

From a historical standpoint, the women’s movement can be viewed as a struggle for the recognition of equal opportunity for women compared to men, and for equal rights irrespective of gender. In 1972, Congresswoman Patsy T. Mink wrote Title IX of the Educational Amendments after experiencing personal adversities in her own educational career. Title IX mandates that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination
under any educational programs or activity receiving federal financial assistance (Suggs, 2002). After the enactment of Title IX, numerous studies and articles (e.g., Ironside, 1983; Warner, et al., 1988) addressed the role of women in higher education and the need to increase an “ethic of care” through female representation.

Overall, the feminist movement during the past two decades has spawned an impressive body of knowledge and has contributed to the current research on women in higher education. The first challenge of the modern age was getting women into the workforce. The second challenge, however, is keeping them there. For example, Story (2005) published an article regarding the future decisions of current students and alumni from two of the most elite colleges in the United States. The study found that more than a few women had already decided to put aside their careers in favor of raising children. Roughly 60% of the students surveyed indicated that when they had children, they planned to work fewer hours or stop working entirely (Story). According to the latest trends, the elite university graduates are not alone. Census Bureau data reveals nearly a quarter of women with professional degrees are absent from the workforce. Tischler (2004) wrote that women were not competing as hard in the workplace so that they could focus on their families. Other surveys indicated that 57 percent of women graduates leave the workforce and 33 percent of white women holding an MBA are not working full-time (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). The explanations for women's career decisions remain elusive. Is it because these women are not really career-focused? Have they witnessed their own mothers' struggles to balance career and family within organizations not really supportive of such efforts? Or is there an intrinsic value to being the primary caregiver for young children?
In researching this project, I noticed how data on this topic can be contradictory, which I will illustrate with examples. The stories of high-powered women in corporate America, such as Brenda Barnes who resigned as president of Pepsi-Cola North America, were included in a 2005 national study that concluded more professional women were leaving work after having children. However, a contradictory report by the Center for Economic Policy and Research in Washington indicated that it is increasingly unlikely that having children will keep women out of the workplace (Coontz, 2005). That report suggests that employment rates of every group fell during the recession and the subsequent slow economic recovery.

According to a 2006 study released by the Council on Contemporary Families and the Center for Economic and Policy Research, mothers are only half as likely to opt out of employment because of their children as they were in 1984 (Boushley, 2006). The report concluded that women were especially hard hit by the rise in unemployment since the recession of 2001, but that applied to childless women as well as to mothers, suggesting that maternal opting-out was not the primary cause of recent labor market shifts.

Furthermore, a 2005 survey from the Center for Work-Life Policy found it is not always easy for women to return to a career track after a period of time off. Hewlett and Luce conducted a survey with a nationally representative group of highly qualified women, defined as holding either a graduate or professional degree, or a high-honors undergraduate degree. A sample of 2,443 women was divided into two age groups: older
women (ages 41-55) and younger women (ages 28-40). Among the women who opted out of their fields, the over-whelming majority (93%) wanted to return to their careers. Yet, only 74% of those who wanted to rejoin the ranks of the employed managed to do so. Women who intended a temporary absence faced challenges re-entering the workforce because they felt disconnected from new trends in their profession, lost networking contacts, or found their options limited (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

Approximately 37% of highly qualified women voluntarily left their careers for some period of time and 58% took a variety of “scenic routes” (reduced-hour or flexible work options).

Hewlett and Luce (2005) also found that women took "on-ramps" into work and "off-ramps" into career breaks. Off-ramping decisions were often triggered by family responsibilities. Childcare issues were the main concern for approximately 43% of the women. However, caring for an elderly family member was also cited (24% of women who off-ramped did so because of an elder care crisis). Furthermore, 9% of women opted out of their career for personal health issues. The researchers noted that women off-ramp for a surprisingly short time – 2.2 years on average – but even such relatively short career interruptions result in heavy financial penalties.

In today's work force, versus that of 30 years ago, few people stay with one company for the life of their career (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Resumés today show more job and even career changes. In addition, there are many more temporary opt-outs for life change reasons. That said, there is still a cost to opting out in terms of what professional level an individual is able to return at when he or she opts back in. Some studies, however, counter the argument that women are leaving in droves. Another group of
women are using flexible work arrangements to make employment viable in their complex lives and avoid opting out.

"Is the complexity of modern child-rearing at the heart of the situation? In other words, are mothers still fighting the 'super mom' model from the 1980s" (Marshall, 2004)? A "super mom" balances a family, a career, and a household. In addition, she is a supportive wife with enough time for her personal interests and friendships as well. Other analogies, such as juggling act and balancing act, are often used in literature when speaking about working mothers (Bauer, 2006). These terms might be used inaccurately, however, because they imply equal weights are distributed simultaneously.

It is difficult to validate stay-at-home motherhood without suggesting that working mothers are neglecting their children, or to vindicate working mothers without making stay-at-home mothers feel their role is not essential (Bennetts, 2007). Being a mother with a demanding career in a culture that seems to favors stay-at-home moms often creates a painful place for mothers to occupy. However, being a woman with children in a career culture that favors individual achievement at the expense of a personal life is equally painful. For a small minority of women, flexible work arrangements have become powerful tools in defining terms of employment. Career flexibility has helped many women meet their goals and manage the complexity in their lives (Blake-Beard, Ingols, & Shapiro, 2007). This is in contrast to the Hewlett and Luce (2005) study which found significant penalties for flexible work arrangements related to earning potential and re-entry opportunities. When women choose to opt out, even for a brief while, the monetary consequences can be permanent. Hewlett and Luce wrote, "Our data show that women lose an average of 18% of their earning power when they take an
off-ramp. The longer a woman spends out, the more severe the penalty becomes. Across sectors, women lose a staggering 37% of their earning power when they spend 3 or more years out of the workplace” (p. 46). While part-time work often enables women to manage their family responsibilities with greater ease, many are equally unprepared for how dramatic the financial toll can be. Farrell (2005) wrote “I want my daughters to know that people who work 44 hours a week make, on average, more than twice the pay of someone working 34 hours a week” (p. 49).

All of these comments are not criticisms about personal choices, but starting points for frank conversations about the realities of life. Blake-Beard, Ingols, and Shapiro (2008) updated their research on the career double bind by proposing that women’s career choices should reflect a “we are self-employed” model. This means that women, especially Generation X women, are not performing as employees working according to their employers’ rules but as “career self-agents” setting their own terms of employment.

Blake-Beard, Ingols, and Shapiro (2008) also talked about the fact that women are now taking responsibility for their work lives. A qualitative study on corporate America indicated that for many women, “work” had become a form of “home,” and “home” had become a form of “work” (Hochschild, 1997). Hochschild, professor of sociology at the University of California in Berkeley, coined the term “double burden/second shift” to reference the phenomenon of women who earn money outside of the home and yet have primary responsibility for unpaid domestic labor (Hochschild, 1989, pp. 3-4). According to Hochschild, these women have the double burden of carrying two full-time positions. In heterosexual couples where both individuals have careers, it has been documented that women often spend significantly more time on household chores and care-giving
(Williams, 2000). Hochschild notes that despite the widespread entry of women into paid work, a lack of an equivalent movement among men into unpaid work exists. This means that women are putting in two work shifts compared to one shift worked by men.

Based on the Hochschild (1997) study, women described their place of employment as a refuge from the stresses of home, which generated other terms such as “emotionally downsized life” and “time bind.” An emotionally downsized life is when a person denies the needs of family members and they themselves become emotional ascetics while a “time bind” is when the roles of work and home become reversed as women begin to feel that home is a stressful place in which there is too much to do in too little time (Hochschild, 1991). Furthermore, Reskin and Padavic (1994) observed that many women are responsible for caring for multiple groups (themselves, husbands, children, and elderly parents or in-laws) and must balance this with working outside the home. The researchers discovered that the women participants in their study had responsibilities requiring considerable time and energy of 64 to 85 hour work weeks.

Economic and Geographic Considerations

Professional socialization in a career may create a disadvantage for women in two particular aspects of employment: geographic mobility and the need for continuous employment (Levtov, 2001). Indeed, one researcher indicates that motherhood is now the single greatest obstacle left in the path to economic equality for women whereby the reduced earnings of mothers are a heavy personal tax levied on people who care for children, or for any other dependent family members (Crittenden, 2001).
Because the field of student affairs is unique to higher education, the density of local employment opportunities may influence the likelihood of employment. This might have a significant impact on the economic and geographic considerations for female mid-level student affairs professionals who are well-educated in their field of choice. Family responsibilities may also reduce geographic mobility. In a study of career mobility among student affairs professionals, Sagaria and Johnsrud (1988) found that 26% of the student affairs professionals in their study changed employment positions approximately every 2 years during the 1970s. Research has also shown that women are less mobile than men (Marwell, Rosefeld, & Spilerman, 1979; Rosenfeld & Jones, 1987). A dual-career couple may have to make tough choices which will have a professional and economic impact on their lives. Women with family obligations are much more likely to be tied down geographically than their male colleagues in the same predicament. If their career demands it, men will often pack up their family and move. A woman who will do the same is an exception rather than the rule. Goldin (2005) refers to this concept as "geographic shackles" because the lack of mobility affects a women's career opportunity.

Geography mobility for dual-career couples should be considered a "two-body problem." Women are more likely than men to have a partner with a career, necessitating a dual job search whenever they move (Goldin, 2005). It is not only husbands/partners that tie women to a place, but also other family members (children or elderly parents) as well as the support networks that women build around them to help with the care of their house and family, such as doctors, teachers, or child care providers. Whereas the two-body problem makes it more difficult to find a new location that satisfies both careers, the "geographic shackles" make it more difficult to decide to look for a new location in the
first place (Goldin). Rather than exemplifying a lack of commitment or ability, or resulting from economic considerations, the restraints binding the female mid-level student affairs professional are a reflection of a different set of deep-seated priorities. For men, it is a matter of choice whether to give up a promising career opportunity and stay put, or to bite the bullet and move. By contrast, for whatever reason, women seem to feel they have no such choice (Goldin). The geographic mobility combined with economic considerations might be unifying explanations for the many observed disparities in mid-level student affairs positions.

Warner (2005) writes that American families feel a vast amount of economic anxiety and the way our culture deals with motherhood takes away from workplace equality and contributes to economic anxiety. Many women do not have the alternative of opting out because they need to work to support themselves and to provide a significant portion of their household income (Blake-Beard, Ingols, & Shapiro, 2007). Some authors suggest that “women who choose not to parent can hardly be said to have exercised something as benign as free choice” because that would be a limited interpretation of personal freedom (Diamond, 1998, p. 60). This predicament is especially ironic for the student affairs profession, which is based on the philosophy of equal rights and equal access (Rosser, 2003).

Some women have attempted to address economic considerations by working part-time to supplement their income. Yet, employers are not required to offer part-time employees equal pay and benefits for equal work (Crittenden, 2001), and the economic repercussions of taking a little time out of the labor force have been shown to still be discernible after 20 years (Jacobsen & Levin, 1995). For working mothers between the
ages 25 to 44, 2 out of 3 are employed fewer than 40 hours a week year-round, and 95% work fewer than 50 hours per week year-round (Williams, 2000). The field of higher education and student affairs tends to require untenured faculty and administrators to spend long hours “paying their dues” in order to position themselves to move forward in the ranks of the institution and in their chosen profession (Williams).

These negative consequences imply that the current composition of professional employment does not permit women a full spectrum of choices in personal matters. The lack of choices in turn limits the likelihood for success in the workplace. This means that positions that require a significant amount of mandatory overtime often “wipe” mothers out of the labor pool (Williams, 2000). Hewlett and Luce (2005) indicated that this is one reason why 95% of upper-level management in corporate America is comprised of men. Another survey of almost 200 female M.B.A.s found that those who had taken an average of only 8.8 months out of the job market were less likely to reach upper-middle management and earned 17 percent less than comparable women who had never had a gap in their employment (Schneer & Reitman, 1993).

Talk of the choice to “opt out” not only overlooks power but also ignores the pain embedded in mothers’ tough trade-offs. Levtov (2001) stated that the long hours and increasing demands required of women are often emotionally demanding and can lead to marital stress. She cited literature on working women that referred to the stress women experienced while attempting to balance work and home lives. Levtov reported that working women reported an array of negative emotions, including despair, discouragement, emotional imbalance, exhaustion and stress.

A recent examination of the economic pitfalls facing stay-at-home moms warns
career women against “opting out” (Bennett, 2007). Depending on a spouse is not just a lifestyle choice, but an economic choice with potentially dire consequences. Bennett documents hundreds of interviews that caution women to plan accordingly. From her research, she concluded that women are uninformed about how difficult it is to return to the workforce.

Bone (1997) reported that women, especially hard-working women, still carry the heaviest responsibility for family care and domestic support. This often leads to women working long hours and giving up leisure time. Feelings of guilt often plague working women who have made the choice to work outside the home (Warner, 2005). They may receive little or no support from their families or from a society which labels them selfish. At the same time, the pressures to demonstrate their competence in a competitive workplace can challenge their sense of femininity. As the demands and expectations of work, home, and family accumulate, working women may feel they are losing control of their lives.

It seems that working mothers are caught in the middle. On the one hand, if they spend more time at work, they feel guilt for not meeting their own expectations of adequate motherhood. On the other hand, they worry their employer may judge them as less committed to the office if they spend time with their families at home. In addition, women report a desire for time to relax and focus on their own personal interests (Hochschild, 1997; Marshall, 2004; Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Unfortunately, they seldom enjoy much personal time (Coiner & George, 1998; Rueshemeyer, 1981). “Career-track” women who choose to stay home with their children, however, pay a price since day-care
savings are offset by the lost income of $30,000 to $80,000 each year a professional sits out (Bauer, 2006).

Socialization in the Workplace

The literature has also centered on professional socialization in the workplace. Socialization is defined as the method by which a person learns about the norms, values and behaviors of a group (Reynolds, 1992). A professional commitment to any workplace environment is often obtained by adhering to the unstated values and assumptions from a typical male-oriented model (Rosser, 2003). Commitment has historically been judged "as doing whatever it takes to get the work done, often evidenced by an employee’s constant availability" (Blake-Beard, Ingols, & Shapiro, 2007). For some, utilizing a flexible work arrangement might be seen as restricting availability. For others, it might allow them to be more productive and define their own time or place to accomplish the demands of work. Learning these aspects of an organization’s culture is inherent to the concept of socialization.

The three stages of the socialization process include the anticipatory or recruitment stage, the occupational or induction stage, and the role-continuance stage (Reynolds, 1992). Socialization has attempted to analyze the fact that women and men in corporate and academic careers often have varying degrees of success (Clark & Corcoran, 1986). Career values and behaviors, sometimes seen as symbols of a professional commitment to success, are often in conflict with family obligations (Levtov, 2001). During the anticipatory and entry/induction stages of Reynold’s socialization model a woman often learns that her career resume is expected to have
promotions and advancement. Challenges can often be seen at each stage for the working woman. And, new employees are required to follow expectations and norms created by the existing work culture.

It is the concept of the “ideal worker,” one who takes no time off to have and raise children, is able to relocate because “to move up, you’ve got to move,” and works for several decades straight (Williams, 2000). A woman who has been socialized to accept these norms would often hold these standards to herself as she continued with her professional career.

The term "ideal worker" is designed to focus people's attention on how we define our values in the workplace. For most organizations, the ideal worker is unencumbered, or free of all ties other than those to his or her job (Crittenden, 2001). Many employers assume an ideal worker is one willing and able to work 40 years without personal leave, including no time for childbearing or childrearing. This ideal is framed around men's bodies, as men need no time off for childbirth and men's life patterns, because American women still assume the majority of childcare responsibilities (Williams, 2000).

When mixed with “role conflict,” the term “ideal worker” articulates a clash between work and family. Often, these terms reflect a system that offers limited choices for both mothers and fathers in the workplace. Fathers typically make trade-offs on the family side by following the ideal worker norm. As a result, they feel increasingly anxious about their lack of involvement with family life and the pressure to be providers. For mothers, the trade-off is in their careers because they all too often suffer marginalization at work (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).
Many people are in part defined and identified by their occupation. Williams (1999) argued that professionals are increasingly expected to function as ideal workers who exhibit extreme levels of commitment to the job with little time off for periods of years. In recent years, career counselors have attempted to figure out the underlying factors that affect the vocational development of women through the Social Cognitive Career Theory lens (Found & Brown, 2000) and utilize this understanding to encourage deliberate “efficacy-building efforts” in the workplace issues of conflict management, decision making, and goal setting (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1984).

Social Cognitive Career Theory

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) model discussed in Chapter 1 finds perceived support is a background contextual factor for career decision-making. It provides one lens through which to examine the career paths of women. Social cognitive variables including self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals have also been shown to play a role in women’s decisions. It fits into socialization because of person-environment interactions (Hackett & Betz, 1981) and workplace social networks indicate that informal socialization systems are important in advancing careers. The SCCT is also defined as aspects of an individual’s environment and appraisal of that environment, which facilitates career choice and development (Ali & Saunders, 2006; Lent et al, 2000).

Many researchers have utilized the SCCT to understand the relationship among career aspirations, multiple role planning attitudes, and wellness (Booth, 2005; Chronister & Hawley-McWhirter, 2003; Ochs & Rosslea, 2004). Booth conducted studies of
African-American and Caucasian women and concluded that over 50% of young undergraduate women today continue to choose female-dominated careers which tend to be lower in status, prestige, and compensation. Chronister and Hawley addressed the career development needs of battered women utilizing the tenets of the social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) to highlight the effects of domestic violence on women’s vocational and educational well-being. Women are strongly impacted by many organizational, personal, and societal factors as part of their career choices to balance work and family when confronting the glass ceiling.

Statistics indicate a trend that those leaving their careers are largely high-achieving women, whose jobs tend to demand longer hours, who carry more responsibility, and whose absence arguably makes the greatest impact on student affairs (Lovejoy & Stone, 2006). Women of many professions must face the daunting challenge of balancing family life and career. Hewlett and Luce (2005) describe these factors as “pull” issues, such as child or elder care, and “push” issues, such as evening meetings or conferences, of a career. Career decisions are often impacted by “pull” factors, such as a life event or change involving child or elder care. The interplay of workplace pushes and family (children, spouse, parental) pulls can be daunting. The decision to leave a position could relate to “push” factors, such as the cultural environment of the workplace. Most women deal with a combination of push and pull factors in their everyday life – and one often serves to intensify the other.

How do work-family policies happen as expected? Blake-Beard, Ingols, and Shapiro (2007) wrote that whether a person negotiates boundaries around the job, telecommutes, stays in a job that permits balance, or make a lateral move instead of a
promotion, women are trying to make “work work.” The wish list of features for work-
family policies includes shorter, more predictable, and more flexible working hours, new 
part-time and job sharing options, time off for emergencies and childcare, guaranteed 
leave with job security for childbearing and childrearing, childcare subsidies and tax 
breaks, and on-site daycare options (Gerson & Jacobs, 2005). Government-initiated 
(i.e., the Family and Medical Leave Act), employer-initiated (i.e., flexible scheduling and 
compensation packages), or jointly initiated (i.e., flexible spending accounts) 
employment policies have the potential to affect family life (MacDermid & Targ, 1995).

A person’s occupation has long been an important means of identification, if not 
the primary one. As a result of the important role of work in the American culture, those 
who observe workers’ behavior, whether employing a scientific or unscientific approach, 
have been interested to some degree in how happy or satisfied employees are in their 
profession. Interestingly enough, career theories to date do not define motherhood as a 
career, and minimal research has been conducted on full-time mothers (Schultheiss, 2009). 
This is, in large part, due to the fact that traditional views on careers attach them solely to 
work that is “paid,” therefore leaving motherhood out (Schultheiss).

Identifying a level of job satisfaction can provide insights into other factors of job 
behavior, such as resignation, absenteeism, self-esteem, and measures of human relations. 
Furthermore, an individual’s perception of career-related barriers and decision-making 
difficulties plays a significant role in the career development of women and ethnic 
minorities (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Studies have shown that women believe more 
career-related barriers exist than do men (Luzon & McWhirter, 2001), and understanding 
the person-environment interactions (Hackett & Betz, 1981) is one way to help women
more actively engage in the social networks that exist informally in the workplace socialization systems.

Higher Education Research and Concerns

Women possess a long and rich tradition in American higher education. Beginning in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, women's colleges were founded in response to a need for advanced education for women. From the inception of women's colleges to the implementation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the history of women demonstrates a strong presence in higher education. The structure of higher education, however, is often resistant to change (Birnbaum, 1988). Culture does not lend itself to new workforce initiatives for women balancing their roles as student affairs professionals and mothers. In essence, there is hypocrisy within the institution.

There are several key factors to institutional and faculty concerns. First, some female faculty members choose to select part-time work in order to successfully balance their work and life concerns (Wolf-Wendell & Ward). However, this decision often causes other faculty and administrators to assume women who elect this option lack professional motivation or commitment. There is also an ambivalence and antagonism to part-time employees (Wolf-Wendell & Ward, 2001). The work load of part-time faculty members often prohibits them from researching and publishing, which is often the criteria upon which most promotions are based (Munn-Giddins, 1998, p. 63).
Career Satisfaction

A study of women in higher education at all administrative levels in the state of Washington found that 78% of those surveyed reported serious thoughts of resigning, with external institutional factors contributing to a significant number of women reporting low levels of job satisfaction (Johnson, Harrison-Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). To address such concerns, many colleges and universities have established gender equity committees to investigate policies and procedures. As a result, many work-family policies have been established to make work more manageable (Marshall, 2004). Yet, Young and Wright (2001) found that faculty women felt they had to remain silent about any role strain they felt because they feared that they would be seen as incompetent or unable to handle their professional responsibilities.

For higher education administrators, several factors have been identified as barriers to career advancement. The most significant barrier has been identified as poorly defined career paths and limited career advancement opportunities within the organizational hierarchy of higher education institutions. Career paths for higher education administrators are often described as flat, short, and limited. This is evidenced by more mid-level administrative positions compared to that of senior-level administrative positions (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1992; Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000). Most studies on career advancement for student affairs administrators examine the experiences of senior-level student affairs administrators. However, the examination of the mobility of mid-level administrators to completely understand career advancement
within the student affairs profession may provide valuable insights (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 
1988).

In addition to other career advancement issues, Rhoades (1995) found that mid-
level administrators perceive that they are not appreciated. Mid-level administrators have
limited decision-making authority, although they have expertise in their specific areas
(Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000). Furthermore, the morale of mid-level administrators
was found to be associated with “their perceptions that they are treated fairly, that they
and their opinions are valued, and that their work is meaningful” (Johnsrud, Heck, &
Rosser, p. 54).

In particular, female mid-level professionals in student affairs positions at higher 
education institutions often leave the field just as they reach a level of significant
influence (McEwen & Taub, 2006). This is important because it may be correlated with a
growing concern regarding attrition rates in student affairs. This is supported by research
which suggests that talented student affairs professionals often leave at the mid-
management level (Bender, 1980; Ferrier, & Chisholm, 1983; Holmes, 1982; Marshall,
2006).

Blackhurst (2000) addressed job satisfaction and reported that career satisfaction
of female student affairs professionals is relatively high. Career satisfaction levels did not
differ based on the reasons for selecting student affairs as a career and were not
associated with differences in age, parenting or relationship status. However, other
studies have suggested that male student affairs professionals are more satisfied than their
female colleagues with both their position (Blackhurst, Blackhurst, Brandt, &
Kalinowski, 1988) and the student affairs profession (Bender, 1980; Rosser & Javinar,
Consequently, women have left the profession at higher rates than men (Burns, 1982).

Costs and Benefits of Staff Turnover

In this era of accountability in higher education, maximizing resources and minimizing costs is critical. Thus, research to identify and address those factors that predict turnover could not be more timely (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999). In general, the literature suggests that while men and women as professionals, partners, and parents struggle with the task of achieving a balance between work and family life, the challenge for women is greater than for men, given the pressures of a biological clock, the physical demands of pregnancy and childbirth, the gendered expectations of family obligations, and the ongoing disparity with which women take on the “second shift” through maintenance of children and home (Drago & Williams, 2000; Hochschild, 1975, 1989; Williams, 2000).

The Shriver Report (Boushey & O’Leary, 2009) detailed how three-quarters of the American public believes that it is critical to the economic success of American families for businesses to address the staff turnover issue. Although women have long been a part of academia – as students and workers – equal representation for women has been slow in emerging. Nevertheless, progress has been made. According to the American Council on Education, women have increased from 42% of the overall undergraduate population in 1970 to 58% of the 2006 student population in two- and four-year colleges (Lewin, 2006). As employees, women served in 52% of staff positions in postsecondary institutions in the fall of 1997 (Roey & Skinner, 2000). Because the
majority of students enrolled in higher education as of 1999 were female, the need for women in decision-making roles has increased.

In theory, discrimination can no longer play a part in the hiring and promotion of female faculty, staff, and administrators, yet, nearly 30 years later after Title IX, women continue to lag behind their male counterparts (Cullivan, 1990; Etaugh, 1984; Kaplan & Tinsley, 1989; Sederberg & Mueller, 1992; Touchton & Shavik, 1991). As a case in point, most females positioned in higher education administration are grouped in lower rank positions, such as director, assistant, or associate, and they typically receive lower salaries than men (Cullivan, 1990; Etaugh; Kaplan & Tinsley; Tinsley, 1985, Williams & Daffron, 2006).

Student Affairs Professionals

The mission of the field of student affairs is typically focused on the development of the whole person – social, moral, spiritual, and intellectual – rather than on academic training alone (Marshall, 2006). Student affairs professionals continue to be one of the largest employee groups in many college and university systems (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988). Unfortunately, as the numbers of individuals and positions have increased, so has the turnover (Sagaria & Johnsrud). At the mid-level career point, many student affairs professionals are wives/partners, mothers/fathers, and/or single parents. The personal and professional challenges imposed on both women and men in multiple, often competing roles can lead to difficulties in finding a suitable balance. Ward (1995) concluded that for new professionals in student affairs, role conflict and ambiguity were significant contributors to job dissatisfaction and the propensity to leave the profession.
A lack of attention to this topic may be the result of an adequate number of entry-level professionals eager to apply to mid-management positions. In general, senior administrators at colleges and universities might not have been so concerned about women (and men) opting out of their student affairs careers because administrative staff turnovers can be both a benefit and a cost. Periodic turnover can be a benefit as it provides an opportunity to re-think existing structures and perspectives and integrate new energy into the institution (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 1998). However, turnover represents a cost related to the loss of experience, knowledge and skills to effectively and efficiently manage the institution (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser). Research suggests that an increasing number of talented professionals leave the field of student affairs even though they are in positions of significant influence.

Mid-level student affairs leaders are defined as those academic or nonacademic support personnel within higher education organizations. Typically, they report to a senior-level administrator and their positions are differentiated by functional specialization, skills, training and experiences (Rosser, 2003). These individuals are rarely classified as instructional faculty and administer programs, services, and functions that are central to the institutional mission of the college or university. Previous studies of mid-level student affair professionals’ work/life issues include research focused on administrators’ attitudes and behavior. For example, Johnsrud (1996) identified 3 sources of frustration: the mid-level nature of their role, the lack of recognition for their contribution and competence, and their limited opportunity for career growth and advancement opportunities. Additional issues important to work life and behavior include: role clarity and conflict (Moore & Twombly, 1990; Rosser, 2000); perceptions
of discrimination (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999); opportunities for promotion and career
development (Johnsrud & Rosser); career paths and mobility (Twombly, 1990), and job
satisfaction (Grant, 2006).

Nobbe and Manning (1997) conducted an extensive study of issues faced by
mothers who remained in their student affairs positions. Thirty-five female administrators
who had reached the mid-level of their field were interviewed. The results of their study
are significant for my research because certain themes emerged that might relate to the
decision-making process that women use when deciding the path of their careers. The
enormous effort women made to balance work and family obligations in an environment
which was not always supportive of their difficulties surfaced as an important theme. For
example, respondents reported they carefully timed their pregnancies as a way to
minimize inconvenience to colleagues. Despite this, women often felt scrutinized on the
job after returning from maternity leave and were acutely aware of being monitored by
fellow administrators. Starting a family seemed to be the only time that many of the
women believed people chose to take a time out or slow down their career ascent. The
ability to use technology and have flexible work options, find quality and affordable child
care for their children, and have supportive partners are some of the important factors that
made it easier for women to transition back to work. However, many of the women
struggled with exhaustion, confusion, and feelings of failure, despite the support they felt
from their supervisors and employers. Moreover, the women assumed they needed to
conceal these feelings in order to be positive role models to others (Nobbe & Manning).

Evans (1986) conducted a career development study of female student affairs
professionals in Indiana. She discovered many women expressed family responsibilities
often conflicted with their career plan which was a key finding in the early stages of work and family research. Evans’ conclusions were consistent with findings outside of higher education in that women who had never married tended to have uninterrupted work patterns. In Evans’ study, the married women with children experienced role conflict. They also felt remorse over spending too little time with their kids. In addition, Evans found that the married women in her study group had husbands who supported their career, as long as that career did not alter their own career plans.

Having a family seems to act as a disadvantage and barrier for women, but it does not appear to impede men who seek career advancement (Chliwniak, 1997). I can recall one story about two graduate students interviewing during a NASPA annual conference. The one graduate student, a female, was doing everything she could to hide the fact that she was married. She did not want that personal information to cloud a recruiter’s decision. The other graduate student, a male, was clearly open about his family and even took out pictures of his young family to share.

Clark and Corcoran (1986) conducted research that revealed most women who have attained the mid-level of their career have already reached the role-continuance stage of socialization with a high degree of commitment to the profession. Thus, the decision to opt out is a tough one because these individuals have invested heavily in their education and training. Most women at the mid-level of their career have spent years accumulating the skills and credentials necessary for successful careers, making it difficult to shift gears towards a new profession or to attend to responsibilities at home.

Several studies have examined attrition and persistence in student affairs. One early study (Holmes et al., 1983) examined the patterns of persistence among graduates
from a master’s degree program in student personnel at an eastern university. This study found an attrition rate “that takes 60% of master’s graduates out of the profession in a 6-year period” (p. 442), despite the fact that 84% of the respondents reported job satisfaction. While the authors suggested reasons for the high rate of attrition (e.g., limited promotional opportunities and mobility, terminal degree needed to advance), they nevertheless concluded that further study of the decision making process leading to departure from the field was warranted (Marshall, 2006).

Marshall (2006) also conducted a study to examine attrition in student affairs and highlighted the reasons why professionals chose to leave the field. The findings of that study identified ten general themes including: geographic restrictions, salary issues, pursuit of advanced degrees, lack of challenge/loss of passion, burn out, work/family conflicts, issues with supervisors and institutional fit, career alternatives, disenchantment with the field and involuntary separation. While previous research indicated that attrition rates range between 32% within the first 5 years in the field (Wood, Winston, & Polkosnik, 1985) to 61% within the first 6 years (Holmes, et al., 1983), Marshall’s (2004) study indicated that 46.4% left the field within the first 5 years, 11.8% left in years 6 or 7, 20.3% left in years 8 to 10, and 26.1% left after 11 or more years in the field.

Research suggests that talented student affairs professionals, women in particular, often leave the field once they have reached a point of significant influence (Bender, 1980; Holmes, Verrier, & Chisholm, 1983). This is noteworthy because many of these professionals have advanced degrees in educational leadership, higher education, or college student personnel and when they opt out of their profession they take with them their knowledge and skill set. Earlier research suggests that high levels of burn out, long
hours, and stressful conditions lead to higher levels of attrition (Carpenter, 1990). Holmes et al. (1983) report that within 7 years of receipt of a master’s degree, 90% of women compared to 60% of men left the student affairs profession.

Given that more women than men enroll in and successfully complete graduate preparation programs in student affairs and higher education and subsequently enter the profession (Coomes & Gerda, 2003), this represents a significant loss to the workforce. Additionally, Bender and Blackhurst et al. (1998) cite several reasons for departures from the field, including dissatisfaction with professional development opportunities, lack of mentoring, little opportunity for advancement, incompatibility with supervisor, and high levels of role ambiguity.

Although recent qualitative studies on senior administrators in higher education have been published (Chaudhuri, 2005; Marshall, 2004), but little information has been gathered about women at the mid-level point in their career. In the 1990s, the largest administrative group within colleges and universities was mid-level administrators (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1992). The fact that mid-level administrators comprise about 60% of the institution’s workforce is justification for this study because turnover decisions reflect employees’ perceptions of their current work environment and their opportunity for future advancement.

Summary of the Literature Review

This chapter provided a diverse overview of women’s perspectives reflected in previous research, surrounding the challenges inherent in the balance of work and family in higher education. Researchers such as Hewlett and Luce (2005) concluded it was
commonplace for women to either attempt to negotiate a flexible schedule or voluntarily opt out of their chosen profession. In this literature review, I illuminated women’s career issues relating to both work and family. Unfortunately, current research on work/family issues in higher education is limited. Available research on female administrators in student affairs with children is primarily directed at senior-level administrators. This literature review identifies gaps where additional research is warranted to help student affairs professionals deal with the attrition rates for women at the mid-level of their career.

One theme that emerged was the great effort women unfailingly make to take the steps to balance work and family responsibilities in an environment not always supportive of their situations. The participants from several studies spoke of carefully planning their family choices in an attempt to minimize inconvenience to colleagues (Levtov, 2001; Marshall, 2004). For example, some women talked about carefully timing their pregnancies. Women returning from maternity were aware that fellow administrators monitored them to see how well they managed. Many women felt scrutinized while they worked. Once they started a family, many of the women made the choice to “time out” or slow down their career.

It was of particular importance to direct this research on student affairs professionals because the mission of the field is typically on the development of the whole person—social, moral, spiritual, and intellectual—rather than on intellectual training alone. At the mid-level career point, many student affairs professionals are wives/partners, mothers/fathers, and/or single parents. The personal and professional challenges imposed on both women and men in multiple, often competing roles can lead
to difficulties in finding a suitable balance. In order to assert their commitment to professional success, women entering a profession may have to follow unsaid, undefined values and assumptions. It is vital to conduct further research to investigate women’s perspectives relating to these questions that are inherent to student affairs.

The following questions are therefore vital to an enhanced understanding of women's views: How many women are opting out? How many years do they remain disengaged? How many returned to the field of college student personnel administration? What policies and practices helped them re-enter their chosen career path? The following chapter details my research methods, which were used to help provide answers to these questions.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This study was designed to examine personal and professional issues associated with different career decisions for mid-level career women who chose to opt-out of their field for a period of time. The study not only explored the decision to opt out, but also investigated how some individuals redefined their career identities and successfully navigated back to their professions after an absence. Much has been written about women and careers and there have been continued calls for data to examine the decision making process of opting out. Due to the nature of this study and the subject matter to be reviewed, a qualitative research approach was implemented. There are numerous factors that must be included in the selection of a methodology such as the setting for research, the goals of the study, and the nature of the subject matter. Each of these factors are examined in this chapter where the primary discussion involves the actions used to make sure the results of the study are healthy. The research methods include the sampling strategy, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The conclusion briefly delimits the research design and identifies the limitations of the research.

Research Questions

The following questions directed this inquiry:

1. How do mid-level female student affairs professionals with young children make the decision to leave the field of student affairs for a minimum of one year?
2. For those female student affairs professionals with young children who left and later returned to the field, how did they experience these transitions? What barriers did they encounter (if any), and how did they overcome those barriers?

3. For those female student affairs professionals with young children who left and did not return, what was their rationale? How have they redefined themselves (if at all) to life after a career in student affairs?

4. How did these women’s career decision-making experiences fit within the Social Cognitive Career Theory (particularly the components of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals) framework?

As discussed in chapter one, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) emphasizes the interplay between self-efficacy and social processes in guiding career decisions. It focuses on the role of environmental interaction and personal attributes and suggests that career decisions are made through 3 integrated models, including individual interest, choice, and performance. In addition, it evaluates an individual’s judgments of her own capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of career trajectories (Savickas & Lent, 1994).

Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research is a discovery-oriented approach intended to understand phenomena in naturally-occurring states (Rudenstam & Mewton, 2001). Creswell (1998) detailed five specific traditions typically utilized in qualitative research. These include biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Whereas quantitative research involves identifying variables, stating a hypothesis, and conducting
experiments resulting in numerical data that can be analyzed statistically (Creswell, 2003), qualitative research supplies researchers with tools for developing a deeper understanding of social phenomena (Silverman, 2000). This is achieved because the researcher “builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Because this study focuses on women’s words rather than numbers to explore their self-perceptions, a qualitative method is appropriate.

In qualitative research, there is a diverse array of interview techniques ranging from unstructured key informant interviews to more structured interview questionnaires and pile sorts (Creswell, 1998). Three of the most common types of qualitative interview styles include in-depth interviews, narratives, and life histories. Narratives are stories of individuals’ lived experiences that are often collected through interviews, but also come from first person accounts (Creswell). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) indicated that narrative used in educational research is an important method that allows participants, individually and socially, to detail their storied lives. This type of study showcases the development of feminist theory, which is grounded in women’s life stories and seeks to analyze gender roles and meanings in society (Rosser, 2003). Narrative research offers individuals the opportunity to consider an interpretation of specific aspects of their lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) and became a useful method during this phenomenological study.

In phenomenological studies, a researcher needs to understand intentionality and practice bracketing (Creswell, 1998). During the interview process, all experiences have both an objective and a subjective component and both phenomena must be recognized
and differentiated. Furthermore, the researcher needs to practice bracketing, which means setting aside any biases or assumptions about the phenomena (Creswell). The phenomenological approach has been implemented in several different settings including feminist inquiry and dealing with the experiences of women at their mid-level student affairs positions. This methodology allows for the study of a group of individuals as compared to other approaches such as a biography or a case study involving the individual (Creswell). In addition to the number of participants, the phenomenological approach is appropriate because the subjects in this study have shared an experience that is unique to them. The phenomenological approach to qualitative research was adhered to in this study; therefore the following data collection methods were observed.

Selection of Participants

The method used to select informants for this study was purposeful sampling, which is typical of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Study participants were chosen from four primary criteria: (1) female student affairs administrators; (2) who had children under age eighteen, (3) are at the mid-level of their profession, and (4) left their student affairs position for at least one year, within the last five years. This study included women from small private liberal arts colleges, large research universities, and community colleges.

The pool of study candidates was selected using two different methods. The first was informal student affairs professional contacts of mine who fit the aforementioned sampling criteria. The second being the names and e-mail addresses of female student affairs professionals at the mid-level of their career in student affairs (e.g., directors and
coordinators of student development, counseling, residence life, or other student service departments) obtained from members of the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). NASPA is an extensive network of more than 11,000 student affairs professionals, including women at the mid-level. The recruitment technique referred to as "snowball sampling" was employed. This approach involved asking an identified participant (such as a current member of NASPA) to provide names of other individuals who have characteristics or experiences of interest for the study (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). A caution must be noted when participants are members of the same group, such as NASPA members or student affairs professionals, there may be a natural bias in this recruitment. However, a variation of snowball sampling called "respondent-driven sampling" has been shown to allow researchers to make asymptotically unbiased estimates from snowball samples under certain conditions (Salganik & Heckathorn).

Since the definition of "mid-level student affairs professional" might vary from institution to institution, the researcher had to rely a bit on the volunteer’s self-concept of their position. One of the main criteria was that each participant in this dissertation had advanced in expertise and skills in their areas of responsibility and in the profession (Hughes, 1999). Women identified as possible participants were sent an e-mail explaining the study. The correspondence served to inquire if the women were interested in participating or if they had any referrals for women who opted out of the field. If interested, they were asked for biographical information with which to stratify the interview sample. The women selected were contacted by telephone to arrange an interview, which was conducted in person or through telephone conference, spanning a one- to two- hour time period. Because no sampling frame was available for the
population of women in student affairs having recently left the field, the snowball sampling approach (i.e., e-mail solicitation and general word of mouth) was the best approach to reach eligible women. Sample correspondences including the introductory e-mail, letter of invitation to participate, a letter of regret, and a thank you letter can be found in the Appendix section.

Data Collection and Treatment

In qualitative research, the typical data collection methods used by researchers include open-ended interviews, notes of direct observation, and written documentation (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research typically generates large quantities of data representing personal perspectives rather than quantitative data. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) maintain that "phenomenologists believe that multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others" (p. 23). It was my task to recognize the participant's view of reality by developing a rapport with the participant. This was most readily achieved by providing time for "warm chatter" at the beginning of the interview. I extended an offer to provide the interview questions to all participants prior to the scheduled meeting, which provided them the opportunity to reflect and prepare for the written questions.

Multiple data collection methods were a part of the ongoing process, including a review of each woman's resume and other written materials and a long, semi-structured interview. According to Dexter (1970), interviewing is a "conversation with a purpose" and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the interview process serves the purpose of obtaining here and now constructions of individuals, events, activities, organizations,
feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other entities to later assemble reconstructions. While all participants had the option of viewing the interview questions beforehand, I was open to emergent questions and comments throughout the data collection process.

The study was designed to include in-depth interviews, approximately one to two hours in length, with no less than seventeen women evaluating how they navigated their professional careers. These seventeen individuals were divided into two groups: (a) those individuals who left the profession permanently and (b) those individuals who left for a minimum of one year and re-entered the profession. Individuals selected through the sampling criteria and who were willing to participate were contacted by telephone or e-mail to schedule an interview. I responded to questions regarding the letter of consent, including the participants' ability to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any point. I asked all study participants the same core questions, but I also investigated other deeper questions to clarify or prompt further responses. All interviews were audio-taped and the study participants had the ability to review all tapes and other notes. Prior to each interview, an e-mail was sent to each participant containing interview time and location details, the expected interview length, sample questions, and a copy of a consent form to evaluate and sign. Additionally, I reviewed the study's purpose, the interview session outline, and my commitment to confidentiality.

In order to develop deeper insight into the lives of each individual, participants were invited to contribute materials such as transcripts, resumes, and other personal memorabilia. Each individual was asked about their knowledge of policies at their former or current institutions related to gender equity issues, and their willingness to put these
policies into practice. The participants’ resumes provided me with personal data regarding education and professional experience. Therefore, interview time did not have to be used to gather these facts.

Data Verification and Analysis

A significant factor in the data analysis portion of a qualitative study is that the researcher is the primary means of data collection (Creswell, 1994). As a result, the researcher must make every attempt to limit the impact of any bias that may exist. The direct involvement of the researcher in the data collection and analysis process is one of the key challenges of qualitative research (Creswell, 2003) which is often considered a “series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 118). Because of the direct involvement, the researcher must also engage in active listening through all phases of the research process. The interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted using an approach borrowed from grounded theory called constant comparative which starts with the data collection followed by a series of codes to make the similar concepts more workable (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). An inductive approach was also used to identify common themes and emerging patterns through content analysis. This technique allowed for the identification of “the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis coming from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (Patton, 1980, p. 306). This method of analysis was appropriate because limited data regarding how women manage their professional careers and motherhood was available. With qualitative research, the process is emergent rather than tightly prefigured
(Creswell, 2003). Each audio-taped interview was transcribed verbatim, and a phenomenological analysis was employed, as modified from Creswell (1998).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) indicate that there are 3 steps in an inductive process mentioned in the above paragraph. These steps include: (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding. In this study, open coding allowed for the entire text to be reviewed for descriptive categories and selective coding placed all categories into three broad research categories. The purpose of analyzing data in qualitative research is to separate themes into as many categories as is appropriate (Jacob, 1987). The second step is axial coding, by which the data is assessed in relationship to major categories and subcategories. Significant sentences and phrases were extracted from participants’ statements that directly pertain to the phenomenon investigated. Definitions were constructed by delimiting the meaning of each significant statement. Clusters of themes were organized from the aggregate formulated meanings (Creswell, 2003).

Moustakas (1994) cited that data should initially be divided into statements in a process known as horizontalization. In this process, categories of data are “clustered” together to create themes within the data. I listened to the audiotapes and took notes with the intention of gaining a better understanding of the data. Subsequently, the transcripts were given to the participants for review and they were given the option to provide further clarification through e-mail correspondence. Study participants also had the opportunity to check the personal stories relayed during their interviews to reflect on the accuracy of their personal stories. This is a process called member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which serves multiple purposes because it gives the participant the chance to fix errors or correct inaccuracies. It also gives the participants the opportunity to make
personal statements and summarize the conversation. Finally, the participant is given a chance to assess the statements as a whole. Each individual reviewed her transcribed interview, corrected any errors, approved the transcription and returned it to me via e-mail. The overall credibility of the study was reinforced through utilizing these methods and establishing a cross check of the data.

Researchers typically filter data through a personal lens that is situated in a specific sociopolitical and historical moment (Creswell, 2003). As a qualitative researcher, I had to analytically reflect on who I was in the inquiry and be sensitive to my personal biography and how it shaped the study (Creswell). My own position as a student affairs professional and mother provided empathy and perspective in collecting and analyzing the data. However, I paid careful attention to how I collected and analyzed data in this investigation. The following section discusses ethical considerations used to safeguard the integrity and welfare of the data and the research participants.

Ethical Considerations

Fairness, honesty, openness of intent, disclosure of methods, research objectives, respect for the integrity of the individual, the obligations of the researcher to guarantee absolute privacy for the subject(s), and the willingness of the subject(s) to participate voluntarily in the activity are just some of the ethical issues to consider in a qualitative research project (Leedy, 1993). I included several steps to ensure this study on female mid-level student affairs professionals was conducted in an ethical manner and will discuss the trustworthiness and transferability of the data.
After each person agreed to participate in the study, I e-mailed each participant before the discussion about the nature of the research, the time commitment involved, and the potential use of the study. I sent each participant an electronic version of the interview questions so that she would have a sense of the interview format. The privacy of each study participant was also protected (Locke, Spriduso, & Silverman, 2000). To maintain confidentiality, I used codenames for each of the participants. I believe no significant risks exist to the confidentiality of the individuals who agreed to participate. Overall, I took care to comply with all the requirements of Western Michigan University’s Human Subject Review Board (HSRB). Written consent was collected before participants engaged in data collection activities. After the final dissertation is approved, the study materials will be transferred to the Western Michigan University campus and stored for a three-year period. Records will be available for inspection by individuals authorized by the sponsoring institution.

The data collection and analysis in this study utilized the fundamentals of qualitative research including triangulation, member check, thick description, and audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These types of collection methods ensured the trustworthiness and transferability of the data. Trustworthiness is an important issue in qualitative research because it is asking how the researcher can convince the reader that the study findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba). Significant effort must be made so that the research process is conducted with fairness and honesty in order to make sure the results represent the experiences of those studied in an accurate way (Marshall, 2004). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are four components of establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative research project (Lincoln
& Guba, 1985). Transferability of the results of the research was achieved by providing detailed descriptions and personal accounts. Transferability is often created by using “thick descriptions” (Denzin, 1989) which allows readers to find similarities between the research results and their own experiences. Thick descriptions allow individuals to “transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred because of shared characteristics” (Creswell, 1998, p. 203).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Certain assumptions can be made regarding the research methodology. In a qualitative study, it is an assumption that the study can have a relatively small sample size. Although the information is not generalizable, it is assumed that the women in this study will be able to relate their experiences to aid others in identifying and overcoming the barriers of reentering the field of student affairs or in redefining themselves after leaving the field.

There are two main limitations to consider when reviewing this research: the potential research bias and the limited scope of the project. As a white, middle-class woman with three young boys currently working as a mid-level student affairs professional, my own subjectivity could potentially color the results of the study. Secondly, results are not generalizable due to the small sample size. That said, data collected and stories shared were richly descriptive. Since little is known regarding this area of study, there is great value in discovering the participants’ experiences. The overall study focus was to begin a discussion about female college and university student affairs professionals at the mid-level point of their career.
This study was limited to the field of student affairs because there are some issues, such as irregular work schedules and a focus on the "whole person," that might be unique to this particular component of higher education. However, this is not to say that women in faculty and corporate positions do not share similar situations. This chapter marks a transition from a review of the context of the problem and the related literature in the work-life balance to the applied empirical portion of my dissertation, offered next in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Participants

Seventeen female student affairs professionals who had opted out at the mid-level of their profession and had children under the age of eighteen were interviewed for this study. Women from large research universities; small, private, liberal arts colleges; and community colleges were included. Positions ranged from program coordinator in a student life department to a small, private liberal arts college assistant to the president. Most participants emerged as a result of targeted inquiries to the NASPA listserv and all agreed to participate after receiving the interview protocol. Participants expressed great interest in this topic area and were eager to speak with me about their life experiences.

A narrative was created from initial telephone interviews, written responses to reflective questions, and follow-up telephone interviews to check for accuracy. Participants’ individual accounts detailed the decision-making process of leaving a career, at least for a few years, and moving forward into new directions. Each of the seventeen participants provided an overview of her career path, indicated the role that self-efficacy played in her career decision-making, described the impact of institutional structures and processes, and explained the barriers faced when applying for new positions. Each offered testimony that career decisions are personal, but institutional support can help retain talent in the workplace. This chapter describes the women’s insights about their self-efficacy and outcome expectations by summarizing the findings.
into four categories: the role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in a career path; thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out; redefinitions and transitions; and advice for new student affairs professionals. Common themes across these stories are profiled in chapter five and a comparison of these findings to current research will follow in chapter six.

Through the interviews, I developed personal insights into each of the seventeen participants. In this chapter, I provide portraits of the challenges, motivations, and influences each of these women experienced in her career as a mother and a professional. The challenges included childcare concerns, long work commutes, and dogmatic supervisory styles while the motivations included making a difference in students' lives. It was often the motivational factor of making a difference in a student's life that led the returning women back to higher education. The stories relay the complexity in each woman's decision making process. They stress each individual's uniqueness while illustrating similarities that intersect their distinctive stories.

First, Table 1 provides an overall summary of participants which includes age, ethnicity, marital status, number of children, educational level, and institutional type. Each individual was given a pseudonym to protect her identity during the course of this research project. The women spoke openly about their career experiences and did not hide personal information such as age, number of children, ethnicity, or marital status. The average age of the participants was 41 years old. The average number of children per household was two. In addition to demographic information, the table includes information about the positions each individual held at the time of opting out and re-entry positions in student affairs (if any). Table 2 provides a summary of the participants’
years of employment in the student affairs profession. Lastly, Table 3 provides information on the participants' institutional type.

The participant pool included women from the age of 32 to 53 with one to three children under the age of seventeen. All but one of the women was married; one woman divorced after 23 years of marriage. Their names were changed to protect confidentiality. These women represent student affairs professionals from Maryland to Colorado. The women in the survey worked between four and fourteen years in the field of student affairs before opting out of the workplace. In those ten years, women had between one and six positions in the field of student affairs. There was only one Hispanic participant and no other minorities who participated in this study. Despite repeated attempts, I was unable to find women of any other ethnicity (Asian, African-American, or Native American) to participate in the study.

Nearly one-third of the research participants began their respective careers with a carefully thought-out career plan. However, each person also expected she would continue to work as a mother, balancing multiple roles as parent and professional. Almost one-half of the individuals said there were rarely any meaningful discussions with their spouse about managing multiple roles. Eight out of the seventeen individuals left their position because of spousal career advancement and geographical relocation. Three-fourths of the individuals acknowledged they might have remained in their position if they had more flexibility in the workplace. Nearly one-half of the women returned to the student affairs profession while the other women chose different paths such as starting a consulting practice, developing new business ventures such as buying into a home-based
Table 1

**Summary of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Public/Private</th>
<th>Position at the time of opting out</th>
<th>Re-entry Position in Student Affairs</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stayed Out</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1 boy</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>Program Assistant</td>
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<td>Married</td>
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<td>Public</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>Associate Dean of Students</td>
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<tr>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>Director of Greek Affairs</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Married</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>Assistant Director of Admissions</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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<td>Career Coordinator</td>
</tr>
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<td>Laurie</td>
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<td>3 girls</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Private</td>
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<td>Associate Director Service-Learning</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Married</td>
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<td>Master</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Assistant Director of Student Activities</td>
<td>Program Coordinator in Student Development</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Married</td>
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<td>Master</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Coordinator of Student Academic Services</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>Director of Greek Life</td>
<td>Assistant to the Director</td>
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Table 2

*Participants’ Years of Employment in the Student Affairs Profession*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Number of years in the profession before opting out</th>
<th>Number of positions held in student affairs before opting out</th>
<th>Number of years out of student affairs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krista</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittney</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6*</td>
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<td><strong>Re-entered</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libby</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
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<td>7*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jocelyn</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5*</td>
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</table>

* Returned to student affairs positions in a part-time status.
** Negotiated a flexible, full-time schedule.
Table 3

Participants' Institutional Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Public Institution (secular)</th>
<th>Private Institution (religious)</th>
<th>Small (Less than 5,000 students)</th>
<th>Large (More than 5,000 students)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stayed out</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krista</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittny</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reentered</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libby</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jocelyn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

business, or working part-time at retail establishments. Since most of the participants were new mothers, it would be safe to assume that all 17 participants obtained a new personal identity after opting out of their mid-level student affairs career. They all spoke of a broader view of the world and appreciation for work and life balance. In addition, there was a bit more empathy for where their students came from with regard to life's struggles. As part of the research study, I examined women's reasons for interrupting their careers or "opting out" (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004).

This research study was designed to reveal the life stories of student affairs professionals using storytelling. The following section is broken down into two categories: (a) those individuals who left their position and stayed out and (b) those
individuals who left their career and came back into the student affairs profession. The role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals played for each individual was reviewed. Finally, participants provide advice on the decision-making process of opting out and suggestions for new female student affairs professionals.

Women Who Opted Out and Stayed Out

Let us begin by first reviewing the stories of the nine women in my study who opted out of their career as student affairs professionals and at the time of this study had not returned to this field.

Catherine

Catherine worked as an Assistant Director of Career Services at a regional, public university in the Midwest. In that position she oversaw the planning of job fairs, supervised graduate students, worked with the alumni board, and counseled students. She also worked at a small, private religious institution and for a non-profit organization prior to her position as Assistant Director. She earned a master's degree in business management. Catherine is a 41-year-old Caucasian woman. She is married with two sons, one in elementary school and the other in middle school.

Catherine came to work in higher education through a non-traditional path. She had moved across the state to be closer to her fiancé and found a position working in radio advertisement sales. To balance what she considered to be high-stress work, she volunteered for a local non-profit organization. Her interest in student affairs stemmed from her meeting with the Director of Career Services from the small private institution.
where she was eventually employed. While working a career fair for the non-profit organization she ate lunch with the Director, who took Catherine’s resume. She was contacted nine months later to interview for a position working with internship programs. At the institution, she started in a coordinator role but moved quickly into the associate director position. Over the next two years she advanced her career, eventually assuming supervisory responsibilities. While the work environment was comfortable, the small private college did not have a solid financial growth plan. At the time, the regional public institution in her area was thriving. She applied for and accepted the position as Assistant Director at the public institution which was a “dream come true” for Catherine because it represented the pinnacle of career services in her region.

Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path. In many ways, Catherine described this position as her “dream job” because she was working at the premiere institution of higher education in her geographical area. Her belief in her ability to successfully perform in the career counseling role helped her to grow in the Assistant Director position quickly. She provided mentoring to the graduate students who worked in the office and started building relationships around campus. Four months later, she found out that she was pregnant with her first son. It had taken a long time to get pregnant so this was a special moment for Catherine and her husband. However, she remembers lamenting when she learned about the pregnancy because she had just been hired. It was an emotional situation for her. She said one of her colleagues from the Student Development Division offered congratulations and she started to cry. She debated about whether or not to return to her position, but she truly enjoyed the work that she did in career services and felt that she had much left to offer.
the department. Her supervisor at that time offered her the opportunity to return to the
position in a part-time role.

This unique opportunity came about because of the support her supervisor
demonstrated towards her staff. At the time, the Director of Career Services was a woman
in her late fifties who had worked in human resources in corporate America and raised
children of her own. However, even with supervisory support, Catherine felt extreme
pressure. It was the first time that any salaried person was offered a flexible schedule on
campus. Catherine stated:

I think there were messages that I placed upon myself because I knew this was the
very first time that a salaried person had worked half-time. I can think of other
people that came up to me to ask ‘How did you do this?’ I wanted to be a team
player so I put a lot of pressure on myself. I was on maternity leave and they
asked me to come in for an important meeting. So, I would come in (sometimes
with the baby). I made it work.

Catherine noted that she was one of only a handful of professional women at her
institution who balanced motherhood and career. She was one of the few women with
young children, but while others doubted her, she knew that her dedication to her career
would cause her to return to work. “I remember asking women in senior administrative
positions how they managed to work when their children were little. What I learned is
that none of them worked when their kids were little. They all stayed home.”

This was a moment of clarity for Catherine; though the support she felt from her
supervisor and her female colleagues was sincere, they did not really have direct
experience to relate to her unique position. She was trying to balance raising a young
family with a career that did not fit within a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. time frame. For example,
Catherine would bring work home in the evenings and work on strategic projects, resume critiques, and workshop presentations.

Catherine focused on two things while her children were infants: her career and her children. "There were times that I felt like I was not a good mom. I brought my kids sick to daycare loaded up on Tylenol or Advil. I would go to work and pray that I would not get a telephone call until the afternoon." She noted she did not have time to develop her other areas of interest such as faith, community service, and volunteerism. We discussed what events or thoughts lead to her decision to leave the profession. After her second child was born, she returned to work in the part-time position she and her former supervisor had created. There was a new Director of Career Services at the institution. Catherine went about coordinating job fairs, supervising graduate interns, and meeting with employers. Basically, she had full-time responsibilities in a part-time position with half the pay. She returned because she loved the position, not because of the money. At the same time, her husband's job was going very well and his bonuses were more than her total salary. But, his job required frequent travel.

Her husband's work schedule created a stressful environment for her family. Often Catherine had to figure out childcare so she could drive thirty minutes to the main campus for an evening presentation. Without immediate family in the area, childcare often meant a high cost for babysitting fees. Finances played a large role in the decision-making process to leave her mid-level student affairs profession. The joy and enthusiasm that Catherine once felt in her dream position was overshadowed by a personnel shift in the office: trusted colleagues left the institution and new hires changed the cultural dynamic of the workplace. In Catherine's opinion, it became a much more competitive
environment in which to work. This was an important insight because Catherine probably would have remained in her Assistant Director of Career Services position if she still felt the same enthusiasm and commitment that she had when she first received the position. When she looked back, Catherine felt that she should have been grateful for the part-time opportunity her supervisor offered her after her first son was born. However, Catherine felt this track really limited her career opportunities — something she never realized would happen when she accepted the offer. Catherine said her decision to leave was based on a combination of factors: her children, the hours and demands of the position, her husband’s increased travel schedule, and the realization that she was not going to advance in her job.

_Catherine’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out._ One of Catherine’s personal goals was to obtain the Associate Director title. A new male colleague started in the office with no experience in the field of student affairs, having spent the first five years of his professional career in engineering. He was promoted to associate director after being on staff for less than a year. This had a tremendous affect on Catherine:

> When I asked my supervisor, I was told a part-time person would never be promoted. I thought about it and it did not make sense. Doctors work part-time and get promoted. Why couldn’t I? I was still supervising graduate interns and coordinating job fairs. And I was not even getting equal pay raises to my full-time counterparts.

The stagnation of her job due to the view of part-time schedules was quite discouraging for her. As Catherine explained, she had one day that just felt like the movie _Groundhog Day_. In that movie, Bill Murray’s character repeats the same scenes over and
over. She called her first supervisor and mentor (Director of Career Services from the small private college where she worked prior to her position) about her decision to leave her position before she even consulted with her husband. Her mentor responded, “I’m surprised it took you that long to figure it out.” Catherine said that it was a relief to leave the position. She did return twice as a contract worker; this worked well because she knew it was temporary, she was more in control of her schedule, and she kept her expectations low. As Catherine noted, “the first experience was great. But, the second experience was not good because the culture of the office had changed dramatically.”

Redefinition and transition. One of the main research questions revolved around how a person who left her dream job was able to redefine herself. Catherine said she was never a person who could sit still so she has been able to use her skills and abilities in other areas. The time she previously spent in higher education has now been channeled into volunteering within the local community. She is a board member of her children’s school and volunteers for another local organization. She feels it is good for women to work outside the home. One of the things she wishes is that “my boys would know me more as a worker; not a mom. So I assume leadership positions when I can.” This recently included a year as the Cub Master for her sons’ Boy Scout Troop, in which she facilitated a monthly meeting for 85 elementary school boys and their families.

Catherine’s advice for female student affairs professionals. Catherine talked about the fact that everyone needs to have the right to at least negotiate with a supervisor about flexibility in the workplace and expect that this discussion not come with repercussions. While working full-time, Catherine enrolled in a graduate class at her institution with one of the deans from student development. Her youngest son was
admitted to the hospital and she did not get the chance to complete her class assignment.
The next day at class, she told the professor about the situation. His reply demonstrated to
Catherine that he did not feel any concern or emotion about the fact her son was ill and
that she had worked tirelessly to complete her office responsibilities. Catherine’s advice
could be summed up in three categories:

1. Family First

Because of my interaction with Dean XXXX, I realized that it wasn’t important in
the big picture. What mattered was that I was there for my son

2. Flexibility

Flexibility is so important. My husband’s job involved a lot of travel and once the
kids got into elementary school it just got out of control. I was (and I still am) the
primary caregiver.

3. Self-Advocacy

At work, I wasn’t as strong as I could have been and stood up for myself as well
as I could have for the work I did and the contributions that I made to the
department. I remember going to the Dean about my position when I did not get
promoted. He was such a force on campus and could make subtle changes – he
still is. He told me I would never be promoted because I was part-time. I had, in
essence, “mommy tracked” myself without even realizing it.

Catherine has also kept the door open to return to student affairs. She enjoyed working in
higher education – the diversity, the speakers, the people who an individual might not
normally get to rub elbows with at other institutions. However, “a big part of me says that
I want to be my own supervisor. Part of my enjoyment with contractual work is that I
could set my own schedule.” In sum, Catherine is positive about her professional outlook.
Diane

Before she opted out of her position, Diane was the Chief Student Affairs Officer at a mid-size public institution in the South. At one point in her career, she reported directly to the president. She had worked in student affairs for almost twenty years in a variety of positions from admissions, to director of financial aid, to the dean of students. Diane, a Caucasian woman in her mid-forties, holds a Ph.D. in College Student Personnel Administration. She is married and has one 13-month-old daughter.

Diane started her career with a plan and relied on mentors to support her career decisions.

I started out in Admissions, working as an Admissions Counselor at the University that I graduated from. Then began working on my Masters degree right away and then became Assistant Director of Admissions. I was the career person. I knew that I wanted to be the Chief Student Affairs Officer one day.

Inspired to pursue her advanced degree, she enrolled in the doctoral program full-time and completed the work in 3 years.

The Vice President for Student Affairs at my former institution called me up and said he had just become President of a private college in Tennessee. He wanted to know if I wanted to be the Dean of Students out there. But there was a catch. He immediately needed a Director of Financial Aid so he said that if I worked in that position for one year he would move me into the Dean of Students position. I worked as the Director of Financial Aid for one year, and then became the Dean of Students…which was like the Chief Student Affairs Officer at that institution. Her career had an upward trajectory from that point on. The turning point in her life and career occurred when she accepted the position of Chief Student Affairs Officer. Diane recalls:

As you can imagine when you are single people take advantage of that, and I was ambitious with steep career goals. Thus, I became a workaholic. They knew I was
determined, motivated, and I wanted to move up the ladder so you always get on these projects and committees. I worked evenings, weekends, and there wasn’t much else in my life. Which I loved, I truly loved it.

Diane was the type of administrator who attended all the student functions. She said that her male colleagues wouldn’t attend certain events and they were never questioned. But, students would ask her what happened if she did not make an appearance at their event. In many ways, the college students became her adopted children. They would call her at home when they needed to speak with someone. For Diane, the position was not without challenge.

I worked for an interesting President. You know, the turning point in my life, things started happening and interesting experience with the President. I thought there is more to life than this. Where you work for someone that says you got to start making value choices which go against your own values, you really start to question why you are in the position.

When her ethics were challenged, she decided to leave the institution and took what Diane described as a “lower” position at an institution closer to her family.

So I accepted an Assistant President position at a very small institution and moved there at the end of the academic year. I stepped back from the Chief Student Affairs position, but geographically closer to family. As I said earlier, everything else was put on hold because I was career focused all the way. So, it was nice to be close to family again. This was probably my late thirties. It was at this institution where I met my husband, so I got married late in life. Diane settled into her life near her family and felt blessed to meet, and later marry, her husband. He worked at the same institution in the development office. Since she was married later in life, Diane did not think that she would be able to have children. The two of them were content to continue working hard in their respective roles at the institution and within their community.
Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path. As mentioned previously, Diane was married later in life and had been very career-oriented at the start of her professional career. She often considered her students to be her “children” because she would attend their evening functions and sporting events.

I wanted to have children of my own, but wondered how do I work that into my life? It was not a problem at first because I wasn’t married. When we got married, we talked about starting a family. Of course later in life, you did not know if you can have children or not. Still... it was in the back of my mind. With my husband’s job, he worked at the foundation, and my job, which again evenings and weekends, we wondered about how we could even have a child? But, I got pregnant, and I was actually planning on going back to work. Quite frankly I did not know how I would work it out, or how I would juggle it. My job, my life was so demanding. I don’t know how women do it. I honestly do not know ....I mean...it’s just, I had 14 departments under me at one institution and then I had eight departments under me at another institution. Sometimes you had weekends with Residence Life and student discipline, weekends or evenings you got called. I think by then I was getting close to being burnt out.

Diane struggled to figure out the balance she was looking for between her career goals and her personal aspirations. Diane was not the only person to articulate the feeling of burn out in her professional life. She was the first, however, to bring up the question of “I don’t know how women do it.”

Diane’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out. When Diane found out she was pregnant, her original plan was to return to work. She did not know how she would make it work or how she would juggle it because her husband’s job required frequent travel and she worked evenings and weekends. Serendipitously, her husband applied for a development position at an institution in Colorado, which would represent an advancement in his career. He was offered the position, he accepted, and the family moved across the country to a new city. Even with all the new transitions, Diane applied for the Dean of Students position at the Colorado institution. She was one of the
finalists when she backed out of the interview process. The interview committee even offered to hold the position for a few months. Diane said it was then she realized she needed a professional break and wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. She said:

My decision was probably based on a culmination of a number of events: (1) some universities reorganizing and in the process eliminating student affairs programs; (2) a higher need student body coming to campus with emotional baggage and intrusive parents that required different work demands of student affairs professionals, and upper administration not recognizing this issue thus not supporting the student affairs programs financially and professionally in order to address these issues.

Diane’s love of student affairs was overmatched by her desire to opt out. She has adapted well to staying home and would only return to an institution of higher education for the right position.

Redefinition and transition. Throughout the interview, I had the sense that Diane was disenchanted with the direction of many senior administrators in higher education. Diane noted that even at the smaller institutions, she was one of the only higher level female administrators. A number of factors influenced her decision to stay at home, including the move to a different state. Her application for a new position helped her to identify her priorities and career burn out. Diane said that if she went back into the field of student affairs, she would be very particular about the type of position. Recently, she considered the possibility of consulting:

I noticed a trend in higher education towards cutting positions in student affairs. For instance, many Career Service Offices are privatized right now. They are not even in Student Affairs any more. So, I would offer my education and experience as a consultant to those universities. There are now companies that come into those universities and offer workshops and trainings for supervisors.
Diane’s realization that she should opt out was difficult and based on many factors. However, she would consider returning to work for the ideal situation or opportunity. Diane emphasized the importance of career and family balance.

*Diane’s advice for female student affairs professionals.* Diane noted:

> Enjoy the journey... don’t take it too seriously. Find female and male mentors. Strive for balance in your life. It will be a daily struggle, but it is important. Sometimes you get so caught up in deadlines and projects that you lose focus and balance in your life. I struggled with keeping balance in my life. We need to remember all the success that we have in our life versus all the things that we have to do or the challenges we have every day.

Diane’s advice summarizes the need to keep focus on the big picture or life values versus the day-to-day grind. Overall, Diane is very fulfilled and proud of her family and herself. During the interview, I could hear her daughter playing in the background. On occasion, we would need to stop so that Diane could hand her a toy. There have been a couple of projects at the local university on which Diane was asked to consult because of her experience and knowledge. Diane hasn’t been out of the workplace long enough for her to redefine herself. However, she has enjoyed the opportunity in her profession to “prove that it could be done,” especially when others had doubt or lost faith. She has enjoyed the ride of a busy work life, and she is now enjoying her time with her 13-month-old daughter. She is still reading and networking with her former student affairs colleagues. Diane is not sure about the next move in her professional future.

*Jessica*

Originally from the Midwest, Jessica moved to the Carolinas after getting married. She is a 30-year-old Caucasian woman with a 2-year-old and a 6-month-old
daughter. She never started her collegiate journey with a particular career goal. Jessica said:

I did not have like a set career in mind when I went to college or when I was in college. It was just sort of like, I don't know what I am going to do but ... I sort of viewed undergrad with wanting to get a general education like a liberal arts education and I see graduate school more as, you know if you want a specific field to get into so, I was not looking for ... I mean I had an idea that I wanted to do like event planning kind of things but I did not think I wanted to do that as a career my whole life. I just thought it was a good opportunity right out of undergrad but I definitely did not have it in my mind when I graduated that I would eventually be going to get my masters in higher education.

Jessica’s generalist education gave her job options, but it was not until she began professional life that she started to find her career calling. Jessica worked for a non-profit organization as the Regional Director for fundraising. Then, she took a position as the Prospect Researcher for the Development Office of a local university. While in this position, she decided to attend graduate school in higher education and administration. Jessica completed her internship in judicial affairs and they created a position for her after the internship was completed. She notes:

It wasn’t really a set position. They sort of formed a position for me at the time thinking it was something I could do until job positions opened up in the summer. It was the middle of the year so my main position was working in the Dean of Student’s Office in the Judicial Affairs area. And then I also worked within the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Office. They were just starting a development area for fund raising. So, I worked on getting that all set up, I did some research with what other schools had and started getting their key statement put together and the web site content up.

Jessica worked in this created position until her daughter was born. Jessica became interested in the field of student affairs while an undergraduate, but, working in judicial affairs was new territory for her. She truly enjoyed the ability to positively affect a student’s life.
My job was one that I would come home and think about it all night. It would wake me up at night thinking about the students. So, I had to let go of all that and decide that I wasn’t going to be thinking about those things for the next several years. In this particular area, I worked with students that are in trouble, leaving school, and changing the course of direction in their life.

While working in judicial affairs, only one person in the office had children and one other person was married. She noted that most of the employees were single. Staff members in the Dean of Student’s Office held such “crazy” hours and were constantly on-call. From her view, she saw that individuals dealt with emergencies that came up at all hours of the night and since it was a large institution, there were a lot of situations. Through her continued relations with former co-workers, she knows that some individuals have been able to manage both parenting and profession through flexibility in the workplace.

*Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path.* Jessica notes:

I’ve always just known that that’s what I would want to do when I was a parent that I would stay home. That’s just something that was important to me and when I made the decision to go to graduate school it was a little tough because I thought that most likely by the time I finished graduate school it would be the time when we would most likely be ready to have children. So it was a tough decision whether or not I should go to graduate school because is it better to not go at all, is it better to go now and quit working?

Jessica’s decision-making process of pursuing higher education was made more difficult because she understood her desire to stay at home as a mother. She did not really know if there was a whole lot to say about it and she hasn’t redefined herself beyond her role as a mother. But Jessica said she understands how once an individual got to a mid-level professional career she could become very focused on the job. She said she spent a lot of time thinking about her job because it was one that would wake her up at night. She
decided that she needed to let it all go for the next several years for the sake of her family.

Jessica’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out. Between the fact that Jessica wanted to be a stay-at-home mother and her husband’s business travel, the decision was an easy one for her family. She said it was a priority for her family to have someone stay home with the children. Even so, she recognized that it was a personal sacrifice. She noted that she has found it interesting how people don’t ask what women did for a job when they stay at home. “It is really interesting because you go from years of interesting stories to nothing. When people do ask me, it’s like a flood of conversation because I have all these stories to tell, but people just don’t think about the fact that there is more to you than being a mom.” Jessica’s decision to stay home was very personal, but also one that her family believed was best for raising children. Today, she would consider returning to work if the position fit her family’s needs.

Redefinition and transition. Jessica thinks about returning to the field of Student Affairs. They live in a university town, which she feels might make it a bit easier for her to find a position. She notes “I’m a little worried about it knowing that I will be competing for jobs against people that have been working consistently. So, I’m just hoping that people understand.” She keeps up with the industry trends through her friends in the field and reading professional journals. However, Jessica admits that she does not want to work full-time so she would like to find a flexible position that allows her to work perhaps twenty to thirty hours a week. She realizes that she might not be able to find such a position in student affairs so she may have to settle, but she was hopeful there would be opportunities.
*Jessica’s advice for female student affairs professionals.* Jessica was blessed with positive role models and strong supervisors during her career in judicial affairs. She said that her supervisors really encouraged her to come up with her own ideas and she had the freedom to make her own decisions. She received advice from her supervisor to follow her heart when making the decision to opt out of the work force. Her supervisor said that she couldn’t imagine going to school and working while having a small child “mostly because of the timing because she [the supervisor] had gone to graduate school before getting married and having children.” In Jessica’s experience, she did not know many people in judicial affairs who had children except for the Dean of Students. Jessica observed the crazy hours and being on call in the middle of the night.

I think you just have to decide what your priorities are and if your level of employment is of great importance to you. Obviously, you are making a big sacrifice to choose to stay home. I think it just comes down to a matter of priorities and everyone’s different and what is important to them. Not to say that people that do not stay home, that their children are not a priority. I think you just have to make those… are you OK with that sacrifice of your job and having your spouse or partners are the sole income provider. I don’t know I just think it’s such a personal decision because everybody has a different outlook on what’s important to them versus their career. I think in a way it is sort of a… your ego has to be strong to handle the fact that you may be competing against people that are ten years younger to work, which is difficult.

Jessica said she is reassured about the fact that another person from her former workplace now has a young son. She feels that it is important for more working parents to be in the field of judicial affairs. It is really a stressful position dealing with many emergencies and it is important for supervisors to empathize with their staff. Jessica does worry about whether or not she will be able to return to student affairs after her children are older. In order to stay involved, she has made a point of staying connected with friends who are currently in the field.
Judy was the Assistant Director of Career Services at a mid-size public urban institution in the Midwest. She was in that department for nine years and served for six months as the Interim Director. Judy is a 35-year-old Caucasian woman. She is married and has one son who is a 2-year-old and a newborn daughter.

Judy attended graduate school in a large, urban setting and started working at the same institution in which she completed her graduate school practicum. She relocated to be closer to her fiancé (now husband). Her first position was Placement Coordinator, which was an entry-level position in the Career Services Office. She was in that role from 1999 until 2003. Then, she applied for a position as an Assistant Director; she received that promotion. Although she did not start her career with a specific plan, she knew before she completed graduate school that she only wanted to work in certain parts of Student Affairs. In particular, she considered Career Services or Academic Advising to be her primary goals. This is one of the reasons her original job search after graduation took a long time.

Judy felt she found her niche in Career Services. “It was something that I felt I was good at. I’ve always had an interest in counseling but it was nice to do the type of counseling that is not emotional counseling, it was more task-oriented in helping people reach their goals.” She worked with a large staff and oversaw graduate interns, internships, and alumni relations. During her nine years in the office, she helped improve the web site, developed creative programs, and mentored new colleagues.
My director had been out for six months on medical leave so I had assumed the responsibilities as Interim Director. In that time, I felt that the staff atmosphere had improved a bit. I had a different work style and was more flexible with employees. I was working two jobs, not getting compensated for it.

Judy assumed the director position while she was expecting her first child. She said that “stuff was getting piled on so my personal life took a major toll the last five months I was in the position.” Reflecting back on the experience, Judy feels that if there had been some compensation for her efforts or a guarantee of a promotion when she returned to the office, then she might have reconsidered her decision to leave her position.

*Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path.* Judy demonstrated how career barriers combined with robust social support could result in feelings of confidence both in managing the responsibilities of being a mother and advancing vocational development. Judy has found that, while knowing opportunities to work professionally are important, having a supportive work and family environment is vital for career satisfaction.

There would be four nights in a row that my husband ate crappy pizza from down the street because I just wasn’t coming home from work. I was putting in 12- or 14- hour days the last four months of my pregnancy. It was really hard working for my boss, he had no flexibility what so ever. By the time I went on maternity leave I was burnt. He had been out for six months on medical leave. I was working two jobs, not getting compensated for it. Prior to that stuff was just getting piled on and piled on and we had the recession going on so my personal life took a major toll I would say the last five months I was in the position, because of all those factors. So while I was very sad to be leaving what I liked to do, and what I loved, I was not sad to be leaving the environment I was in.

She went on maternity leave with the intention of returning to the workplace. As Judy mentioned, she was almost the single breadwinner for the family so finances played a large part in her decision-making process. After her husband secured a different position, she felt that she needed to focus on the big picture and what would be the best
scenario for her family. It was the feeling that nothing would change in the office that lead to her decision to quit.

My boss would always joke and he would say, you know....I had an assistant director who had twins and she did not come back after she had twins. I was like ‘Uh huh...what are you saying’ and then he would always have these little smirky comments like ‘are you sure you’re coming back?’ I knew that my work environment and atmosphere and hours would not be any different than before when I came back. When I decided to leave, I knew that a lot of people on campus would be very surprised because I think they saw me as being a lifer. I guess I did not really get a feel either way. I knew that I would be missed and I knew that it would kind of be a surprise to everyone and it was still a very difficult decision for me.

Judy’s decision to opt out was made easier by the environment her boss created.

Judy’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out. Judy said she knew the work environment, atmosphere, and hours would not be any different when she returned from maternity leave. After weighing all these factors, Judy resigned from her position. Although people on campus were very surprised because they thought she would be a “lifer,” she realized that she couldn’t leave her son for twelve or fourteen hours a day. Judy not only surprised her co-workers, but also her family members with her decision.

I have two family members who have worked in higher education, one of which is my cousin who is a professor. All of them have had very high achieving careers while balancing motherhood and working. They were all pretty surprised actually when I decided not to go back to work. In fact, my aunt just asked me if I had given any thought to going back to work. I told her that I do stuff on the side like resume critiques. My husband is gone 2 days a week and at some point we would like to have another kid. I don’t want to go back to work until that second child is in pre-school and probably part-time until they are older. My immediate family is very supportive, but later my aunt told my dad that she thought I was wasting my mind.

Judy believes higher education and Student Affairs, in particular, is supportive of women overall. On the whole, employees enjoy great benefits such as vacation time and
health care. In some institutions there are child care options, community and cultural
events, sporting events, and athletic facilities. At the same time, she noted that it comes
down to the human resource rules, individual supervisors, and flexibility.

A flexible work schedule would make it easier to take time off to go to a school
field trip or a doctor’s appointment without eating up sick time or your work
hours or things like that. And doing that before you’re in the parenting role...
because I mean even if you’re not a parent, it’s nice to have those flexibility of
hours to do things.

Finances also became a crucial part of her decision-making process.

Before I was in the Assistant Director role, we crunched numbers and financially
it did not make sense for me to go back to work. After you took away my
commute, dry cleaning, and daycare costs, I think I would have been making three
thousand dollars a year after taxes. That just isn’t worth it. So, at that point we
definitely said it does not even make financial sense to do it. After I was in the
assistant director position, it still would have been better, but for us economically
I think it was under ten thousand dollars.

Being a stay-at-home mother has been difficult for Judy. Her husband was
recently promoted and the family moved to a new city in the same state. Judy mentioned
that she does not feel as if she has much self worth if she introduces herself as only
staying home with her son. She says “I stay home with my son, but I also do this on the
side.” But, she was quick to say that the relocation was fantastic for her family.

Professionally, Judy said she already had a lot of contacts for growing a consulting
business when she is ready to go back to work. The downside is that her options for
working in higher education are much more limited in her new city than they would be in
her former location because there are fewer schools.

Redefinition and transition. Ultimately, Judy would much prefer being in a higher
educational setting than working as a consultant when she returns to work full time. Yet,
she couldn’t be certain of her future plans – either personal or professional. Her husband
was just relocated (again) to another city so she had to pack up the house they purchased recently to move the family by the calendar year. She anticipated her next move might be to own her own business, and she hinted it might be in the field of resume writing or career coaching. Judy spent many years helping students and alumni with job searches, networking, and related skills that they will be able to use over the course of their careers. She also feels that she had been a helpful resource for clients in defining and pursuing their career goals. She also had the opportunity to develop and implement new programs that are still being utilized by former workplaces and are hopefully still informative for their clients. In addition, she felt she had enhanced the workplace for fellow colleagues through collaboration, mentoring, and teaching. All of these life accomplishments are important points for Judy to consider when redefining herself after her mid-level student affairs position.

_Judy’s advice for female student affairs professionals._ Judy said, “Whether it’s student affairs or not, the big push for anyone is flexibility in the workplace.” It was interesting to listen to Judy’s career decision-making process because she really would have stayed in her position if there had been more flexibility in the workplace. She said:

No one wants to cut a position because if they cut the position they lose the funding for it. And so I think, and I totally understand wanting to keep that position, but I think it would be better rather than doing a line item per position, to get a set amount of money for all the salaries in an office, period. And then they can fill the slots like they want to. If I could have job shared, I probably would have stayed on part time because I loved what I did.

Judy’s story further illustrates the importance of having a flexible work environment.

She recently had her second child and is now experiencing life with multiple children.
Carol

Carol is a 37-year-old Caucasian female. She has been married for four years and has one biological son. She grew up in an urban setting and started working retail at the age of sixteen. She worked in retail management and human resources prior to her position in Career Services. Carol started a Master of Education degree, but she did not complete it. Carol never envisioned a career in student affairs. She thought she would eventually move to New York City and work in the fashion industry as a major buyer for a retail corporation.

You know if someone had asked me when I graduated from college where did I see myself in five years, my plan was to be a buyer in New York and go to design school. Working for Saks in New York… that was my dream. I mean I still work for Saks but never made it to New York. I did not have a career plan when I graduated from college. I mean I did but it did not work out that way.

She applied for a career services position at a regional public university located in an urban setting. The reason she made the switch from corporate America to higher education was because the institution would pay for her to finish her Master’s degree in education. She was very interested in moving forward in her career and had always thought that teaching would be a wonderful profession since the work schedule fit an academic calendar. The position she was offered involved employer outreach for the business school. Her responsibilities included employee development, resume building, and helping students with the job search. The position was very sales-oriented because it involved employer outreach and bringing companies onto campus to interview students. She was in that position for a year and a half before she left. When asked what events or
thoughts lead to her decision to opt out, Carol replied that there was a lack of flexibility and no part-time option at her institution. She said:

You know, I loved being on campus. I mean there is just energy about college kids. I shouldn’t even say kids... adults. I just really enjoyed it. I loved everyone I worked with and the atmosphere of being on campus and helping students. You know kind of pointing people in the right direction. But, my supervisor was not flexible with the work schedule. I was leaving the house at 7 a.m. and not getting home until 6 p.m. at night. It would have been too long of a day for an infant. So, I had to make a decision. I always wanted to be at home. My sister was a stay-at-home mom and my mother was a stay at home mom. I always knew I had a part-time retail position to fall back on and I figured that if I did not like it I could always look for a job again. But, I love being home.

Flexibility in the work environment is paramount to retaining new mothers. When there is no flexibility in the workplace, and an individual already harbors a desire to be a stay-at-home mom, the decision-making process is made much easier for the mother.

Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path. In Carol's situation, she felt really discouraged by her supervisor. When asked about the institutional support available, Carol noted there was not any flexibility in the workplace. The institution she worked at only offered a flexible schedule in the summer, which included shortening the lunch breaks to a half hour so that staff members could leave at 4:30 p.m. There was a daycare on campus. But staff members did not have any priority and there was an extensive waiting list. Carol noted that her supervisor:

...was really hard on me the last few months of my pregnancy... really hard. I mean I came home crying and stuff and it was to the point where I did not even stay to get my maternity leave. I left a month before my due date because I felt that he was treating me unfairly. I did an exit interview with Human Resources, but to my knowledge nothing happened.
Carol’s boss created an uncomfortable work atmosphere and this made her decision to opt-out easier. Because an office colleague had recently left her position to stay home with her newborn child, Carol felt that her supervisor’s attitude was directly related to her pregnancy.

*Carol’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out.* Carol always knew that in her marriage, she would be the one who assumed all child care and household chores. She noted:

My husband would not stay home so it would have to be me. I do think that that is the perception because it’s a fact. At certain levels...I mean I guess it depends if the woman’s got a more senior level than the man, then maybe the man would stay home. But with my family and my friends it was always the woman who had to have that responsibility.

The traditional stereotype that the woman stays home with the children played a significant role in Carol’s decision to opt out. Carol recognized the challenges that individuals face when they opt out of the work force. She was recently drafting a resume for her sister who has been a stay at home mother for eight years and wondered how she was going to compete with other people in her field. Yet, she knows that there is not a one size fits all answer for everyone. Carol said, “Each person has to kind of work through their own desires because you can’t say all women should stay home with their kids or all women should work full-time.” The lack of flexibility in the workplace and unwelcoming attitude from her supervisor led Carol to opt out of her position. However, she also based her decision on the traditional view of the woman staying at home. Carol has considered returning to the field. Again, it seemed that it would depend on whether or not she would be able to find a position that allowed her the flexibility to put her family first.
Redefinition and transition. The decision to return to the field of student affairs would be based on a number of factors. In particular, finances would play a role in that decision-making process. Carol said she would need to look at daycare costs versus how much she would be making in her position. She said:

My sister-in-law has to work because her husband’s position does not offer insurance coverage. So she works full time to get insurance and her son attends a home-based daycare which does not offer many learning opportunities. She would like to put him in a different environment because he isn’t really thriving as much as my son. But, she can’t afford a fancy learning center for children. It’s unfortunate for them because they have to put him into a program they can afford but not the best one.

Carol’s role has been redefined from professional career woman to mother. Her desire to return to the field of student affairs is weighed against her desire for the best learning environment for her child.

Carol’s advice for female student affairs professionals. Carol’s advice is based on the fact that no one can predict what the future holds:

The thing is that I would never want... you don’t know when you’re going to meet that person or when you are going to start a family. It might just happen on you so you can’t really limit your career based on time (like in five years I will be married and in seven years I will start a family). I thought I was going to be married to a guy I went to college with and I did not end up getting married until I was 33 years old. When my husband and I first started trying to start a family, it took us six months to get pregnant. I would hate to plan my career around getting married and having a baby and then not have things work out as planned. You have to go after your career goals and what you want to do. I don’t think you can plan your future career around “what ifs.”

Currently, Carol works part-time as a sales associate for the same retail store she worked at when she was a teenager. She admits that she would love to work outside the house more, but says it is too hard because she has to consider and incorporate other people’s schedules.
I’ll tell you this much… I hate not feeling like I am contributing financially to my family. The reason that I like to work as a sales associate is that I want to feel that I’m contributing. If I pay for my own haircuts and clothes – even if it is stuff I don’t really need – I feel that I am allowed because it is my own money. Like, I wanted to buy my son a little outfit that I wouldn’t normally purchase because it’s way too much money to spend on kids’ clothes, but I contributed towards it. You get rewarded because my son is developing and I know that I am the one who is teaching him. But, my husband gets a raise, he gets reviewed at work, he gets a watch for his ten years of service at his company. I don’t get things like verbal compliments from my husband or son. The hugs and kisses are good, but I do miss the external rewards.

Carol points out the importance of extrinsic rewards in working outside the home, though she did joke about the fact that she was working in her old high school position. She values both the financial and the emotional benefits of working and providing for her family. Carol is continuing her search to redefine herself after life in higher education.

Beth

Beth is a Caucasian woman in her mid-fifties. She worked as the Director for Parent and Alumni Relations for a small, private Catholic college in the Midwest for six years. She started working at the age of thirteen when her father passed away and she needed to help support her family. She worked as a receptionist at a doctor’s office and eventually moved into a sales position for a furniture company. She did not attend college in the “traditional sense,” but started taking night classes in her early twenties. She has been married for over 25 years and has three children. Beth has a 15-year-old daughter and twin boys who are ten years old.

Her connection to the small, private college where she worked started when her husband suggested that she quit working her sales position and return to school as a full-
time student. At the time, they did not have any children and could afford to live on one person’s salary. She immediately loved the energy of the campus. Although she was about ten years older than her classmates, she loved being part of the scholarly community and listening to their ideas and insights. After graduating with her bachelor’s degree, she left the university environment and took a position as the Assistant Buyer for a local clothing company.

Beth remained connected to the institution through her service on the Board of Directors. When the Director of Parent and Alumni Relations position opened, she applied and was offered the position. In that role, she motivated alumni to become more involved in the college. Beth started regional chapters and recruited prospective students from across the country. She also identified people in the community who were Catholic to raise money for the institution. Beth created a Parent Handbook which is still being used on the campus and served on seven committees for the Alumni Board.

Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path. Beth maintained an extremely positive and futuristic attitude toward goal-setting. She used a quote from her sister-in-law to define self-efficacy:

My sister in law always used to say "If you expect it...it will happen." That and personal goals are what drives me forward to my dreams.

Beth has a strong view that positive thinking is what leads to achieving personal goals. In addition, she carefully assesses her environment before making decisions. Her Vice President of Development was also a wife and mother, however, she had stayed at home when her children were young. Beth realized quickly that she did not have many allies in her office for balancing work and family. Although it was manageable when she had her
first child, she found it more difficult after the twin boys were born. In particular, childcare for three children grew to be increasingly more difficult to afford on her salary. She was recruited to work in the Development Office of a large Health Care Organization, but realized that it was not a good fit for her personality. She stayed in the position at the health career organization for less than one year. Although she was offered more money and benefits at the organization, the flexibility and work-life balance was not as she had been lead to believe during the interview process. She was working sixty hour work-weeks and found the stress of balancing work and family to be overwhelming.

Beth’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out. Beth talked about the fact that she feels it is so important to be at home for her children when they return from school because it is during the afternoon that they want to talk about the events of their day. Beth noted the increase in the scope and complexity of her pre-teen children’s needs – primarily as they related to academics and social development – played a role in her career interruption. Beth’s decision to opt out was centered around being home for her children. This consideration was a key factor when she considered a return to the workforce, though ultimately she did not receive the position for which she applied.

Redefinition and transition. Eventually, Beth started her own business venture with a friend. They work with a nationally-renowned clothing line to bring high-end products to her community. She has built ongoing relationships with more than 150 clients which drove her business to be placed in the top twenty percent of the country with an average of approximately $140,000.00 to $185,000.00 in personal sales on an annual basis. In this position, she makes more money working fifteen to twenty hours per week than she did as the Director of Parent and Alumni Relations. Beth is not sure what
she will do in the future. She recently applied for a position at the same institution working with the Emeritus program, but she was not granted an interview. Unable to secure a position back in the field of student affairs, Beth found a position as the Director of Development for a non-profit organization in her city. She would like to get back into the field of student affairs because her family is looking towards the future and how to finance three children in college.

_Beth’s advice for female student affairs professionals._ Beth felt her children are happier and better-adjusted for the time she has spent as a stay at home mother.

If you can afford it economically, I would encourage you to stay home when your kids are young. And, it only gets more complicated as they get older.

Beth has strong feelings towards staying at home. She said her children talked with her more, now that she is at home, because they typically shared stories directly after school in the afternoon. She also has realized that her pre-teen daughter is facing many challenges that come with this period of life for young girls. However, she understands it is a personal decision that is largely driven by a family’s financial situation.

_Amy_

Amy is a 40-year-old mother of two children, a 12-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son. Both her undergraduate and graduate degrees are from the same institution. Her master’s degree is in College Student Personnel Administration. Amy left her full-time position in student affairs to raise her children. Amy said that she works part-time at the nursery school within her children’s school:

…more for the connected feeling, being needed and liking to help out because it is not a position that utilizes my skills and degrees. Definitely a rewarding job that
keeps me busy and has filled that professional void that I don’t have any more working full-time at a college campus.

**Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career paths.** Prior to her current position, Amy worked in many fields of student affairs. When she was pregnant with her first child, Amy was the Assistant Director of Greek Life.

Working the crazy Student Affairs hours that you work, weekends, weeknights, early mornings, you know, retreats and all that kind of stuff. That was doable without kids even as a young married couple because I had my husband who was a fundraiser so he lived and breathed Student Affairs and Higher Education as well. We were both at the same institution. We worked late and commuted together which was great.

Amy left her position when she was the Assistant Director of Campus Activities. The title had changed, but her position was still heavily involved in Greek life. She oversaw all the sororities, buildings, facilities, leadership development, and programming.

**Amy’s thoughts on the decision-making process for opting out.** When asked about the decision-making process, she replied:

I loved my job and the people I worked with. I loved the campus as a graduate and an undergraduate. On that campus, I knew the system really well. I knew the people, I knew who to call when there was a problem, and it was a good fit. I was content. My salary had gone up; they continued to add things to my plate. As you know, in Student Affairs, there are tons of committees and extra special projects for the President and when they tap into someone who was committed and dedicated and knowledgeable my plate was overflowing with opportunities. I felt as if I was growing professionally even though I was not interviewing. I did not want to leave and go take an upward move somewhere else. I was happy where I was and they were continuing to allow me to grow and to develop, sending me to conferences.
When she discovered that she was pregnant, everyone was very happy. It was a very exciting time in their lives and her personal goals were being defined by her family dynamics. The workplace, however, was not without issue. There was no negativity, but flexible work options were not available at that time. Amy relayed a conversation with her supervisor:

It was very emotional, I was crying. Myers Briggs comes up even now when I think about it. She is a huge T and I am a huge F. We had a great relationship. We had been friends before she was my boss. She was a wonderful boss, I love her now, and I’m still friends with her. She is a mother of three now and works a quarter of what she did before. The system now allows her to do that and she said, Amy, you should have pushed me harder. So it was hard. She basically said we can’t do it. But at the time I quit my job I did not want to leave. I wanted her to say yes, we’ll let you telecommute 3 days a week and work 2 days a week. It just did not happen.

Amy and her husband made the decision that she would stay home to be with their young family. Because she loved her position, this wasn’t a simple decision. Yet, Amy felt that she did not have any other option because her work schedule was not flexible. The lack of a flexible work schedule drove Amy from her career, but in retrospect, it has been very positive for her to step out of the student affairs world. Amy’s reasons for that positivity are described below.

Redefinition and transition. In response to her own and her family’s expectations, Amy’s involvement in mothering and in other aspects of the traditional role intensified greatly once she was a stay-at-home mom. She said that they live in a great area for raising families and having children and she thoroughly enjoys the whole aspect of domesticity. It has kept her busy and has filled that professional void created when she left full-time work at a college campus.
Amy’s advice to female student affairs professionals. Amy believes it is important to find supervisors who understand and relate to the position of working parent.

My boss now has three children and she has the best possible, of all possible worlds. She works a totally flexible schedule and still has maintained her salary. She’s a huge asset to the University because of her institutional knowledge but she’s been able to move on. I would say just try it! The opportunities are there for you to try and juggle those. I do see the stresses on those women who are trying to raise a family and be the best mom and wife possible and women who are trying to be the best professional possible. That’s hard on a woman to feel like you do neither one well and beat yourself up about it. My advice to them when I talk to them in the leadership class is to go for it. Try it! It’s OK to work part-time and ask for extended time off to raise a child.

Amy has remained friends with her many colleagues at her former institution. She kept her networking lines open and has stayed active in the community through her work in Junior League. Life is “very chaotic” for Amy, but she enjoys every moment.

Krista

Krista worked as the Associate Dean of Students for a small, private, religiously-affiliated college in the Midwest. Prior to her role in the Dean of Student’s Office, she was an Area Coordinator for the Department of Residence Life. Former students indicated that she was a wonderful woman who demonstrated great character, intellect, and excitement. She holds a Master’s degree in Counseling. Krista is now a stay-at-home mom, which she described as “a change from the world of Student Development Administration.” Krista has two boys. Her husband is a teacher and they live in a small town in the Midwest.

Krista did not always work in student affairs. She completed her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and then worked on her master’s degree with the intent to
work in church ministry. She wasn’t offered a position in this area, but someone at her graduate school suggested she explore a Residence Life position opening at a small Christian college.

I went to a Christian university in Canada. Originally, I started out thinking I wanted to be a doctor. I realized that I wasn’t really enjoying the sciences and I spent a lot of time talking to people and listening to their problems. So I went into Psychology. I actually applied to be a Resident Assistant, but I did not get the position, which is ironic later on. I got my BA in Psychology, and my Master’s degree in Counseling. I went and got my Master’s in Counseling Psychology and while I was doing my internship I did not enjoy doing therapy. Someone suggested I also apply as a Resident Director and I just fell in love with the campus.

Although her only previous experience was being an RA in graduate school, Krista was offered the position. Working in student affairs became a “family business” for Krista and her husband. Her husband worked as an Admissions Counselor before returning to college to obtain a teaching degree. They both became involved in campus activities and led mission trips to an orphanage in Mexico. Krista worked approximately seventy hours a week in her role of student development and she felt that there was always way too much to do.

I did not have time to devote to my personal life when I was in my position. When I did, I just tried to have a marriage. I think that I felt if I did devote time to my personal life I would get in trouble in a way.

Krista said she wished that she had spent more time outside of her office doing professional reading without answering her e-mails or talking to her staff. In other words, Krista wished she had taken more time for herself instead of developing the habit of always being accessible for colleagues and students to reach her. Her work and life boundaries became blurred. She had her first son while she was in the position. However, her work commitments weren’t the reason she left her position. Her supervisor, in fact,
permitted her to work from home one day a week which provided for some flexibility with her first child. Krista left her position when her husband found a new job in another town. This provided her a clean break and an opportunity to work on setting new boundaries for future employment opportunities.

*Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path.* Having one parent stay home with their children was a value that Krista and her husband prioritized.

The main thing that I value is that a parent will be home primary with our kids. So, I’m blessed with a pretty modern husband...I mean he stayed at home for almost 2 years. It just seemed like the right decision. It was my turn to stay home.

This choice is what determined that Krista would leave her position.

My husband had worked as an admissions counselor, but he decided to return to school to obtain his teaching degree. We were trying to decide what to do and I had decided that I had a career; you know I’m not having a career, but I had done my career and it was time for [my husband] to do his.

Teaching positions were extremely difficult to find so they had to expand their geographical region. Her husband found a position on the opposite side of the state and they moved six months later.

*Krista’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out.* Krista emphasized that it was important to discuss what is best for a woman and her family. Know what she is giving up and consider how this will affect her as a person. On the whole, Krista did not miss the crisis management, politics, and long hours. She said:

The higher positions like Vice President and President were primarily men. I would say unintentionally for the most part, there is a men’s club. That’s the way it is, you know. Like they understand each other, they respond more in a male way, they do things that are more oriented to their interests and talk about things. I think that I felt that, especially from some of the older gentlemen at my institution. They would talk a lot about my age like you probably don’t
understand this television show, Krista, or you probably don’t remember this song.

Krista said that she missed the student interactions and supervising a group of staff members that were really dedicated to making a difference on campus.

   I really loved working with new professionals. I really loved it. You either love that or hate that about the job. I liked building my staff; I liked seeing my staff interact with each other. I think I liked seeing the positive outcomes out of discipline. I liked knowing I was making an impact on policy and on the way things would be done in the future.

Krista demonstrated in her interview that when a woman leaves her position she needs to consider all aspects of her thought process because when she makes the decision to opt-out, the part of her career that she really enjoyed remains vividly in her mind.

   Redefinition and transition. If she had stayed in the field, Krista thought she would eventually become a Vice President for Student Development. She enjoyed going to conferences and being a mentor herself for younger generations of student affairs professionals. She worries that if she keeps staying out of the profession, no one will remember her and it would be harder to get back into the field. She said:

   People wonder why you stayed out so long. When I hired people it was always something we talked about... why that gap? I don’t know what is going on with college students now... culturally. They are different every year, especially with technology and everything. I feel out of it, culture wise, like the clothing style and lingo. I think that I don’t have my hand on the pulse anymore.

Krista did not think she would return to the field of student affairs. She said she wanted to pursue something on the artistic side of her personality. She currently is painting a huge mural at her husband’s school and has some home business ideas in the works.

   Krista’s advice to female student affairs professionals. Krista emphasized the importance of getting to know the institution’s upper administration.
I would encourage people to go talk to the very highest level of administration to find out what their feelings are on family and to not be afraid of talking to someone at that level and to be known at that level. I think that was something really positive that I did. I did not say why don’t you want me to stay home 1 day a week? I did not go into that... I just got to know administrators and made them see who I was in my position. To this day, I was well respected by them and so I had less fear from the other levels that were really more influential with me. I did not fear them as much because the President knew me, you know. Be known... that would be my advice.

Krista addresses the importance of understanding at the highest levels what opportunities exist to have a flexible work environment.

Christy

Christy was the Director of Greek Affairs at a small, private institution in the Midwest. She left that position two years ago. Christy is a 38-year-old Caucasian female. Both her undergraduate and graduate degrees were obtained from the same institution. She is married with three children, all girls ranging in age from fourteen months to five years old.

Her experience in the student affairs profession started with her involvement as an undergraduate student. Throughout her career, Christy worked in Residence Life, Greek Life, Student Life/Programming, and Admissions. Her master’s degree is in counseling because she wanted a degree that would allow her to work in a variety of places. However, she was not able to find a private counseling position without going further in her degree to complete the doctorate. A mentor suggested that she look at college student personal administration. As mentioned previously, she was very active in student affairs as an undergraduate student and learned that she could create a career path for herself in this field.
After working at a few small colleges, she settled at the small, private institution where she was voted outstanding area coordinator by the Association of Fraternity Advisors. She was very active in professional associations and traveled to national and regional conferences for professional development and networking opportunities. When asked about her experience, she replied:

My first two years, I did not have children. I was not married. So, evening and weekend meetings did not seem like a big deal to me. I think I had a lot of energy and enthusiasm that I poured into the residence hall position. Once I got married, my husband and I realized we were tired of living in university housing. I applied for the program coordinator position. I would commit two nights a week on campus for concerts and comedians.

Christy’s life became more hectic when they had their first child. She was still working as the Director of Greek Affairs and tried to juggle her full-time position with a young child.

*Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path.* Christy’s personal and professional identity was wrapped into her role as the Director of Greek Affairs. She was quite involved in her professional associations and won awards as a mid-level professional. However, her job was not without its conflicts.

At XXXX College, I was also commuting. So many of my co-workers lived close to campus so they were able to get home for dinner and return for that 8:00 p.m. concert. But, I was commuting a distance of 35 miles so if I had an evening meeting I was there for the long haul. And, I was trying to make a good impression. It became really difficult when I had my first daughter because I would have to leave the office at 4:30 p.m. to pick her up on time from day care.

Balancing career and family was manageable except for the fact Christy had a long commute and a position on campus that often involved late night events. She said she tried to leave the office every day at 4:30 PM to make sure she picked up her
daughter by 5:30 PM but she often had a student walk into her office just as she was preparing to leave.

*Christy’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out.* Christy said she was able to balance her personal and professional roles because she had an “amazing supervisor” and supportive colleagues. Recently, she and her husband relocated due to a change in his career. She noted:

I applied for a position at the university in our new town. It was an eye-opening experience for me. I had the tiniest glimpse of what it would look like when I re-entered the work force during the interview process. I have only been out for two years, but I feel like it has been twenty. One of my interviewers was talking about Facebook and looked at me and said ‘Oh, you might not know what that is.’ Of course I know what Facebook is! But, the terms they used – and I was pretty well respected in my field – I think there was a big reality check.

Christy has a desire to potentially return to a higher education environment, but her example demonstrates how quickly the professional world changes.

*Redefinition and transition.* Christy said that in terms of time, her focus is on her family. She and her husband made the conscious decision that their best option involved her staying home with the kids. She said:

My personal fulfillment has taken the back burner – I still find time to do things that I like to do like read books, exercise, scrapbook, etc. But, my focus is on my family. I hate to say that I am the typical “soccer mom” because I do get a lot of energy and fulfillment from my role. I find time here and there to do things for myself. But, I drive my kids to school every day, make cupcakes, and volunteer for the PTA. I never really thought I wanted to stay home and I was pretty content with day care. But, I enjoy my role.

Christy said that if she did return to work in higher education, she would like to find a flexible position, perhaps even a part-time opportunity.
Christy’s advice for female student affairs professionals. Christy emphasized that she should have pushed for a more equitable distribution of household responsibilities between her husband and herself.

The vast burden of dropping off and picking up fell onto my shoulders and if I did it over again, I would ask my husband to divide the responsibilities more equally. It just did not work out at the time. We did not have good strategies. Once I had children, I stopped going to professional development programs because I did not want to be away from home and leave them. Of course, some people might have made different decisions.

Christy is not certain about her future plans. She aspires to return to the field of student affairs, perhaps in a part-time counseling position. However, Christy believes she will not return to the workplace in any capacity until her children are at least a few years older. She is keeping her options open because there are not a lot of institutions of higher education near her home. She is trying to build her network of professional connections. During the middle of this research, Christy applied for another position at a small, private institution. Although she was not offered an interview, Christy remains optimistic about future professional opportunities. On the personal side, she would like to join an exercise facility or another group or activity to meet people in her new neighborhood.

Brittney

Brittney is a former admissions counselor, residence life staff member, and program coordinator for student activities. She is also a wife and mother of four children. She and her husband made the decision to home-school their children when their oldest son was entering kindergarten. In this role, she is quite the hands-on mom and educator; however, she still keeps her higher education ties through teaching a first-year student
class every fall semester and occasionally teaching a psychology class in the adult learner program of a small, private Christian institution in her area. She has her Bachelor of Arts degree from a small, private institution in the Midwest and a Master’s degree from a similar institution. Brittney worked in higher education for five years before leaving her full-time position to stay at home with her first child.

Brittney said that her career plan evolved because of the relationships she built while an undergraduate student with people in the college administration. These relationships affirmed her skills in this field.

[I was] given more and more responsibility and creating positions for me to take on like supervision of students. I definitely felt trusted and I learned a lot. I would speak in front of hundreds of people as a 22-year-old at a very well respected Christian College and just be like... I have no right doing this. But, I did it and I learned and I tried... the thrill of that was wonderful for me. I would read Arthur Holmes and even in my free time I wanted to understand higher education and study God’s world in all of its many facets.

During our conversation, I was struck by the passion expressed by Brittney. At one point, she said “I’m burning inside, I am so amazed at this world. Education is amazing... I feel like I’ve had that fire and been excited by these things for many years.” Although she did not start her career with a plan, she was most certainly an organized and spiritual person.

Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path. Brittney demonstrated a very positive outlook toward the decision-making process of opting out. This is quite typical for people with high self-efficacy. They often have feelings of serenity towards approaching difficult tasks and activities.

I think the fact I quit my position was disappointing to my colleagues, but my boss at the time was a friend and very supportive. They actually had to ask me to stay on longer than I had wanted to and I said no. At the time, I thought that was the right answer. Looking back, I know that that was a hard pill to swallow because I left mid-year. Otherwise I think they were supportive and understood.
At XXX, I felt encouraged there as a female to take on more roles. I felt much support there...equally so then when I decided to leave.

Her career path progressed to the Assistant Director of Admissions before she decided to opt out of her career.

**Brittney's thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out.** Brittney’s traditional upbringing helped her decision-making process to opt out:

I am sure my upbringing has influenced my ideas, and my mom who maybe worked two years out of the house after I was in college. I have always had that in my mind that that would be part of my mothering... that I would be home with my kids. Obviously, we were completely shocked when I got pregnant and I think it took us a while to stop choking over all of it. Once we did, it was something that we were both on the same page with. We did not want to pay someone else nor have our kids be with other people for much of the day. I don’t think there was a lot of discussion because we already operated on those assumptions. When the opportunity to work part-time on campus arrived, we knew that my husband could care for our son because his residence hall position was flexible. So, that was a real easy transition for us. My responsibility changed from being someone who brought in money to being someone who would raise our kids. The priority changed then and we did not buy anything unless it was super cheap and on sale, no going out to eat. We gave up a lot of things financially so that we could have more time with our kids.

Brittney recognizes that her decision to leave was a “hard pill to swallow” for her supervisors. But, they were supportive and understood the decision. She said they had a number of female administrators to take on more responsibility which helped in her decision.

**Redefinition and transition.** Brittney and her family have really made an effort to live a natural life full of locally grown produce, home schooling, and quiet. They have downsized material good such as dinners and movies out in exchange for living on one income. Speaking with Brittney, I could tell that this was a passion of her life journey. She did not speak of her efforts in a condescending way; it was just the path that her
family has chosen because they did not want to be a part of the American dream. They wanted to pursue their own dream of a simple life.

*Brittney's advice to female student affairs professionals.* Brittney’s interview constantly reminded me of the SCCT fundamentals. Beliefs of personal competence help determine how much effort people will expend on an activity and how resilient they will prove in the face of adverse situations—the higher the sense of efficacy, the greater the effort and resilience.

The field is such a rich one and so my advice would be to try to get as much experience as you can in different areas because there are a lot of different facets to a university and a liberal arts education. So, try and be in one department and then maybe work in another one to kind of build your perspective.

Brittney pointed out the benefit of having perspective. She said that one of the best ways to better understand how a university works is to explore the various areas of an institution and consider more than one work experience. It is this same perspective that is helpful in the career decision making process because development occurs during the lifetime of an individual. Brittney and the other ten women whose stories were shared in this section opted out of their mid-level position and have not returned to the field of student affairs. The next section, however, chronicles the other research participants who opted out and returned to the student affairs profession.

**Women Who Opted Out and Returned to Student Affairs**

Now, let us turn to the stories of the seven women in my study who re-entered the field of student affairs in higher education.
Betty

Betty is a Caucasian woman in her mid-fifties with two sons. Her story is the first I will tell regarding the women in my study who left student affairs, but did return after a few years. She graduated from a small private college with a sociology major. She later realized an interest and love for teenagers and returned to complete the requirements for an education degree. Having taught in middle schools in New Jersey, New York, and Philadelphia, she also taught in the software training division of a large Fortune 500 company. She earned a Master of Arts in Counseling. In addition, Betty operated her own business, Classy Cakes, before returning to higher education as the computer lab manager. Betty transferred to the Career Development office a few years later where she serves as a career counselor and the manager of the Career Resource Center.

One of the reasons that Betty moved around so much is that she is married to a college professor and has spent much of her professional career relocating around the country while her husband advanced in his profession. Eventually, they landed at a college town in the Midwest where he is now a tenured professor. Currently, she works as the assistant director for career services at the same institution where her husband is a tenured professor. When asked about her career plan, she said:

I did not really plan on having a career. I planned on getting married and having kids and staying home. But, I couldn't get pregnant. I just kept right on working on my professional career [at the time as a corporate trainer]. In retrospect, that was a good thing to do because I had a solid work base for when I wanted to return to work after staying home with my boys. After eight years of trying to conceive, we finally got pregnant. At that time, it was full-time with travel or nothing. A part-time position was not an option so I quit working. I did learn [when I stayed home] that I needed to do something. I did not like just staying home and doing crafts. So, I started my own cake decorating business.
Betty understood her desire to have both a career and be a stay-at-home mom. She managed to make it work by finding a profession that provided the opportunity to do both.

*Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path.* Betty was another participant who demonstrated that confidence matters in outcome expectations:

Thinking back to when I started my career journey, I was always confident that I would succeed. Directly out of college, my goal was to become a social worker. It wasn’t until I actually worked at the Juvenile Detention Center that I realized it wasn’t a good career fit for me. Then, I had to redefine my goals. I stayed in the “social” category of teaching social services, and eventually student affairs.

The lack of flexibility in the workplace and the travel demands of her position played a large role in the decision-making process to quit her professional career. However, Betty’s perception of her ability to reach her life goal was halted when she became a stay-at-home mom. This was one of the reasons that she created her home-based business. Betty developed her own cake decorating business and completed orders for neighbors and local companies. She said: “I started my cake business because I was looking at the cake for a neighborhood party and thought ‘I can do that.’ So, I went home, researched my options, and started my cake business.”

When Betty moved to the Midwest, she looked for a part-time position to supplement their income. Through networking, she found a position managing the computer lab at her husband’s college. Three years later, she was hired into the Career Development Office. For Betty, the transition back into the workplace was a good one because she was able to leave the office at 3:30 PM every day to meet her children after school. Her supervisor at that time was very accommodating and willing to be flexible.
with Betty’s schedule, knowing that she would often return to campus for late-night presentations in the residence halls.

Betty’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out. The realities of stay-at-home mother became crystal clear for Betty after a few months:

It was difficult to be a stay-at-home mom because I saw how it was a conversation stopper at social events. I knew that it was the right decision for my family because the commute time and lack of flexibility in the workplace. However, it helped that I quickly adapted to my new situation and redefined my outcome expectations.

While her boys were still in high school and college, she helped her mother to care for her father who was ill. He recently passed away. Now that both her children are close to graduation, Betty has been contemplating the next stage of her career journey and her role in the “sandwich generation.” Recently, her position has undergone many changes within her department; this is causing her to analyze whether or not she should continue to work in the student affairs field. The flexibility she has had for thirteen years has been removed. Her time is now tracked and she needs to be accountable for keeping her counseling appointment schedule at a certain percentage.

Redefinition and transition. Betty’s transitions were often a result of the upward trajectory of her husband’s career. She left her first career to be near him before they were married. After they were married, they moved to the East Coast so he could work on his doctoral degree. They lived in two states while he worked in business and academia. They eventually moved back to the Midwest to be closer to family. In her adult life she was often defined as Frank’s wife or John’s mother. It wasn’t until that final move to her hometown that she started building her own career. As mentioned previously, it was a
career guided by the help of a friend inside the college. Betty was grateful for those years of reflection because it helped her discover her inner self and strength.

Betty’s advice to female student affairs professionals. Betty indicated that it is important for a woman to think about where she sees herself in the future and look at her priorities and what she values in her life. She continued, “Is it your faith, your family, or your career?” Regardless of an individual’s response, she maintained that it is important to:

Stay connected and current in your profession through continued membership in professional associations. Volunteer in your local community and stay active because it is important to keep up with trends.

Betty pointed out two positive ways to keep current on student affairs: membership in professional associations and volunteerism. She always made a point of reading professional journals when she was a stay-at-home mother and volunteered in her community with a non-profit agency that empowers economically underdeveloped women toward self-sufficiency.

Libby

Libby works in the Career Development Office at a university in the Midwest. She is married and has two girls. Libby attended college with the desire to be a high school teacher. She then completed her master’s degree in counseling, through which she interned in the career services office. She worked in the public and private school systems for a number of years before opting to stay home with her two young girls. Her positions varied, encompassing academic advising, residence life, and career development. In the last year, Libby returned to the workforce when she accepted a
position as a Career Services Coordinator for a private university focused on business, health and technical careers. One of the primary reasons that Libby returned to the workplace was so her husband could continue his doctoral work. He is now the primary caregiver for their two girls.

Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path. When I asked about the role that outcome expectations played in her career journey, Libby responded, “My career journey, I feel like it’s been really, you know, all over the map. . .” Although many of her careers have been in the student services area, she hasn’t had an upward career trajectory in any particular area. That said, she has had a rich array of work experiences. Libby started out as many people do in student affairs – as a resident director. She worked for the Department of Residence Life for a small, private institution for two years. She then worked for a different institution as an academic counselor.

I only worked as an academic counselor for one year. I was commuting an hour each way and I really had a crazy schedule. I was working 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and I think already at that point I was thinking about, if I had kids, there is no way I could do this schedule because it was Monday through Thursday. But I wasn’t full time. It was part time, but I was working 36 hours. I did not get the same benefits as full time employees.

She transitioned from an academic counselor at the collegiate level to a high school guidance counselor. At the time she decided to opt out, she was working as a guidance counselor for a Christian high school. She left her position because there wasn’t a flexible schedule option within their program.

Libby’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out. Libby had an experience with a inflexible supervisor who led her to the decision to opt out:
My supervisor sat me down during my annual review process [I had to renew my contract to say whether or not I was coming back]. This was right after I found out that I was pregnant so I wrote I wasn’t sure if I was coming back or not. He said, “Well, why is this?” and I said, “I just found out I’m pregnant. I would really like to stay but not at 40 hours per week.” At that time I was doing counseling and teaching, so I asked him if I could just do the counseling portion. He said that the school had me at my best right now and once I had a child my loyalties wouldn’t really be here at work. And you know, he was basically telling me, “You should not work here, and you should be home with your children.” And so, part-time was not a possibility. He already knew of somebody who wanted to work in the guidance office, so I felt very replaceable at that point, so I did not pursue the part-time. You know, I requested it, but it was denied.

One of the main points in Libby’s decision-making process was her childhood experience. She grew up in a single parent household and her mother worked full-time outside of the home.

Then my husband and I started talking about the possibility of me staying home. I always thought I was going to work, because my mom worked throughout my childhood. She and my dad divorced, when I was really young, and so she had to work, basically, to support us. I just always thought I was going to do that as well. But, discussing it with my husband and having that possibility of staying home was exciting to me, so I decided, you know, “Well at this point in my career I’m not really sure where I’m headed, I think staying home would be the best option.” And really, for my husband and for me, we wanted to have one of the parents be home with the kids. That has been important to us. So, that was my decision and then I was home for four and a half years, and you know, for various reasons, decided to reenter the work force, most of which has been in support of my husband and helping him finish up his PhD, which has been difficult for him to do and work full time. So, really it has all been based on making best decisions for our family.

Libby decided to opt out due to lack of flexibility when she wanted to be home for her children. She mentioned that she would have perhaps continued working at the higher educational institution where she first worked as an academic advisor because they offered flexibility in the work week. But, without flexibility in the workplace, she
couldn’t make it work. It was a family decision that prompted her to return to work full-time.

_Redefinition and transition._ As mentioned previously, Libby went back to work full time because her husband left his position to focus on his doctoral degree. I asked Libby about the transition from being the primary caregiver to the primary breadwinner in the household. She said:

It was difficult at first. I felt really guilty for leaving my kids. And I, you know, just switching from seeing them, you know, twelve, thirteen, fourteen hours a day and now I see them maybe three hours a day. The whole allowing my husband to be the stay at home parent was also an adjustment for me. I had my routine with the girls, and then when he tells me, “Yeah, you know, we did this and this…” I’m just kind of like, “Well maybe I shouldn’t know about this because that makes me a little nervous.” I think just letting go of that identity and allowing my husband to fulfill that role. I think, my husband’s life is a little more balanced, and I certainly feel more balanced because when I was home with the kids, I never got any time away because my husband was just not there. So, I never took the time to get a sitter or take time for myself, I just never did. So I actually feel like it’s more balanced now that I’m at work, which seems a little odd. But, I certainly feel that way just because it’s not just 100% doing something and not feeling like I have any outlet or connection.

Libby addresses the idea of having the less traditional parent, the father, at home with the children rather than the mother.

I remember the first time when my daughter…it was in the summer and I was home and my husband was home and my daughter fell and I picked her up to comfort her and she did not want to come to me, she wanted Daddy, and that just hit me like a ton of bricks like, ‘Oh, I’m not the comforter anymore.’ It was certainly difficult at first. But, I think if I did not have a job that I enjoyed so much it would be that much harder, and if I did not have a husband that was home with the kids…those factors make it that much more difficult for me. But, since I love my job, and since I know that my kids are with my husband, I feel better about leaving them and doing this now.
In this case, she is at ease working full-time because her husband is home with their kids. The children are comfortable with him as the primary caregiver and this gives her peace of mind.

Libby’s advice for female student affairs professionals. Libby couldn’t stress enough the fact that effective communication is the key to success in any relationship. Women need patience and foresight because it is just good planning for your family. The bulk of the chores and duties and all the extra stuff that comes with family, still tends to fall on the woman. It shouldn’t have to be that way; it should be an equal thing. My husband and I still struggle with household responsibilities, even though he’s the stay at home parent. Sometimes I say, “Wait a second, I did not do this to you when you were working full-time!”

Libby emphasized that communication is essential in a two-parent household. She used the phrase “be on the same page with responsibilities” to talk about how she and her husband were successful in their roles.

Laurie

Laurie is the Associate Director of Service Learning at a small, private college in the Midwest. Her story is one of unexpected journeys and the human potential to overcome life’s obstacles. Laurie has three girls and her middle child is physically disabled. She and her husband divorced when her girls were in high school and college. Laurie is also an adult learner. Her father was a carpenter so he wanted all his children to have a skill. Laurie became a certified medical assistant and worked before completing her Bachelor’s degree.

After her family relocated to the Midwest from Colorado, she applied for an administrative position at the college in the student development office. The position
consisted of organizing freshman orientation and other large-scale events. Her roommate from college also worked at the institution, and suggested that she apply for the position so she “could get her name out.” Laurie admitted that details and administrative responsibilities were not her strength. The person in the position before her was very structured, but Laurie brought warmth and hospitality to the position. As evidenced by the program she has helped build, she is a collaborator and creator of new programs.

*Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path.* Laurie enjoyed the collegiate environment and working with the student leaders on campus, but she knew going into her first position after staying at home with her children that it would not be a long-term career. She said:

> I worked as the administrative assistant for the Dean of Student Development for two and a half years and always was keeping my eyes open for something else, because I am not a secretary. I hate details, I hate sitting at a desk all day long, answering emails, organizing files. I’m not good with papers. I organize people very well, finding people’s giftedness and equipping them to do things is really strength for me. So then, um, the mentoring position opened up and the service learning, so they were each half time. So the college agreed to allow me to do that as a full-time position, trying to dance back and forth. But, I don’t think they would have asked a man to do two jobs like that.

In this comment, Laurie touched on an aspect of the workplace that is often overlooked in society. She was asked to work two half-time positions which ended up being above and beyond a forty hour work week, yet her salary was not reflective of the workload.

*Laurie’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out.* Self-efficacy influences the choices people make and the courses of action they pursue. In Laurie’s case, she describes the fact that her self-efficacy and confidence has grown as she has matured.
I think I would have been more thoughtful about my next life, my next stage. If I had more of life as a woman in stages, then I would have been more strategic and a little more thoughtful. I think it’s ok to take time off, and I think you can make a case with a prospective employer that this is why I’m going to be a better employee to you, because I have had this time and space.

Laurie talked about the importance of building a strong support system when one is trying to balance work and family. She said her first position at a church was very developmental for her because her co-workers supported her whole person.

They said to me, “You’re too valuable to us, but you’re no good to us as you are.” This was true. And I was no good to my family. I was no good to myself, because I was driving myself into the ground. But again, at fifty I would be able to make different decisions than at thirty-ish. I just did not feel like I could ask for the permission for some of those things. I did not know how to ask for what I needed. I did not know what I needed for one thing. And I think sometimes within a support structure you need someone who can say, “What are you needing and how are you going to get it?” And we don’t often have that. We work for an employer, we’ve got to perform. You know, we put a lot of stress on, but it comes from employers as well.

The theme of creating flexibility in the workplace also emerged during our conversation.

In particular, Laurie talked about the fact that salaried employees should be allowed the opportunity to flex their schedules if they were responsible enough to get their work accomplished.

_Redefinition and transition._ While her children were young, Laurie’s career transitions were connected to her husband’s job. He was relocated across the country. They moved and Laurie started networking in the area to find employment. She found a career opportunity through an old friend and built a strong church community which helped her during their divorce.

_Laurie’s advice for female student affairs professionals._ Laurie demonstrated one of her values, which are to take time for personal growth.
I would advise women that if they choose to stay home with kids for a portion of the time that they continue to grow personally; that they kind of make some plans and goals to either take a class or be involved in some volunteer stuff or work part-time or something for themselves, because I think women tend to always think of everybody else first.

Laurie emphasizes what many women believe: as a mother it is very important to develop one’s own interests while caring for children, in order to achieve personal satisfaction and growth.

*Jamie*

Jamie contacted me from my National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) posting after a former colleague had passed on my e-mail inquiry to her. She was eager to speak with someone regarding her career journey as she had opted out of her full-time mid-level student affairs position. She reentered the workforce a few years later in a part-time position. Jamie is married with two children.

She said:

I started in student affairs as an undergraduate student leader. I ended up being eventually the Vice President of the Student Government managing about over a $500,000 budget. I moved to New York and worked in advertising for two years and really hated that. I was actually on a gasoline account and where they showed an ad for a woman’s legs. I thought, “Oh, this is not the career for me.” I was actually looking at MBA programs looking at a career in business and somebody at a university said “Why don’t you check out international affairs?” So I visited people in international affairs and they said “Oh, you have a lot of student affairs experience, why don’t you check out our education program?” I asked “That’s a real job? You can work like that?” So I ended up going to graduate school for College Student Personnel Administration. My first job was as an academic advisor in the graduate business program.
As the above quote indicated, Jamie started as an involved student at the undergraduate level and continued to climb the student affairs ladder until she was the Assistant Director of Student Activities at a large state university on the East Coast.

I was an assistant director and I actually came back to work after my first child. I had six week’s maternity leave and I took another two week’s vacation so I was gone eight weeks, then I came back. At that time, my institution offered women the opportunity to work either sixty or eighty percent. I actually wanted to work sixty percent but my boss felt like then the position would be permanently moved to sixty percent so she asked me to work eighty percent, so I did. Then I worked a year before I actually decided to step out when they wanted me to come back full time.

Jamie tried to meet the needs of the office and her family. She weighed her desire to work sixty percent with her boss’ request for working eighty percent then full-time after one year.

Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path. Jamie had little flexibility in choosing part-time versus full-time at her position prior to opting out. She noted:

When it was time to come back full time, I decided I just really couldn’t do that. It was just too much between commuting and I was actually at that point working between two campuses. It was four days a week with one day a week at another campus, I left thinking “I’m gonna take a year off because she is a little baby and needs her mom at home.

Jamie knew she wasn’t able to maintain the sixty to eighty percent schedule that was agreed upon when she returned to the workplace. Coupled with the daily commute and working between two campuses, the benefits of working were minimized in comparison to staying at home with her child.

Jamie’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out. Jamie’s decision to opt out of the workforce coincided with her husband’s promotion. His promotion was a
financial relief because they were able to live off their savings and his increased salary.

This was their plan for one year, but they decided to extend it longer. She was out of the workforce for seven years. She now works at a major research institution on the East Coast as the Program Director for Student Development and Campus Activities. This is a part-time position. She has also reviewed journals for national associations and taught leadership development classes for college students. Jamie balances all these external responsibilities as the primary caregiver for her young children. This is a significant shift from how she perceived her life prior to opting out.

Before I opted out? Oh, it felt horrible. Actually, when I was working eighty percent I would have 1 day on and 1 day off, and the day I was off it was all about just going back the next day. I had to do laundry and get my outfits ready, and I was nursing so I had to pump breast milk, and had to cook and like my house was trashed because I had worked the night before and the nights that I would work, because there were a lot of evening hours, because graduate students would come in later, I would basically on the days that I would work, I would just pick up the baby, come home, make dinner, and just like crash. So it was just all work, work, work. No family. Then the next day, it was still all about work again.

Jamie’s decision to opt out was difficult because she truly wanted a career, but also wanted flexibility and dedicated family time. She has reflected on these desires and this has really helped her discover the ideal balance between family and career.

Redefinition and transition. Jamie spoke of the seven years between her position as Assistant Director and her current position in Student Activities as a time when she took an “eclectic” approach to her career. She wasn’t really in search of a career opportunity because her primary focus was on her children. Jamie said:

I just happened to pick up jobs all the time. I actually worked part-time, but it was working with young kids, teaching at a community center, leading play group, and then volunteering in their schools. I just happened to seem to get jobs. At one nursery school, I brought my guitar in to sing and they offered me a music teaching position. Two years ago, I was looking for just something small and part-
time when I saw an administrative secretarial job in the human resources
department at a suburban satellite of my previous institution. I applied for it and
they said “Oh actually you’re a better fit for student development/campus
activities,” who had like a secretarial position open but they were also looking for
an assistant director. My boss actually created a part-time, professional position
for me in student activities. The name of the office is actually student
development and campus activities. I consider it very rare to have a part-time, sort
of flex time position. When I have evening events, obviously I do that, you know
I’ll be working this weekend but for the most part then I work twenty hours a
week.

Jamie demonstrated her flexibility by working occasional nights or weekends while
achieving a flexible work schedule. Her bosses created an ideal situation for Jamie’s
career goals by working with her in this student activities role. In the beginning, Jamie
felt she had to redefine her role from a professional career track to mommy track because
she worked enviable hours compared to other staff members. For instance, she leaves
every day before her children get off the school bus.

*Jamie’s advice to female student affairs professionals. Jamie notes:*

My advice to new student affairs professionals would be to get your education
completed before you start having a family. It would be much easier to get it
before you have kids rather than after. I feel like there are also different fields
within higher education where it would be more flexible. For example, where I
work in student development/campus activities, it is probably the least family
friendly because there are so many evenings and weekends and crazy hours.
Perhaps an area with more traditional hours would be easier in terms of having a
family life?

As Jamie emphasizes, it is very important for each person to weigh the timing of starting
a family versus their particular area of interest when working in student affairs. Jamie
concluded her interview by emphasizing that flextime is also critical.
Jocelyn

Jocelyn works in the Career Services Office of a large public university located in the Midwest. Jocelyn is a Hispanic woman in her early thirties. She manages the Career Resource Center, a position that includes coordinating evening programs and managing student workers.

She graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Special Education. Two weeks after graduating, she started to work as a high school teacher. After working as a teacher for six months, she applied for a Transfer Center Coordinator position at a community college. As the Transfer Center Coordinator, she worked with underrepresented or “at risk” students to help them get into a four-year institution. The Transfer Center Coordinator position was a grant funded position. After almost two and a half years she applied for and received a Career Assessment Specialist position at the same institution because the funding was more secure. She supervised a staff of five part-time assessment assistants, and also coordinated schedules, completed performance evaluations, managed program evaluations and delivery, and recommended new procedures or programs for the department.

Jocelyn opted out of the workforce for approximately one and a half years after her son was born. The reason she opted out stems from a mixture of taking care of a young child and being the primary caretaker of her father. She said it is extremely culturally important for children to take care of their parents.

In February 2006, my mother passed away and she was the primary caregiver for my father who has Alzheimer’s, dementia, and is partially paralyzed. So upon her death, I became his primary caregiver and within my culture it’s kind of frowned upon to send your parents to a nursing home. My house became his house and so
with the whole transition of being pregnant and having my father move in with us that also played a role with me stopping out.

She lost her position at the community college where she was employed because of the time away from the workplace. She spent the next year regaining her health after complications from her pregnancy, taking care of her father, and looking for employment. Her father still lives with her family in the suburbs of a major city in the Midwest. Jocelyn was able to find a caregiver who was fluent in Spanish to care for her father and her son after she returned to the workplace in a full-time position. I asked her about her career path.

I knew I wanted to work in Special Education for some time and then eventually go back and get my Master in Administration so that I could be a principal. After being in the system and seeing kind of how things worked I thought oh maybe I should try something else ---which led me to Community College and so I enjoyed my time there and I was actually very comfortable as a Transfer coordinator there and enjoyed that position a lot. So I did not have immediate plans on going forward except for getting my Masters in Adult and Higher Education. I started looking at possible options in the future as far as you know professional development and growth and so I’m kind of still paving the way I guess you could say. I think I would like to go into Senior Administration one day…that was my plan. I think the steps that I have taken are allowing me to go in that direction, but it will be a matter of time because what I was hoping was that maybe in about five years I could be a Director or Dean or somewhere along that line.

After Jocelyn opted out of the workplace, it took her a few years to get back to a mid-level position in student affairs. Jocelyn has a career plan, but still maintains flexibility because it is very possible that it will change.

*Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path.* Jocelyn had to redefine her personal career goals after her mother passed away and she became the primary caregiver for her father. The outcome expectation of being a “supermom” juggling the multiple facets of her life had to be renegotiated.
With the responsibilities I have with my family, I think those plans needed to be changed. Upon graduation with my Master’s degree I gave myself five years to start my doctoral degree. Now that I have a son and take care of my dad, my original plans had to change a bit just because I don’t want to shortchange myself or them.

Family circumstances play a significant role in achieving career goals. Jocelyn has adapted to meet her own needs as well as those of her son and her father.

*Jocelyn’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out.* Jocelyn’s situation is unique to the other interview participants, but not unique to American women as a whole.

When I transferred from the coordinator position to the assessment position, there was a month’s break between one position and the other. As a result of that one month break, I did not qualify for FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act) and the community college did not offer short-term disability, only long-term disability. So when my mom passed away, any time that I had as far as vacation or anything which would have been used for my maternity leave, I ended up using to stay at home with my dad for about a month. Then I came back and had a lot of stress obviously and went into pre-term labor so my doctor recommended that I be put on bed rest. The community college had offered me like a six week time period to accommodate the pregnancy, delivery, and recovery. As a result of going on pre-term the six weeks were taken at that time, so then I was no longer able to go back to work and therefore did not have a position anymore. I wasn’t terminated; I just had to leave because of medical needs. It was like a result of everything going on that required me to step out.

Jocelyn’s decision to opt out was atypical to the other seventeen women interviewed because it was mostly related to family health considerations. Since then, she has had the opportunity to reflect and consider her career options.

*Redefinition and transition.* Jocelyn is in a much better place now. During the period of transition, Jocelyn seemed to remain optimistic about her career opportunities. When asked about the job search process, Jocelyn said that she felt it was probably made
easier for her since she is bilingual. Nevertheless, she admitted that it was a bit challenging. She said:

I think I could have found a position a lot faster if I wasn’t being as particular about location and responsibility. It was a very intentional job search for me. I think I realize the path that I would like to go, but I also realize the responsibilities that I have at home and the fact that I can’t juggle them both fairly. I did not want to take on a position that required too much of my time outside of the regular work schedule and I did not want to take a position that would require too far a commute.

In her new position as the manager of the career resource center, she has the opportunity to be creative and take chances in developing new programs.

*Jocelyn’s advice to female student affairs professionals.* Jocelyn believes that her experiences at the community college helped her realize what is important for a successful career. When she applied for her new position, she was very open and honest about the fact that her family comes first in her life and that she needs flexibility in the workplace.

I try to keep the communication open with my supervisors. I think that that’s important for me. When I actually interviewed for this position I did one of those, oh, you’re not supposed to talk about personal relations or aspects of your life during an interview things, but I actually self-disclosed and I said to them, you know what, in all fairness to you guys but also to me...I need to disclose this because this is what I am looking for in a position for flexibility.

Jocelyn provides great advice and encouragement for new female student affairs professionals. She is very motivated and focused on developing her professional credentials through education and experience. Similarly, Jocelyn demonstrates that there are opportunities for work and life balance in student affairs if you are willing to explore career opportunities and take risks in the workplace.
Julie

Julie has worked for the only independent private college in her state for eight years. The college was founded in 1912 with an enrollment of six young women. Today, the institution educates approximately 3,000 men and women annually. She is married and has one 11-month-old girl. Her undergraduate degree in psychology and her master’s degree in college student personnel administration is from a mid-size, public university from the Midwest. Julie took advantage of the Family Medical Leave Act after the birth of her daughter and then decided not to return to her position. She thought she wanted to be a stay-at-home mother.

I was always kind of driven to go to college and make something of myself. In my family, it was kind of defined by what you do versus who you are. So that’s why it was such a hard time for me after we had [my daughter] last spring because I went on FMLA and I thought I would stay home with her but when I did I felt I lost who I was as a person and it was really hard to connect with my family.

She started experiencing post-partum depression and rarely went outside with her young daughter. Julie felt something had to change when she started snapping at her husband after he came home from work in the evening. She realized she missed her position. Julie was driven to achieve career success, but her need to connect with her family was just as important. She did not know how to combine those two dueling desires.

As the Coordinator for Student Academic Services in the Extension Studies Program, Julie’s position has a largely online component in which she only works with non-traditional undergraduate students. She assigns faculty advisors, offers academic counseling, and provides real-time services regarding dropping and adding courses and informal advisement. In addition, she oversees academic policies, tracks student
retention, implements and facilitates pro-active student outreach initiatives, meets one-on-one with all undergraduate students for individual counseling sessions and basically oversees all aspects of student services.

*Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path.* Julie notes:

Personally, I have always felt expected to make money and make something of myself. I was influenced strongly by my grandmothers (both were teachers and expected a lot). When child-bearing came into play, it was not, "What will you cut back on to raise your child?" as much as, "How are you going to make work and family run smoothly, because you can't give up one for the other?" Maybe because I grew up influenced by this expectation, it has become my own expectation as well. So, for me it is just as important to have a career as it is children in order to feel that I am worth anything. And I have to excel at both or I am a failure at everything.

Julie was out of her position for less than one year, but in that time her previous position was not filled. She called her supervisor and asked if something could be worked out with the department. Julie wrote a proposal and negotiated a flexible schedule. Julie works in the office on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. She is available through e-mail and Web CT on Mondays and Fridays from her home. The deal was to work thirty hours in the office and ten hours from her home. At the moment, she is really working hard to limit her work time at home to those ten hours, but Julie did admit that she could see a time when her e-mail correspondence and work online could increase.

*Julie’s thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out.* As mentioned above, Julie started experiencing post-partum depression. She said:

The first couple of weeks were fine. I was really happy and I had her [my daughter] going out every day to the park or the grocery store. But then it started getting cold and we couldn’t get out of the house and then I started wearing down.
I realized I wasn’t getting ready every day, sometimes I wouldn’t shower; I felt that I was hunched down everyday holding a baby. I couldn’t really do what I wanted to do. If she napped I had to be really quiet. I felt like I was kind of losing myself and I got really depressed. I would get mad at my husband because he would tell me what a great day he’d had and that’s not right. I figured what I need to do kind of get on track again was to get back to work.

The value Julie places on her career started to affect her home life. She believes it is essential to consider how individuals will act as a mother and wife when deciding to opt out.

**Redefinition and transition.** In her short time as a traditional stay-at-home mother, Julie realized that her personality was better suited for working. She did not feel like herself when she was at home with her daughter. Julie really wanted the socialization of the office and the intellectual creativity that her position brought into her life.

**Julie’s advice for female student affairs professionals.** Julie’s advice was simply to know what you were getting into when you opt out of your profession.

Make sure you understand how flexible your position is…thinking about that ahead of time. Try to find out beforehand what kind of person you are. If you need to work out of the house some, try to find a position that will let you do that and if you know that with the position you have to be here every day, and into the night kind of thing, be prepared for that or find something else.

Self-knowledge and understanding is essential when working in student affairs. If a person requires flexibility in her career then pursue it early on.

**Theresa**

Theresa admits that she does not feel as if she ever really opted out of the student affairs profession. She has been hanging on by a thread at some points. Theresa is a 45-year-old
Caucasian woman and the mother of three children; a 15-year-old, an 11-year-old, and an 8-year-old. She and her husband both work in higher education. Her master’s degree is in higher education administration and she completed her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. She currently works in a part-time position in Student Affairs at a mid-sized private institution.

Theresa’s professional career started in Residence Life. She worked in Student Conduct for a time then moved to another institution and became the Assistant Director of Campus Activities for Greek Life for ten years. After she left Greek Life, she served as the Coordinator of Research and Assessment in the Student Union. After the birth of her third child, she worked one or two days a week for ten years.

Theresa discussed the difference between working full-time in Student Affairs and part-time as a project consultant. She said:

I think it’s a different beast in that you’re just on all the time. Most of our groups are housed and when I first came in we had about 3,500 students in Greek Life. So, you are almost like a Dean of Students for that population and I advised all the counsels and every Monday night you would be invited to a dinner and meeting. There was also a lot of weekend stuff. And, fraternity and sorority rush. I would practically live at the office when I first got there. So a lot of that just is very draining. I mean I have such great, rich relationships with students but you would get called at 2 a.m. at home because someone has been transported to the hospital. That’s not an uncommon phenomenon in Greek Life. Because there isn’t the staff that you have in Residence Life to intercept along the way, you’re the direct contact for a lot of people.

Theresa completed her doctorate during her time in Greek Life and while her children were young. When asked if she and her husband started out with a plan, she said that it was more like “planned happenstance.” Theresa admits that she has gotten very lucky in her career. When her husband got his first job in California, she did not know if she
would be able to find a position in the area. While attending a professional conference, she sat next to someone at breakfast and it turned out that person was from a neighboring institution. Theresa was hired about a month later to serve as the Student Conduct Coordinator. She realized early in her career that a successful marriage required the balancing of her husband’s career with her own. Her husband’s current position requires weekend commitments, e-mail from home, and late nights in the office. She said, “It’s a trade off… who’s going to do that.” After she left Greek Life, the institution created a position for her called Coordinator of Research and Assessment in the Student Union. She did some work for the Division of Student Affairs at that time. Theresa was in this position for five years. After her third child, she went down to one or two days a week for ten years. When her youngest child was in first grade, she accepted an Assistant to the Director Position. In this position, she performs a number of project-oriented tasks for the director such as creating leadership curriculum for a co-curricular class, staff development work and fundraising. She is now working a seventy-five percent position with the summer months off.

Role that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in her career path. Theresa is the child of a single mother. Her role model as a child was a strong, working woman and she always assumed that she would do the same. She always viewed opting out as a temporary period – even though it was for seven years. She considered herself on a different timeline than other student affairs professionals. As she said, “I cashed in my retirement years early to enjoy my children.”

There was a Provost that I had interviewed for a project and he had these sort of ten tips for people and one of them was that luck and happenstance make up for lots more that happens in life than being planned about things and if you are so
planned that you don’t allow that stuff to happen, than you’re really missing out on what can be great opportunities. I somehow remembered that, and as I reflect back on my career I think uh huh, that’s much truer than it would be.

When she left her paid employment, she turned her self-efficacy and professional skills onto her family. She read a multitude of child development books, computerized many processes in her house, and attained a new level of personal organization. Theresa emphasizes that while planning in a career is important, it is also necessary to allow for different experiences and opportunities to alter the career path.

Early on in her career, she would have said her goal was to be a Dean of Students or a Vice President. Now, her priorities have changed. When I asked her what changed, she responded:

I really and truly would have told you back when I was in my twenties, I am not having kids. I don’t want to have kids. I did not think I would be a great mother and I just did not want to have kids. We were married ten years before we had our first child. I was forty when I had my last one. I guess now I would say that I realize that the greatest impact I can have in this world is how you raise your kids so it gives you a chance to recognize how you’re going to leave your legacy in ways that I don’t know I would have thought of before I had kids.

Upon her reentry, one of her colleagues with whom she had previously worked said to her: “I knew you would be back. When you had your first child, I knew you would leave, too – long before you did. You always do everything one hundred percent.” It is that dedication to her responsibilities and strong personal convictions that helped Theresa to navigate the opt in and opt out system. She also shared the fact that she believes “to those much has been given, much is expected.” As a smart, strong woman, she wants to be an example of what women can do.
Theresa's thoughts on the decision-making process of opting out. One of the things that Theresa mentioned is that she needed to be comfortable with the fact that she was not viewed as a “player” in the institution. She does not supervise anyone and does mostly project work at the institution. In contrast, she had a colleague who did the same thing and felt that she was “moving to be inconsequential.” She noted:

I have a very good colleague who has three children and went from a full-time position to a part-time one working for an Assistant Vice President doing project-oriented work. She found that she absolutely hated it! She spent six months in this role then went back to a full-time job. She did not like feeling like she was not in the middle of things.

Although Theresa said that she was not a “player” in the institution, she is a member of the leadership group in her department. The department has over one hundred employees with 250 student workers. They oversee student organizations, programming activities, student union events, and community service and leadership programs. She might not have supervisory responsibilities, but she does realize the referent power she has because of the position she holds as the Assistant to the Director of a very large staff.

That’s not to say people aren’t envious of my situation. Some people see me leave at 2:45 p.m. and say, “Oh, are you leaving already?” I usually don’t worry about those comments but I recognize others would like to have the same opportunities that I have had.

Redefinition and transition. Theresa was clearly settled in her professional and personal life. She was very articulate and spoke frequently about her passion for the student affairs profession. She has utilized numerous strategies to effectively deal with her personal and professional needs. Theresa has a strong network of friends and neighbors who provide assistance to the family when needed. In addition, she works in a flexible environment which allows her to work from home if her child is sick or she
needs to be available for a repair person. She can also leave work early to attend her child’s athletic events. Finally, she looks after her health by eating right and exercising regularly. Though finances were an important factor in the decision to opt out, she and her husband made it work by cutting back on living expenses. For instance, they don’t take fancy vacations. They spend their summers at a family member’s lake house in New England.

*Theresa’s advice for female student affairs professionals.* Theresa’s advice integrates individual and organizational alignments. She said:

I think it is very important to try and assess the culture of the organization and institution you want to work at. Ask others in the organization what the culture is like and decide if you believe it is congruent with your values. Not all places or people put a high value on family friendly policies and practices. Whether you work full-time or part-time, I think you need to base your work on your personal values and make sure that whatever situation you have there is value and goal congruence. I have made difficult choices about my career options because they are not conducive to my value of family first. Have the courage to stand up for what you believe. Make sure you pick your supervisor carefully and don’t be dragged down by others who might complain about your choices. We teach students to understand their values and how they should be the driving force in their choices, we should encourage each other to do the same.

Theresa is planning to begin a doctoral program in a few months and has had many sleepless nights worrying about balancing that with family. She says that she now has a plan in place and she has been able to work out many details and feel reassured and excited to be a student again. Theresa illustrates the importance of self understanding. She said that female mid-level student affairs professionals should know what they value in life because those values should drive career decisions. Additionally, they also need to align with where an individual works and who he or she is working for as an employee. Paternity leave, the option to go sixty to eighty percent, telecommuting, and utilization of
technology were all cited as important trends for higher educational institutions to implement.

Conclusion

In chapter four, I have created in depth illustrations of the seventeen participants interviewed for this study. Their stories contain notable differences that separate the women, but they also have similarities that unite them. For example, the women in this study demonstrated how female mid-level student affairs professionals might have hit their heads on the proverbial glass ceiling. The similarities included how most of the women while working full-time still accomplished the majority of the household chores and that their salaries largely went towards paying for childcare. These similarities mirrored Arlie Hochschild’s 1997 findings chronicled in her book titled “The Second Shift” referred to in Chapter two. The differences revolved around the fact that the women who opted back into the field of student affairs managed to find a job situation that provided flexibility in the workplace and a supportive supervisor. Both the differences and similarities are further examined in the final two chapters. Chapter five discusses emerging themes found throughout the interviews. Chapter six offers my recommendations based on this study’s findings.

The next chapter examines how the social cognitive career theory connected to the study. The advice that study participants presented to help female student affairs professionals who have young children in the decision-making process of whether to opt out or continue their professional career in a straight trajectory will also be explored. None of the women in this study regretted a minute of the time spent with their children.
But, they did wonder about the financial trade-offs and getting back into the student affairs profession after the opt out period.
CHAPTER V
THEMATIC RESULTS

This chapter contains an analysis of the interviews and research findings gathered from discussions with 17 female mid-level student affairs professionals in higher education. The interpretation of these themes was the result of inductive data analysis and reduction. This process involves immersion in the specifics of the data and coding procedures that take into account external heterogeneity (the degree to which the data does not belong together) and internal homogeneity (the degree to which the data does belong together) (Creswell, 1998).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to provide insights into how these women with young children, who chose to opt out of their student affairs positions – either temporarily or permanently – negotiate the decision-making process involved. The methodology was open-ended interviews based on an interview outline. The study was designed to include in-depth interviews, approximately one to two hours in length exploring how these women navigated their vocational decision-making processes and professional careers.

The sampling procedures were purposeful, yielding a diverse pool of participants from across the United States. The trustworthiness of the data was accomplished through thick, rich descriptions, member checks, and peer review (Creswell, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Fourteen of the seventeen interviews were conducted over the telephone. The other three were conducted in person in a controlled setting. Participants were mid-level student affairs professionals. One woman (Libby) was a high school
guidance counselor when she opted out of the work force, although she had started her career as a Resident Director. Libby returned to the work force as a mid-level student affairs professional in a higher education institution. Fifteen of the seventeen women had obtained graduate-level degrees in counseling, education, or business. Two of the women (Laurie and Carol) did not complete their master’s program work. Following the interviews, each of the participants was sent her personal story to read via e-mail. Each was given six weeks to review and respond to the story. The open-ended interviews allowed in-depth inquiry and follow up for clarification and detail. In many cases the participants told their life stories, which enabled the placement of their work experiences in the context of their personal characteristics and biographies. Many had remarkable stories to tell, highlighting their tenacity and personal strength to make lifestyle choices perceived as the best path for each of their families.

Stories such as these are examples of the Social Cognitive Career Theory that provides a framework for understanding how people develop career-related interests, make (and remake) occupational choices, and achieve career success and stability. Some of the participants took an active approach to the career decision-making process. Some of the others took a more passive approach to their decisions to leave the student affairs profession, which came out in a bit of a regretful tone during the interviews.

Broad Categories

The research questions guiding this study were posed in three categories: the decision to leave the mid-level student affairs profession, the decision to return to the mid-level student affairs profession, and the decision not to return to the student affairs profession.
profession. Each category contained subthemes that transcended the 17 participants. The next three sections will explore the subthemes, emerging themes, and the connection of these women’s experiences to the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

*Research Question One*

This question addressed the decision-making process that led the women in this study to leave the field of student affairs while in the mid-point of their career. Reasons such as the escalating burdens of work and life balance, family relocation, child care costs and the traditional mother role were all explored. In one interview, Jessica indicated, “You have to decide what your priorities are and if your level of employment is of great importance.” This quote illustrates a sentiment articulated by almost all of the participants. They talked at length about how they reevaluated their priorities and what they valued in life when they made the decision to leave their mid-level student affairs positions. Diane said that it was “just that feeling with my daughter,” and Carol indicated that, “obviously your kids are going to be your priority.” Beth also emphasized the importance of being available for her children: “I felt it was important to be home when my kids got older.” Brittney summed up the value shift best when she said, “My responsibility changed from being someone who brought in money to being someone who would raise our kids.”

Many of the women indicated that their spouse’s career was an active influencing factor that helped them (or gave them the excuse) toward their decision to leave. Six of the women articulated a passive career decision-making process, in other words, the
decision was made for them due to a spouse's career or geographic relocation. Catherine said, “My husband’s work travel schedule created a stressful environment for my family.” Jessica also cited that her husband’s travel schedule impacted her career decisions in addition to the fact that she knew that they could afford to have her stay home. Diane said, “I probably would have stayed at work if we would have remained in XXXX.” Judy mentioned that geography was her largest problem because her family went from the “largest collection of colleges in the state to the smallest.” Krista’s husband also found a better teaching position on the other side of the state. Finally, Christy’s husband started a new company closer to his family’s home state, which prompted a family relocation.

Lack of flexibility in the profession was also largely cited as a primary reason participants opted out. Catherine said that since she was the first salaried person to work half-time, she felt the pressure to do the same job with half the pay. Yet, her supervisor also told her that she was not going to advance in her job because she was not full-time. She felt she had been “mommy-tracked,” which Webster’s Dictionary defines as choosing “a career path that allows one a flexible or reduced schedule but slows or somehow blocks advancement in the workplace by a career decision.” Krista explained that she felt supported by her direct supervisor because he allowed her to stay home one day a week. However, she felt she had to do more work because, “I really had to back up what I was allowed to do in the workplace.” Other participants did not even have the option of working half-time. Judy said, “My main complaint and one of the things that lead me to leave is that I wished there was more flexibility in student affairs.” Carol and
Betty also reported that neither of their institutions would allow them to work a part-time or reduced schedule.

Research Question Two

The decision to return to the field of student affairs was complicated for the seven individuals who moved back into salaried (not contractual) positions because they had to balance the household responsibilities with their desire to get back into their profession. In addition, they worked through the guilt of not being a constant presence in their children's lives. For the women who returned to the profession, overcoming obstacles, seeking a family-friendly work culture, and seeking the help of mentors and networks were extremely important. These women also had to work past the comments (e.g., "You are leaving already?") and the feelings of not being connected to the workplace culture (e.g., Staff meetings scheduled on the days that they were not in the office). Some of the other participants (Catherine, Diane, Carol, and Judy) dipped their toes in the water without getting fully immersed. Catherine noted, "I did return twice as a contract worker and I felt like I was more in control of my schedule." She also articulated that she kept her expectations low, which helped her to "avoid fatigue." Of the women who did return to student affairs, four out of seven (Beth, Laurie, Jamie, and Theresa) talked about reframing their expectations. Jamie said, "I am technically underemployed right now," and Theresa noted, "I joke and say that I am one of the only people to go down the organizational chart."
**Research Question Three**

The third question explored the rationale for those women who chose not to return to the field of student affairs. The women in this study indicated that they did not want to work within a structured system, felt discontented with student affairs, or simply wanted a more entrepreneurial or creative environment. Looking at career development theory and analyzing the participants' comments, themes emerged from these three research questions as common threads among all participants. The next section provides a summary of these three research questions viewed through the lens of social cognitive career theory.

**Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)**

In an effort to understand the under-representation of women in senior-level student affairs positions, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) was used to examine the influence of having young children on the decision-making processes of women who left mid-level student affairs positions. The theory provided a framework for understanding the connections between interests, goals, and subsequent actions (Bieschkem Eberz, Bard, & Croteau, 2008).

The most prominent elements of career development theory that seemed to be influencing their decision-making process were self-efficacy and career goals, two elements in the SCCT. Self-efficacy beliefs can influence the choices people make and the courses of action they pursue. To demonstrate the relationship between the SCCT and this dissertation research, I continued coding based on the three main points of the SCCT.
(personal and career goals, performance outcomes, and self-efficacy) in the conceptual framework.

Women are strongly impacted by many organizational, personal, and societal factors as part of their career choices to balance work and family. The SCCT builds upon the assumption that cognitive factors play an important role in career development and decision-making. This is particularly useful in addressing two areas of career concern: performance attainment and persistence at overcoming obstacles. Problems in career development emerge when individuals prematurely foreclose on occupational options due to inaccurate self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations or when individuals forego further consideration of occupational options due to barriers they perceive as insurmountable (Brown & Lent, 1996). Within this study, Diane said, “My job, my life was so demanding. It would be hard for me to work with my previous job and try to raise a child.” Jessica agreed, stating that the judicial affairs office had crazy hours and she found herself on call in a crisis at odd hours of the night, which was not feasible with a husband who traveled for his career. Bandura (1997) might take these two participants’ examples and define them as “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (p. 391). These beliefs about abilities play a central role in the career decision-making process.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy derives from past performance accomplishments, but is also responsive to external social encouragement and discouragement. Bandura’s (1997) theory is related to performance outcomes because a person’s motivation level, emotional
state, and actions are based more on what he or she believes than on what is reality. For instance, a mother with young children who possesses ability sufficient for a career in student affairs, but has low self-efficacy beliefs, can or should be exposed to women who are also student affairs professionals and mothers (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). When analyzing the career decision-making process these women considered all career options and the potential outcomes of each choice made. The interactions of self-regulating, self-reflecting, and self-organizing emerged in the women as they faced the important decision of whether or not to opt out of careers that they loved. It seemed that having accurate self-efficacy beliefs and the confidence to overcome barriers are essential to reach a career goal. The next section explores the concept of goal-setting.

*Personal and Career Goals*

Building upon self-efficacy theory, personal and career goals may be defined as an individual’s intention to engage in a particular activity or to produce a particular outcome (Bandura, 1986) and provide a cultural context for understanding career development (Bandura, Lent, et al., 1994). Some of the women interviewed entered into the career decision-making process with a definite plan. Judy indicated that she was “definitely interested in being in charge of an area and moving up the ladder.” She felt that she was good at her job as the assistant director of career services at a mid-sized public institution. She felt that the work environment, atmosphere, and hours would not be any different when she returned from maternity leave. Judy also stated that she did not want to leave her son for twelve to fourteen hours a day. Although she was interested in being a “lifer” and moving up the career ladder, she decided she would give it up to raise
her family. Judy was one of the 5 participants in this study who felt that limited options in student affairs were a significant factor to their decision-making process. This is important when connected to the fact that all but one of the participants expressed a concern about the stressful work environment and lack of flexibility in the profession. Another research participant discussed her career goals positively. Libby said,

[I] knew that I wanted to go into higher education because my master’s degree prepared me for that level and I had interned actually in the career services office at XXXX. At that point, my interest was in career counseling. But the hall director position was also great.

Libby was one of the women who returned to the field of student affairs and experienced flexibility in her career options. Jamie also returned to the student affairs profession, and she said, “[I] wanted to work and see how far I could get in my career – it is still very important for me to be intellectually challenged.” Betty noted, “Having a career plan is helpful, but the thing about life is that it does not always care about your plans and it is often better to just be prepared and flexible for the opportunities that come along.” Carol said, “I did have a plan, but it did not work out that way.”

Finally, there were those individuals (Krista and Amy) who articulated the fact that they never had a career plan. Krista said, “I did not start my career with a plan. But I remember saying to the associate dean of student development that I wanted his job. I wanted to do what he was doing. So, I guess that was my plan.” She left her position as a mid-level student affairs professional when her husband found a teaching position on the other side of the state. Another research participant, Amy, left her position after she had her first child. Amy said, “I really did not have a plan. I just willingly allowed my mentors and colleagues to guide me.” These research participants seemed simply to walk
through the open doors that appeared throughout their career without a specific goal or plan for the future.

One of the key research components involved exploring within the interview evidence of self-efficacy interacting with career and personal goals to impact the participant’s individual outcome. The SCCT would suggest that the stronger an individual’s self-efficacy, the more likely she would be to adapt and maintain a high sense of self (Lent, et al., 1994). While looking at self-efficacy, the four-quadrant diagram (Table 4) became a useful tool to determine the self-efficacy and career goals of the 17 female student affairs professionals who opted out at the mid-level of their respective careers. The four-quadrant model (often denoted as AQAL for “all quadrants, all levels”) has been used by theorists from Stephen Covey in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989) to Ken Wilber in *Integral Life Practice* (2008) to visually compare and contrast two ideas to determine an outcome. It was helpful to look at examples from the participants and organize those examples into four separate categories (high self-efficacy/high career goal affinity, high self-efficacy/low career goal affinity, low self-efficacy/high career goal affinity, and low self-efficacy/low career goal affinity), and Table 4 shows this in detail.
Table 4

Summary of Self-Efficacy and Career Goal Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low self-efficacy/high career goals</th>
<th>High self-efficacy/high career goals</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>*Jocelyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Beth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>Judy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Each of these women expressed a concern about not being as forceful or vocal as they should have been personally or professionally. Yet, they went on to be leaders in community organizations and/or help with family businesses. | *Libby
| Jocelyn                             | *Julie                              |
| Beth                                | *Theresa                            |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low self-efficacy/low career goals</th>
<th>High self-efficacy/low career goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Amy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Jamie</td>
<td>Britney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>*Laurie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Each of these women did not have a career plan and did not really consider their student affairs job a career. Their positions simply became a matter of function and convenience. | *Betty
| Britney                           | Krista                              |
| *Jamie                            | Krista                              |

*Indicates women who have returned to the field of student affairs*
Low Self-Efficacy/High Career Goals

When women have low self-efficacy expectations regarding their career decisions, they limit the extent to which they participate in an opportunity, and they are more apt to give up at the first sign of difficulty. According to Hackett and Betz (1981), low self-efficacy beliefs in women are thought to reflect the limited and disadvantaged position that women have in the workplace and the limited range of career options presented to them. Take, for instance, Catherine’s decision to opt out of the workplace. From the individual stories in Chapter 4, Catherine stands out as a motivated individual. She worked on her advanced degree while employed at the public university because she saw that degree as a necessary tool for promotion. She also worked extra hours and on weekends to do “whatever it took” to complete her responsibilities in job fair coordination, staff supervision, group presentations, and individual counseling appointments. Catherine was one of the first women at her institution to be granted a flexible or reduced schedule. She was overjoyed. However, these positive feelings were soon diminished when she realized that she was one of only a small group of professional women at her institution who balanced motherhood and career. When she did not receive the promotional title of “associate director” in her department, she really started to doubt her long-term commitment to the position. She noted that she might have stayed in the position if she felt the same enthusiasm that she had when she first started. Catherine said her decision to leave was based on a combination of factors: her children, the hours and
demands of the position, her husband's increased travel schedule, and the realization that she was not going to advance in her job.

In reflecting about this decision, Catherine noted, "[I] wasn't as strong as I should have been and stood up for myself as well as I should have for the contributions I made to the department." She became frustrated with the fact that a male co-worker who was less-experienced received a promotion to associate director. Her low self-efficacy emerged in the sense that she did not negotiate for her position. She did speak with the dean of student development about the situation and was told that she would never be promoted because she was on a reduced schedule. Catherine had high career goals but she lost the drive to stay and fight for her student affairs position. This internal drive, however, later, manifested itself in leadership positions within the community. She became an active member of the parent/teacher association at her boys' school and the local Cub Scouts.

As another example of low self-efficacy and high career goals, Diane was the person who achieved a role closest to a senior administrative position. Before Diane opted out of her mid-level student affairs position, she was the Chief Student Affairs Officer at a mid-size public institution in the South. She started in admissions and worked her way up the ladder, always believing that she would be the Chief Student Affairs Officer at one point. She described herself as a career-oriented person. The move to another state for her husband's career really made the decision for Diane to opt out of the workplace. In many ways, it was a passive decision. However, she noted in her conversation that she did not

...know how women [who work full-time] do it. I am personally struggling with my self-worth by staying at home versus working. I loved my profession and what I did. I just could not figure out how having a family fit into that lifestyle.
Diane was definitely a highly skilled individual, but she was also emotionally attuned to the realities of balancing work in the student affairs profession and having young children. She noted, “when you are at the mid-level of administration, the demands for ‘being there’ are so much greater and the pressure and guilt associated by making compromise with a family was ultimately out of the question.” Her low self-efficacy manifested itself in the sense that she did not use proactive language or come up with career solutions after moving to another state. In essence, her low self-efficacy blocked her problem-solving skills. She had the opportunity to interview for a position at the institution her husband moved to, but she did not pursue the option because she felt it was not the right fit. She indicated that she struggled to find the right balance between her career goals and personal aspirations. Diane was also the only person in the research study to articulate the feeling of being “burnt out” with her professional life. Diane, however, is reenergizing her mind by taking the time to be at home with her daughter. She has come up with some ideas about creating a consulting company for student affairs professionals and has continued to read up on the student affairs literature and keep up with future trends.

Low Self-Efficacy/Low Career Goals

According to Bandura (1986), repeated success at performing a task tends to lead to an increased sense of self-efficacy, whereas failures tend to lower a person’s self-esteem. The second quadrant (bottom left, Table 4) might be described as low self-efficacy/low career goals. Two participants in this research project verbalized a low sense
of self-efficacy combined with a sense of not feeling great career motivation. For the purpose of this dissertation, this low career motivation is identified as "low career goals" because, compared to the past group of individuals who sought out leadership opportunities in community organizations or had long-range career goals outside of the home, these are low career goals.

For example, Jessica’s decision-making process of pursuing higher education was made more difficult because she understood her desire to stay at home as a mother. Once she reached that mid-level professional career position, she felt focused on the job. She said she spent a lot of time thinking about her job in judicial affairs because it involved the kind of decisions that could keep a person up at night. It was also a difficult work environment because most of the staff was single and did not mind the "crazy" hours or late night telephone calls. It was very common for her to deal with emergencies that came up at all hours of the night. She decided that she needed to let it all go for the next several years for the sake of her family. Jessica did not experience any ambivalence about the decision to opt out, but she did say that, "you go from years of interesting stories to nothing." Though she did not express any ambivalence in her decision to opt out, her low career self-efficacy revealed itself in social settings. She recognized the decision as a "personal sacrifice" and noted, "your ego has to be strong enough to handle the fact that you may be competing against people that are ten years younger than you" if you decide to return to the student affairs profession. At the time of our conversation, Jessica was not sure if she would go back into student affairs. She also had not moved on to the kind of leadership opportunities in the community that Catherine and others had.
Jamie was another participant who articulated that she “wasn’t sure how kids fit into the career picture.” She was the Assistant Director of Student Activities at a large state university on the East Coast. After her first child, she was able to negotiate a flexible schedule to work 60%, but her supervisor soon expressed his desire for her to return to full-time status. It was not an option for Jamie, who felt the daily commute and work between two campuses would not be feasible to juggle with young children. Her decision to opt out coincided with her husband’s promotion at work. This promotion was a financial relief to the family because they were able to live off their savings and his increased salary. Jamie was out of the workforce for seven years. She noted that her decision to opt out was difficult because she truly wanted a career, but she also wanted flexibility and dedicated family time. She returned to student affairs in a part-time position as the Program Director for Student Development and Campus Activities. The reason that I placed Jamie was in this particular category was because she displayed a low self-efficacy when applying for a position after both her children started elementary school. The part-time position mentioned above started as a secretarial position at a major research institution. Her new supervisor told her she was overqualified for the position and created this unique opportunity for her.

High Self-Efficacy/Low Career Goals

This third quadrant (bottom right, Table 4) is titled “high self-efficacy and low career goals.” A good question might be how is strong personal ambition connected to low career goals? The career goals might be better defined as low career goals in the formal or traditional sense, which often equates to career goals outside of the home. Amy
and Brittney best represent this particular quadrant, because they both articulated a confidence and comfort in their person yet an underlying pull away from any formalized position that might have taken them away from family commitments. These women were confident in their decision to opt out of the field of student affairs. Amy contacted me via e-mail with the simple message:

Your email finally made it to me via my husband. I’m a former Student Affairs professional from XXXX. I left my career to raise my two children and it seems from the e-mail trail that you might like to talk w/ me about that?

Right from the beginning of our conversations, I noted that Amy had a high sense of self-efficacy. She was confident and it seemed her high level of motivation was based on what she believed rather than what might have appeared objectively true. Amy was happy in her student affairs position and seemed to have the support of her administration, yet she did not attempt to negotiate a flexible schedule to accommodate her new family situation. Amy’s belief was that she should definitely stay at home with her children, which is the reason that she was categorized in the low career goals section. She said:

I was an anomaly in my graduate school class because they talked about things like moving up in student affairs and I talked about coupling my career with family or raising kids. I really did not have a plan to opt out, but my institution did not have a part-time option and there was no job share option.

When Amy sent me her consent form, she included a picture of her two children with a note about the reason that she opted out. Therefore, I placed Amy in the high self-efficacy and low career goals category because she was aware and confident in her choice to stay home and raise her children, but that choice meant she would not pursue her career in higher education.
Another example, as indicated by her life story in Chapter 4, Brittney was brought up in a very traditional American home in which the husband worked and the mother stayed at home with the kids. In fact, her mother did not work outside the home until Brittney was in college. That being said, Brittney did have career goals. She did not have the typical career goals outside of the home; Brittney’s goal was to become an educational provider for her children. Brittney indicated that she had gifts that aligned her with being an educator and felt it was her responsibility to educate her own children. She felt she could do a better job than a school. As she noted, the decision to stay home with her children might have been influenced by her own mother. But, Brittney said they “did not want to pay someone else nor have our kids be with other people for much of the day.”

High Self-Efficacy/High Career Goals

The final quadrant (top right, Table 4) is the area of high self-efficacy combined with high career goals. After reviewing their stories, I placed five participants in this quadrant. As one example, due to family obligations, Jocelyn left her position at a community college located in a large urban setting in the Midwest. Finding a new position after opting out briefly was not difficult for her. She explains, “[I am] bilingual and have development skills that really set me apart in some areas.” Her decision to opt out was atypical in the context of the other 17 women interviewed because it mostly related to family health considerations. However, this time out of the workplace gave her the opportunity to reflect and consider her career options. She was open about the fact that having a family played a huge role as to what type of position she applied for.
because she was very particular about location and responsibility. Jocelyn demonstrated a strong sense of self and high level of self-efficacy because she was confident in her abilities. Specifically, her career goals are different from the women in the low categories because she sees herself continuing her education towards a doctorate degree and moving upward in her career path. Jocelyn did not seem hampered by the fact that she was balancing her ailing father and son. In addition, she did not seem fazed by the fact that she was expecting her second child, which she mentioned during our follow up conversation.

As another example, throughout our interview, Beth seemed to have a strong view that positive thinking leads to achieving personal goals. She displayed a very strong sense of self throughout the entire conversation. Beth said, “Opt out would imply options... I felt forced out of student affairs due to inflexible circumstances and not being able to afford proper care for three small children on my salary.” It would be easy to question how a person with a high level of self-efficacy could also say that she felt forced out with no options when other participants defined with a low level of self-efficacy earlier felt just as forced out. The difference is in what the women did with these unique situations. In Beth’s career journey, she moved from her mid-level student affairs position directly to a fundraising position with a non-profit organization. When asked about the concept of self-efficacy, Beth used a quote from her sister-in-law as an example. “If you expect it... it will happen. That and personal goals are what drives me forward to my dreams.”

Beth (and other research participants including Brittney, Catherine, Jocelyn, and Jamie, and Libby) had a strong view that positive thinking and a spiritual belief in a higher power leads to achieving personal goals. In Beth’s situation, she carefully assessed
her work environment. Her vice president was also a wife and a mother; however, she stayed home when her children were young. Beth quickly realized that she did not have many allies in her office for balancing work and family. Her confidence led her to take those career goals and move them in a different direction after she left the field of student affairs. These excerpts from the stories of these 17 women demonstrate that participants tended to fall into one of the four quadrants involving self-efficacy and career goals. The next section on performance outcomes ties together the three components of the SCCT.

**Performance Outcomes**

Performance outcomes are tangible prior successes that have been linked to ability both directly and indirectly through intervening self-efficacy beliefs. For example, Jamie returned to the field of student affairs in a part-time position that has little supervisory responsibility compared to the positions that she had in the past. She said, "I know that I am really selling myself short, but I think it is worth it to have the flexibility for my family." Jamie's performance outcome relates to the proximal influences of emotional and financial support that comes from selecting a particular path in life. Additionally, Theresa returned to the student affairs profession in a part-time role and joked that she was one of the only people to go down the organizational chart.

These participants demonstrated framed perspectives that went against the societal norms of what it means to succeed in the workplace. Blake-Beard, Ingols, and Shapiro (2008), wrote about the “self-employed” career model which recognizes the fact that women are more willing to become independent career agents if that means that they are allowed to make critical decisions about their own destiny (including, but not limited
to, the length of a work week, leaves of absence, and responsibilities for work lives).

When an individual thinks about career satisfaction and career trajectory, it is often assumed that a serious career meant moving upward in a straight line (Dwore, Gustafson, Murray, Parsons, Smith, & Vorderer, 1997). The interviews with the women in this study suggest that performance at work is tied to performance at home. Jessica noted that she had to reevaluate her priorities because she was spending time at home thinking about her job. If work or home life are tipping below the balance scale, then the women in the study were willing to temporarily, if not permanently, opt out of their position in order to create more balance in their lives. As Amy stated, “Working the crazy student affairs hours that you work – the weekends, weeknights, early mornings, retreats, etc. was doable without kids.”

The following sections present the themes that emerged within the analysis that support the prior findings regarding career decision-making. In addition, these themes address the reasons women opted out, and the ways they believe that they could be better supported to either continue working or return to meaningful employment.

Emerging Themes

The initial round of data analysis revealed a number of broad themes in the open-ended interviews. After further rounds of data reduction, five strong themes were identified from the participants, along with a few additional sub-themes. The major themes include: (1) the participants exhibited a strong personal ambition and drive to achieve their aspirations; (2) family support and sacrifice made the decision-making process easier to navigate, but most still consider “opting out” a privilege; (3) many of
the participants expressed feeling emotionally torn between work and motherhood; (4) institutional support was perceived to be crucial for persistence and there were identified barriers created by the institution that caused stress; and (5) the importance of finding self worth and fulfillment in whatever a person decided to do with her life.

Table 5 provides the participants’ decision-making events that influenced their choice to opt out of the workplace. Table 6 lists the five emerging themes, also presented in this chapter in narrative form to allow for a more holistic sketch of the data.

**Theme 1**

*The Participants Exhibited a Strong Ambition and Drive to Achieve Their Aspirations Whether Professional or Personal, but the Demands of Student Affairs Positions were too Inflexible.* The women I interviewed for this dissertation were employed in a variety of student affairs positions ranging from academic advising to residence life. Whether they returned to the field of student affairs or chose a different path, they all felt a tremendous passion for higher education. In other words, the women were not dissatisfied with their mid-level student affairs position. All the participants described a strong personal ambition and drive to achieve their dreams wherever those dreams led them. These aspirations became less professional and more personal as they contemplated or actually started balancing family and work commitments.
Table 5

**Participants’ Decision-Making Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stayed Out</th>
<th>Did Not Have a Career Plan</th>
<th>Had In-Depth Discussions about Career Decision-Making</th>
<th>Spousal Career Advancement and Geographical Relocation</th>
<th>Remain in the Position if More Geographical Flexibility in the Workplace</th>
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<td>Catherine</td>
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<td>Diane</td>
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<td>Brittney</td>
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<th>Reentered</th>
<th>Did Not Have a Career Plan</th>
<th>Had In-Depth Discussions about Career Decision-Making</th>
<th>Spousal Career Advancement and Geographical Relocation</th>
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<td>Julie</td>
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<td>Theresa</td>
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Table 6

Summary of Emerging Themes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Remain in the Family</th>
<th>Emotionally Torn Between Work and Motherhood</th>
<th>Mentoring and Supervision Were Critical for Women in Making Career Decisions</th>
<th>Important to Find Self Worth and Fulfillment</th>
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<td>More Considered Work</td>
<td>Flexibility in Opting Out a Motherhood Privilege</td>
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Fourteen of the seventeen participants would have remained in their position if more flexibility had existed in the workplace (see Table 5). It is for this reason that the flexibility became one of the emerging themes. Catherine said, “Flexibility is so important. My husband’s job involved a lot of travel and once the kids got into elementary school it just got out of control because I was (and still am) the primary caregiver.” In addition, all seven of the women who returned to student affairs indicated flexibility was a huge component of their job criteria. Jocelyn said, “I would have found a position a lot faster if I wasn’t being so particular.” Theresa indicated that the balance in
her life was much better with a flexible schedule because she could control how much
time she had for work and for home.

Brittney’s career in admissions gave her the opportunity to supervise graduate
interns and new professionals. In this role, she was able to pass on her enthusiasm. As
Brittney said,

I still feel that [passion for my work]. I’m burning inside. I am so amazed at this
world. Education is amazing… I feel like I’ve had that fire and been excited by
these things for many years.

Brittney rechanneled her enthusiasm by taking on a new role in life as a home-
school parent to her four children. As a family, they have made many financial sacrifices
so she could have more time with the kids. She said that home schooling gave her the
ability to resist the current pace of America to create an environment with a slower pace.

One of the participants, Diane, worked in student affairs for over ten years. She
said:

You know, I loved student affairs. I think over the course of time, however, it’s
not the same. The reorganization and the demands change as students come on
campus and people at the top not realizing and understanding that we have
students coming to campuses now with a lot of baggage.

It was this desire to help and/or work with students that caused these participants
to put in long hours and undertake erratic schedules in the workplace. Diane went on to
say that although she felt torn, she also felt fulfilled. She said,

I believe everything happens for a reason and there are lessons to be learned in
every juncture. The turn of events in my life prior to me opting out of my career
was the catalyst in my decision.

The concept of flexibility in the workplace was an important topic for all of the
participants. Laurie indicated that if she was starting to have a family now, she would try
to get her employer to allow her to work half-time or do some work from home. She went on to explain that she would try to negotiate things differently, “I don’t know if that’s because of a financial push or even a career push as much ... well, I think it’s a career push.” She continued,

I think it boils down to the fact that you don’t want to lose a spot. You don’t want to get behind. But again, I think it drives women crazy because we’re doing it all. And I don’t know if you can do it all.

Flexibility in the workplace is not an easy topic to talk about. Libby talked about how she had discussed this concept with a colleague when I asked her about the standard work schedule.

Everyone works eight hours a day; five days a week. We have two counselors and we’re getting a third person, so that might help with the coverage for the office. One of the counselors would love to explore the possibility of part-time, but she’s too afraid to ask. She’s been a counselor seven years and she’s a working mom. She’s afraid that if she puts that out there, it’s going to be met with negativity and she does not want to be looked at as the part-time worker. So, she’s really wrestling with that question of... do I even bring it up? Do I even see if it’s a possibility? It’s kind of trying to find the answers in round-about ways without making it clear you’re the one that wants the part-time.

Connected to the theme of personal ambition, it seemed that many of the participants had the ambition and desire to move forward in the student affairs profession, yet they were too tired to do anything about it. It became an exercise in futility for some of the participants who felt that their salary did not make up for the time away from their children. For example, Krista had to drive 30 miles each way for her job. After she had her first child, she tried to leave at 4:30 p.m. each day to pick up her daughter from childcare. But she always felt there was more to do and it was hard emotionally because “inevitably a student would walk into the office as I was putting on my coat.” Amy said, “Working late, commuting together, and weekend commitments was doable until I got
pregnant with my first child.” Many of the women in this study appeared to revert to the traditional gender role of wife and mother. It was an interesting observation to make that once they made the decision to opt out, they focused energy and enthusiasm on family.

Through my observations of the student affairs profession, women seemed to struggle to balance a relationship with their significant other and children. Only 5 of the 17 participants (see Table 5) started their careers with a plan, and their priorities during their early work years did not necessarily involve children. This is why Jamie exhorted that she just wanted to work and get as far as she could get while still feeling like she was doing something good. She was not sure how children would fit into that plan. As Jamie said, “I really did not plan very well. I just did what I wanted to do and hoped the career would work itself out.” Theresa also indicated that she did not necessarily have a long-term plan when she started her career. She said that some of her career trajectory was luck and happenstance more than a planned approach to advancement.

Often women in the student affairs profession face uneven challenges in the attempt to merge family life with their careers (Levtov, 2001; Marshall, 2004). A women’s manual in educational administration offers guidance:

A good rule to follow if you are in an administrative position is not to talk about family issues at work unless it is critical. If you must take your child (or parent or even spouse) to a doctor’s appointment, that appointment should be referred to as yours... This cannot be stressed enough: keep personal business to yourself (Witmer, 1995, p. 346).

This above example reflects a woman’s complicated realities when she attempts to combine family and work in today’s workplace. Catherine recalls a situation when she was working part-time and her supervisor scheduled a very important meeting on her day out of the office. She called everyone she could think of to see if they could watch her
son, but no one was available. She had to bring her infant son to the meeting with her. Her supervisor did not comment on fact that she made the effort to attend the meeting. Instead, Catherine found out at her next review that she would never be considered for a promotion because she was part-time and, therefore, did not qualify for advancement. Catherine left her position shortly after this conversation. She said:

There were occasions when I was required to work on the weekend because of a presentation to a student organization or fraternity on campus. But, I was never compensated for my extra time by being able to flex one of the weekends. My supervisor would just say that as a salaried employee we “do what it takes to get the job done.”

Judy indicated that the flexible schedule in her office was paltry because it equated to taking a half hour lunch break so that she could leave campus at 4:30 p.m. instead of 5:00 p.m. Krista also talked about the messages received in her workplace regarding the hectic lifestyle of a student affairs professional at the mid-level point. She said:

Meetings all over campus and I was on all these different committees. I just decided I couldn’t do that anymore. Just when I thought I could get away, a discipline case would come up that you felt you needed to do right away. In retrospect, now that I’m out of that environment and healthier, I realize that those perceived slackers in my office were actually being balanced. They were just working 50 hours a week instead of 70 hours. This comment reflects many of the participants’ emotions because the feeling of being disconnected with the future direction of the office paired with family commitments left these women with a strong personal ambition to opt out. The drive to achieve, however, was still internal.

Dr. Martin Seligman, a pioneer in cognitive psychology, believed that having options and making choices is the very foundation of human psychological health (Bennett, 2007). Similar to the SCCT, when a person loses hope she feels that she has
exhausted all possibilities and is left with no viable choices. This hopelessness leads to depression, anxiety, and apathy. Catherine said to herself, "Doctors and lawyers can work part-time and be promoted. Why can’t student affair professionals?" She became very frustrated with the environment in her department because she felt undervalued. The final straw was when she realized her husband’s bonus was more money than her entire salary. It was at that point that she decided it was time to leave the profession.

Theme 2

*Family Support and Sacrifice Made the Decision-Making Process Easier to Navigate, But All Still Consider It a Privilege.* All 17 of the participants considered opting out a privilege (see Table 6). As Lori stated, "I always thought that I was going to have to work, but being able to stay home was such a gift that it is something I would never regret or take for granted." For others, economics played a vital role in the decision-making process but did not drive the choice to drop out. For example, Judy explains:

Opting out is a privilege if it is something that you want to do and are able to do economically for your situation. For many, economics dictate otherwise and opting out is not a possibility. However, in my experience in higher education, there were not that many women with young children working in entry- to mid-level positions because the salary does not offset childcare and other work-related expenses to make it feasible.

All of the women in the study indicated that their partner’s income allowed them to make the decision to opt out of their career without significantly impacting their lifestyle. Interestingly, of the women who responded to this research inquiry, only one individual was divorced. She was also one of those individuals who re-entered the
workplace. McGinnis (2008) said that women in opt-out pieces were often interviewed either after they have already dropped out of work or before they were divorced. Laurie was interviewed for this particular study after she was divorced and had returned to a mid-level student affairs position. With a 50% divorce rate in America, “opt-out” stories fail to include the economic vulnerability of women who stop working and get divorced (McGinnis). This point further illustrates the need for family support. Such support helps women to opt-out with less concern for the financial ramifications of leaving a career. However, if after opting-out a divorce situation occurs it greatly impacts the decision to re-enter a career. This is why Laurie’s interview is unique and important to examine in future research.

Childcare was one reason that many of these professionals opted out. They rationalized that the costs of continued childcare would take most of their earnings. Jamie, for example, said that she worked during her daughter’s first year in a part-time position. When it came time for her to return to work in a full-time position, she decided that she would leave for a year. Daycare and childcare costs seemed prohibitively high for both Jamie and her husband to work full-time. After crunching the numbers, they figured they could just live off their savings. She said, “We knew it would be a financial struggle, but I would do it a year and, as time went on, it just extended longer and longer.” Another participant, Libby, said:

I really do feel like opting out was a privilege for me. Though the only tough part is the financial implications of only one of us working, it is worth it when I think of our girls and the care they are receiving from us.

The study participants discussed the emotional challenges women face when attempting to balance career and family. The women I interviewed cherished the time
they spent with their children and the deeply gratifying knowledge that their efforts were producing happy, thriving individuals. But at the same time, the women were clearly torn by the renunciations they felt necessary to make in their lives.

For most of the women in this study, the decision to leave a professional career was an emotional process. As Theresa noted, “the expectation of motherhood – child-centered, people-centered. It seems natural to me for many women to be in a nurturing, important, demanding, yet undervalued profession.” Most of the participants turned their self-efficacy and professional skills toward their families. Theresa went on to say she read a multitude of child development books, computerized processes in her house, and attained new levels of personal organization as a funnel for her emotional energy. Brittney learned everything she could about homeschooling her four children. Catherine said, “I made the decision to opt out on my own – knowing that my husband would support me fully. It was a relief when I finally did make a decision – and owned it.”

According to Lovejoy and Stone (2006), there are working mothers in higher education institutions who are the breadwinners for their household (i.e., single moms who make the money or married women whose significant other stays home with the children). In this study, however, the majority of women came from a two-income family. While most two-income families calculated the financial implications when making the decision to opt out (e.g., Judy, Krista, Brittney, Beth), it was not the defining factor. Many of the participants cited factors such as a sizable commute, nine to five workday with no flexibility, travel, late night programs, and weekend commitments in their decision to opt out.
The reality of planning for and then having children made each of the respondents weigh the choice and the privilege of opting out versus staying in the current career. As Laurie said, “I think women pay the price. I don’t think kids do and I don’t think spouses do. I think it’s the women themselves. And they have the guilt.” Each of the women in this research project had the personal drive and ambition to succeed, yet they decided that they needed the step away from the workplace. They were fortunate because all but one participant had a partner to carry the financial responsibility for the household.

The women indicated they were fortunate for the family support throughout the career decision-making process, but felt professional socialization in their careers may have created a disadvantage for women. There are two main components of general socialization: an uninterrupted employment history and geographic mobility (Levtov, 2001). An uninterrupted employment history benefits the employee because of the long-term retirement and social security contributions. Similarly, geographic mobility is often essential to career advancement. Four of the women in this study relocated to different states because of their spouse’s career advancement. Diane felt she was:

... torn with my responsibility because I am personally struggling with my self-worth by staying at home versus working. I loved the profession and what I did, I just could not figure out how having a family could fit into that lifestyle of work. When you are the top level of administration, the demands for ‘being there’ are so much greater and the pressure and guilt associated by making compromise with a family was ultimately out of the question from my perspective. There is not a lot of forgiveness or understanding when everyone else around you at the top level is male.

Opting out is not an easy decision, but each of these women had to weigh her personal choices and determine what worked best for herself and her family. In Diane’s comment, she gets at the heart of the friction between stay-at-home mothers and working
mothers. As mentioned in the literature review, additional reports discuss the phenomenon of women obtaining the highest levels of education, entering the workforce in record numbers, and then choosing to leave the workforce (e.g., Bauer, 2006; Belkin, 2003). The pressures of caregiving are further exacerbated when women must manage the needs of aging parents as well as young children. Hewlett and Luce (2007) found that 24% of women left the profession because of elder care. Jocelyn said,

I think having my dad living with us has affected me because I am taking a lot more time off of work to take care of his medical needs and I’m completely exhausted first thing in the morning because he keeps me up all night long. He has had a greater impact on my career than our son or even our 12-year-old niece we just took over temporary guardianship for. I’m a very sensitive person, but I think I’ve become more emotional just because I feel so drained and it’s carrying a lot of responsibilities.

For divorced women with young children, it might not be feasible to opt out. Laurie, the only divorced woman in my study, focused her advice to women on becoming self-sufficient. She said,

I would advise women that if they choose to stay home with kids for a portion of the time that they continue to grow personally and that they make some plans and goals to either take a class or become involved in the community or work part-time for themselves. I think women tend to always think of everybody else first.

In order to make the opt-out decision-making process easier, women should consider their own needs and priorities more often. More importantly, though, family support is vital to making a decision. This support is essential, since most women still consider it a privilege to opt-out of their career.
Many of the Participants Expressed Feeling Emotionally Torn Between Work and Motherhood. Meaningful work is an important component of who women are as individuals, and therefore, a significant part of what makes certain women good mothers.

All 17 of the participants expressed feeling emotionally torn between work and motherhood. Catherine said,

I know I made the right decision. I have also been fortunate to have worked several times on a temporary part-time basis. I also feel confident that when the time is right, I will re-enter the work-force in some capacity though it might not be in higher education.

Julie talked about the fact that she wanted to spend time with her daughter and felt that being in daycare all day, five days a week would take away from her childhood development. Yet, she felt the transition to being a stay-at-home mom was difficult because she found there were days that she did not shower or leave the house at all.

Another participant, Jamie, said that she felt torn between working full-time and motherhood,

Before I opted out? Oh, it felt horrible. Actually, when I was working 80% I would have one day on and one day off, and the day I was off it was all about just going back the next day. I had to do laundry and get my outfits ready, and I was nursing so I had to pump breast milk, and had to cook and like my house was trashed because I had worked the night before and the nights that I would work, because there were a lot of evening hours, because graduate students would come in later, I would basically do nothing at home on the days that I would work, I would just pick up the baby, come home, make dinner, and just like crash. So it was just all work, no family, and then the next day it was still all about work it felt like to me.

Another participant, Judy, said that personally and professionally, the decision to stay at home was best for her family because the small amount of pay that she would
have been taking home from her last salary would not have been worth the toll that
working full-time would have taken on her family environment. She said,

I know that being home with my son has made our individual family environment
less stressful and chaotic. Looking back, it also would have been very difficult to
work full-time and care for my son as he had a series of chronic (not serious)
illnesses almost constantly during his first 18 months. It also gave me more time
to work with him one-on-one when he had a speech delay. So, overall, being
home enabled him to receive the best care that he could without affecting either of
our professional careers. I also had time to volunteer with some non-profit
agencies since staying home, which is something I did not have time for in the
past.

The emotional distress over the choice between career and motherhood plays an
important role in the decision to opt out in order to stay home. As Theresa exhorted,

I joke and say that I am one of the only people that go down the organizational
chart instead of up the organizational chart. I don’t want to supervise anybody and
I don’t want to have more responsibility. When I started working part-time, I
think that the balance was much, much better for my family.

Another aspect of this emotional tug was the question of “doing it all.” Diane was
the first person to say “I don’t know how women do it.” This statement is an interesting
one because it is often met with such emotional reactions. As Laurie said,

If you had a supportive spouse that said that he could do the laundry or meals and
when you returned home the house was peaceful, organized, laundry finished,
then maybe you would feel that it was all worth it. But, I bet that 75% of the
relationships don’t have that.

The emotional struggle a woman faces between balancing career and family is
stressful, and often the institution can make it more stressful. Wolf-Wendell, Twombly,
and Rice (2000) noted women with children in institutions of higher education had less
institutional support than men with children.
Theme 4

Mentoring and Supervision Were Critical for Women in Making Career Decisions. Having a strong mentor or a supervisor who was flexible played a very important role in each woman’s career decision. It is important to have mentoring relationships (Amey & Reesor, 2009) and female student affairs professionals need to be intentional in seeking potential mentors. For example, Krista mentioned that she chose her mentors (male student affairs professionals at the senior level) because they brought a different perspective which helped her think more broadly and comprehensively.

Institutional type emerged as an influential factor – especially public versus private, religious versus secular, and small school versus large school. Five of the women (Krista, Christy, Brittney, Betty, and Julie) who worked in small, Christian liberal arts institutions mentioned the mentoring they received from senior student affairs professionals. For example, Krista said “One of my mentors showed me that you could be a mom and work. It was a matter of choice.” Krista was one of the women in the study who left the field due to her husband’s career opportunity in another city. It is not possible to say that one type of institution is more open to change than another; they present different challenges, and the influence of institutional type will be dependent on what other factors are at work in that specific setting. For example, Libby talked about how working at a for-profit institution was different because of how the overall management ethos affected the culture. In that case, the size of the school, or its status did not mattered, but that it subscribed to a business-oriented philosophy. On the other hand, Julie worked in a small, private, religiously affiliated institution. She talked about
how her workplace was very family-friendly and the staff was largely composed of working mothers. When Julie made the decision to opt out, her supervisors did not want to lose her and tried to talk her out of the decision. But she decided to stick with her plan. Julie said “...my supervisors understood my decision to leave and said that they did the same thing with their own children. They told me I wouldn’t regret it.”

The ability to work in an accommodating and family-friendly environment would have been a key to retaining the women who opted out of their mid-level student affairs positions. Diane worked for a large, public institution. As she said:

Working the crazy Student Affairs hours that you work, weeknights, weekends, early mornings, overnight retreats, and all that kind of stuff that goes with being in Greek Life was doable without kids. Even as a young married couple [it was doable] because my husband was a fundraiser for the college so he lived and breathed higher education as well. We were working late, commuting together, and all that stuff.

The women enjoyed the early days of their professional careers. With the growth of the family responsibilities, however, they felt that their work schedule became too much to handle. All of the women who I spoke with regarding their student affairs positions talked about the fact that their positions were not typically 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Time and again, these women highlighted the significance of going “above and beyond” for students. This meant that they would often stay late or arrive early to do “whatever it took” to get the job completed.

Pay equity and flexible work schedules were two issues that surfaced when participants were asked about institutional support. Jamie indicated that she has now served as a mentor for young, female student affairs professionals in her institution. When these younger women tell her they do not really care about the money, she often
responds, “But you need to in order to feel valued and if you don’t want the money then give it to someone who can use it. You need to advocate for yourself.” She said that she has started programming at her institution on pay equity to demonstrate that women have to work a full year plus a couple of extra days to make equal pay as most white males. This programming is part of the American Association of University Women’s Equal Pay Day.

Work environments considered “family-friendly” included supportive supervisors, encouraging coworkers, an institutional culture that was supportive of working parents and caregivers, and available work-family benefits. These factors work together to help create a family-friendly culture that assists working parents. As noted in Table 6, the women (Theresa, Amy, Jamie, and Julie) satisfied with their positions talked about job flexibility. For those without job flexibility, it did not seem worth the effort to remain in their positions. Jamie compared her current position with the position she had previously in student affairs. She said,

I had miscarried before my first daughter was born and when I was having difficulties with the pregnancy I went on disability. The dean came to my supervisor to inform her that they were not really happy with the fact I took disability and then continued with our family’s plan to take a vacation. He expected me to cancel our trip. Gratefully, my supervisor defended me and said that it is a very emotional experience to go through a miscarriage. But, it still felt shocking and eye opening that the institution would be so unsupportive.

Sarah, another young female student affairs professional with a mid-level position at a private institution, just made the decision that seemed right for her family. After repeated requests for a reduced workload (80%), she decided to leave her position to stay at home with her children. She would have loved to stay in her position; she earned a Master’s degree, which supported her career goals. However, she needed more flexibility
and time in her life. Her request to work a four-day week schedule was denied. As mentioned in the literature review, mid-level student affairs administrators who experience career advancement often have accumulated several years of professional experience in various positions at colleges and universities. This individual gave up her position because she felt that she did not have any alternative at the college. Furthermore, she did not have a female senior-level administrator to advocate on her behalf.

The option to work a part-time or flexible schedule was available to some, but not all, of the participants. Carol said, "We did not have a part-time option and there was no job sharing option. Knowing at one point, I would have kids; I knew I would have a conflict."

This lack of flexibility in the workplace put a strain on the balance between work and family. Judy described her former work environment in this way,

I worked for someone who was very old-school and by the book when it came to schedules. We did the flex schedule in the summer, but it was the lamest flex schedule you have ever seen. Basically, you could take a half hour lunch, five days a week, and leave early on Friday if we had appropriate staff coverage in the office. If not, you could take another day of your choice. There were some other departments on campus where you could come in early, work four ten-hour days, and things like that. But, it just wasn’t there in my office and creativity wasn’t encouraged. I know it is hard when you are working with students, but, we could have created some alternative work schedules like holding appointments in the afternoon and making employer calls from home in the morning.

In the business world, women have the ability to utilize flexible work hours and technology to complete their professional responsibilities from home (Lovejoy & Stone, 2006). However, the field of student affairs has traditionally been based on intense personal contact, not technology and flexibility. Typically, job descriptions for most student affairs positions include significant student interaction that cannot be achieved
through telecommunication – despite the fact that traditional college-age students are familiar with instant messaging, e-mail, and the Internet (Keup, 2008). The importance of immediate responsiveness to student concerns has essentially created a culture of overworking (Fitzgerald, 2009). Julie admits that she works more than required because of technology. She often finds herself responding to student’s questions while at home with her son. She says, “My laptop is actually attached to my hip.” While this example champions some women’s nurturing and caring sides, it also limits the options for women who are looking for balance between their professional and personal lives.

In this study, 13 of the 17 participants indicated that they had mentors who helped them navigate their decision-making process. Catherine was one of the few women in her particular workplace with young children so she did not have any type of institutional support. She remembers asking women in senior administrative positions how they managed to work when their children were little. She reports, “What I learned is that none of them worked when their kids were little. They all stayed home.” It is Catherine’s opinion that a mentor would ideally be a female student affairs professional who has navigated the deep waters and is able to provide career advice. The women in Catherine’s workplace were able to provide career advice, but each of them waited until their children were older before entering the workplace. Jocelyn noted that she had close relationships from her first position, but she had not established a mentor relationship at her new institution and would be looking to build something as a re-entering professional. Amy had a similar situation at her institution. As Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2009) suggest, individuals can benefit from role models and mentors. Exposure to a mentor or positive role model is essential when navigating a major career decision.
The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a mentor as “a trusted counselor or guide.” A mentor is an individual, usually older and always more experienced, who helps and guides another individual’s development. Jamie referred to a female student affairs professional who retired from her position a few years ago. At the time, Jamie’s one-year-old daughter came with her to the retirement party. The retiree told Jamie, “They’re only little for so long and you can have this [career] for a long time when you come back to work.” Jamie said that this individual was really an inspiration to her because she really took her words to heart when she considered staying home.

Krista indicated that she feels blessed to have had many mentors in her life. She said,

The first person I would consider to be my mentor is my father. He was an incredible leader as the President of [a major church organization in the United States] and was very well-read on leadership development and politics. If I ever came up against administration, the men’s club, or stuff like that, I would definitely call him. The other person was the Vice President of Student Affairs at my institution. He was very supportive of my career decisions. Finally, the Dean of Campus Ministries was a female mentor. She was a strong single woman when I first met her. She got married and had children, but she always stayed active and involved in what was going on in the institution.

Christy indicated that her former supervisor turned out to be her mentor. She was a “confidante and a friend who was married with children. Yet, she always managed to juggle everything.” Not all mentors come from the workplace. Libby’s mentor was her mother, who raised Libby and her sister as a single mom. One other participant, Jamie, indicated she did not have a mentor in her career journey. She said,

My mom was a single, working mom, so maybe that was a little bit of a model in terms of how hard it is to be a working parent. And in the work environment, I did not really have any friends in higher education who had had babies and made the adjustment back.
Interestingly, there was a lack of female role models for many of the women in this study. While important for men, research suggests mentoring relationships are vital for women's career development, as female employees face greater organizational, interpersonal, and individual barriers to advancement (Kanter, 1982). Some of the participants, like Krista, indicated male mentors throughout the career journey. Perhaps it is the capability of the mentor that matters and not their gender? However, there is a smaller supply of mentors available to women than to men (Burke & McKeen, 1994). Many of the other women I interviewed talked about the fact that most of the women in senior administrative positions either stayed at home when their children were young or did not have any children. Therefore, they had to find their mentors outside of their student affairs department because they did not have a support system in their own department. The aspiration levels of women might be raised if female mentors are available to act as a role model (Hackett and Betz, 1981). Catherine talked about the time when she went to the Assistant Director in her department to find out how she handled childcare when her daughter was a toddler, only to discover that she did not start working until her daughter was a teenager. She then went to a colleague who worked in the Development Office and built a mentoring relationship. This individual was a working mother with a young child and had the life perspective that helped Catherine through difficult times. Of course, there is a vast difference between having a mentor and having a supportive supervisor. While most of the women respondents had a mentor, only a few had supportive supervisors during their career.

Judy noted that her experience and the experience of other women who opted out was greatly impacted by her supervisor at the time. She wrote,
While I was on maternity leave, the staff did their annual evaluations. I had written a very positive performance evaluation while on maternity leave for the Director to deliver to another female employee who was also pregnant. It was while he was going over the evaluation with her that the two knocked heads (again) and she quit. The Director's lack of flexibility, inappropriate (and possibly illegal) comments and questioning regarding our pregnancies, and poor personnel management skills led to turnover in the department as a whole – and certainly did not contribute favorably in decisions made to opt out.

The research participants emphasized that having a supportive supervisor was an essential ingredient for making their working lives prosper after having children. These women rarely let their family responsibilities interfere with their professional duties; however, simply knowing their supervisor respected their family lives made an important difference.

Catherine was one of the research participants who did not return to the workplace – and she is not sure she wants to reenter that environment. She talked about the time she was on maternity leave with her first child. Even though she was not technically “working,” she drove to campus in the middle of a snowstorm on a Sunday evening to do a resume workshop for a sorority. She had made the commitment to present to the students months prior and did not want to cancel on the group. Her supervisor never acknowledged her efforts. Catherine did not wish for a public acknowledgement, but would have appreciated recognition from her supervisor that she made an extra effort. After her son was born, she decided to work part-time. Her position was the first part-time position offered in the student affairs division at the institution; she remained in that part-time position for four years. Catherine explained,

I was an assistant director and I am not like the person that gives just 90% of my effort. When I was hired in, I was under the impression that I needed to get my Master's degree to get a promotion. So I juggled working, raising our first child, and attending graduate school to finish the degree. Our supervisor hired someone
with no higher education experience and it was announced he was promoted to associate within a few months. I asked my supervisor why I wasn’t also promoted and I was told I would never move up because I was in a part-time position.

On the other hand, it is easier for employees to care for their children with the knowledge that they have their supervisor’s support should they need to stay home to care for a sick child or leave early to attend an important event. In return, employees are careful to make up the time and often exceed the supervisor’s expectations. For example, Laurie was one of the research participants who reentered the workplace. She indicated that her current supervisor allows her to arrive at work at 10:00 a.m. when she had to work until 6:00 p.m. on the same day. She is also able to leave work in the middle of the afternoon to pick up her middle child who has mental disabilities to drive her to her part-time job at the local grocery store. This type of flexibility enabled her to return to the workplace. As Amy said, “It’s just kind of backwards when you think about Student Affairs and how open we are and welcoming… it just does not fit.”

Its staff, especially its leaders, shapes the culture of a workplace. Supportive supervisors are leaders who come in all forms. For example, when she re-entered the field of student affairs, Jamie said her supervisor claimed that family was important. Jamie indicated she was skeptical at first because he was a young, single man. However, he demonstrated that he was true to his word. Jamie said, “…part of how the whole process works is that the whole team I work with is very supportive of work and life balance.”

During this study, it became clear that the women wanted to have co-workers and supervisors who recognized and respected their numerous family and work demands. The supportive supervisors did not question the participant’s career dedication when they left work early to take a child to the doctor or attend a school event. Jamie explained,
The most important part of the day for me is getting my kids off the school bus because that is when I hear about their day and if they need to go to any extra-curricular activities or play with their friends. But, at the same time, I still feel like I get a full professional experience because I have a lot of creativity and flexibility in my new position.

Unfortunately, not everyone in this study had a supportive work environment. Theresa indicated that when she worked full-time she would leave at 5:15 p.m. every day and people would say, "You're leaving already... where are you going?" She said, "There was a sense that well, you're not working until six or seven? I just think that kind of culture is unhealthy for anybody, especially in the student affairs profession." One other participant said that she left her position of ten years because her supervisor started planting explicit messages about how he did not feel that four days a week was working for the department – even though her productivity and statistics were higher than other members of the department were. In the work environment, coworkers can provide support, advice, and even assist in covering evening events. If these support systems exist, employees will feel more comfortable attending to their children’s needs while still fulfilling all of their job responsibilities (Blake-Beard, Ingols, Shapiro, 2008; Wolf-Wendell, & Ward, 2001). When such systems are not in place, employees like Catherine might decide that the rewards of working do not outweigh the emotional toll on the family. When asked about the event or thought which led to her decision to leave her position, she responded,

It was a combination of things... the other person getting the promotion after being in the office a shorter amount of time; the fact I was still juggling all my previous responsibilities [supervising graduate students, coordinating job fairs, employer relations, and student appointments] in a part-time position; and the fact that my supervisor told me that I was not getting the same pay raise because I was considered part-time.
When people have to take care of somebody other than themselves, whether sick children or parents, there is a real social problem with the disconnect between work and family (Hochschild, 1997). Jocelyn indicated that the whole transition of being pregnant, a new mother, and having her father move in with them played a role in her stepping out. As Libby said, “If I was an employer, I would offer more flexible schedules, allow for some telecommuting, or work from home.” From the participants in this study, flexibility in the work environment would have been a critical necessity for them to have not opted out of the workplace.

Theme 5

Finding Self Worth and Fulfillment is Key for Participants’ Professional Growth.

All the participants articulated the importance of finding self-worth and personal fulfillment, regardless of life situation. Laurie emphasized that it was not essential for a woman to work outside the home to obtain that fulfillment. Instead, the participants’ comments emphasized the fact that opting out is a personal choice to be made in conversation with immediate family. As Carol said, “There isn’t one size fits all for anybody. Each person has to work through her own desires because you can’t say all women should stay home with their kids or all women should work part-time.” Carol went on to say that she would love to work in higher education again, but it was too hard to fit the requisite work hours around other people’s schedules. Her part-time retail position fits much better for her family and current lifestyle because the hours are flexible. The overwhelming majority of women in this project expressed a moderate to
high degree of ambivalence about the decision to quit their jobs, and for many the
decision was protracted and agonizing. As Theresa said, “Whether you work full-time or
part-time, I think if you’ve got a family that it is going to take precedence. It should take
precedence.”

For the group of participants who opted out of their mid-level student affairs
positions and did not return, adaptation to home life created a change in values and
interests. The majority of women felt less committed to their former careers (though not
to work itself), and either searched for alternative paths associated with traditional
professions for women, such as becoming an independent business consultant, or lost
career direction altogether. This profound shift in career orientation meant that those
individuals were either not planning or uncertain about returning to their former
occupations. These findings suggest that departure from the work force, even
temporarily, may have long-term consequences for certain aspects of women’s career
development and commitment. For instance, Beth started working for a national
organization that sold clothing through home shopping parties. Catherine indicated she
would rather work for herself than return to the world of higher education. She articulated
key factors in her decision, including the desire to have creativity and flexibility in the
workplace. According to Table 6 in Chapter 5, only Jessica and Brittney experienced no
indecision or ambivalence in making the decision to interrupt their careers for home.

For the women in this study who chose not to re-enter the profession of student
affairs, my analysis indicated that their decisions were influenced by numerous factors,
involving the interplay of workplace pushes and family (children and husbands) pulls.
Among the women who cited a desire to stay home with their older children (Beth, Betty,
Laurie, and Brittney), an increase in the scope and complexity of their academic and social development needs played a role in career interruption. Having chosen family over career, women’s professional identity continued to be important to them once they had left the workplace and transitioned home. Laurie notes:

I think we (females) pay a huge price in order to carve out a little time to process and grow, take a class... like our spouses do, you know. I see my colleague who is the Dean of Multicultural Affairs get ready for a conference. She cooks all the meals and freezes them ahead of time, does all the laundry, puts out the clothes for the week, and etc. It’s hardly worth the mental energy. Now if you love your work, could that possibly be rejuvenating? Maybe, but I think there is too many expectations tied to work so it feels like a stress rather than a rejuvenation. I needed to look outside my student affairs profession in order to redefine myself.

Being home was a transformative experience for many women. Their heightened involvement in mothering and in volunteer work and their adaptation to the new role of stay-at-home mother resulted in a profound shift in these women’s values and interests over time. Their valuation of mothering and care-work deepened. For instance, Laurie became very involved in her church and led service-learning projects for the youth groups. She also developed a fascination for home improvement projects. She said, “I’d tear down a wall and I’d paint this up, and I’d redo a kitchen. I gutted out a whole kitchen and contracted out only the things I needed.” Additionally, Amy said she got involved with her children’s school and the local Junior League after she opted out of the workplace. Amy was also one of four research participants who followed her pioneer spirit to start a business of her own. She started making baby blankets; this started as a small hobby, which involved making blankets to give away to friends and family and expanded into an entrepreneurial venture.
This shows that these women want to have the option of balancing career and family; organizations need to provide situations where women can have that meaningful balance. For employers who want to retain these workers in the long run, for women who seek to combine work and family, and for the advancement of gender equity, these results argue for policies that facilitate career persistence during periods of high family demand. These policies need to accommodate work-family needs at different life cycle and family stages, and seek to accommodate women’s work-family responsibilities via career exit and re-entry (Lovejoy & Stone, 2006).

The women who returned to student affairs positions described a sense of trepidation about re-entering a workforce from which they had been absent for many years. The older they were and/or the longer they had been out of the work force and at home, the less confident they were about the prospects for re-entry. Christy indicated that she recently saw the tiniest glimpse of what re-entry would look like when she interviewed for a student affairs position. She was not familiar with some of the terms they used during their conversation. At one point, one of the interviewers referenced Facebook. He turned to Christy and said, “Oh, you might not know what that is.” She felt very insecure at that moment because prior to opting out she had been very well respected in her field. “If I were to go back to higher education, I think there would be a big reality check” Christy said.

Theresa was able to find work that matched her needs at her former institution. She utilized her network of friends to find a re-entry position that offered flexibility. She works three days a week, which she said is the target number for feeling engaged and
connected with the office staff. Similarly, Amy felt that networking has helped her return to the student affairs profession. She said,

I sometimes think it’s about who you know and who knows you. A couple of key people knew me from my former institution and knew I was a good student and knew I was a good worker. They were like, “Oh hire Amy... she’ll be great and she’ll finish the job and it will be wonderful.”

Amy had stayed connected with her colleagues in student affairs, both personally and professionally. Her children called her former employers “Aunt” and “Uncle.” She returned to the profession briefly but approximately one year ago made the decision to stay home with her children full-time. This decision connected with other research participants’ comments about the importance of being home with children as they get older.

Julie was the only research participant who truly acknowledged feeling “very happy and very lucky” because her opt-out time was only a year. That one year was enough time for Julie to realize that she was quite depressed as a stay-at-home mother. She said:

The first couple of weeks were fine. I was really happy and I had her going out every day to the park or grocery store. When it started to get cold, we couldn’t get out of the house and I started to wear down. I realized that I wasn’t getting ready every day. Sometimes, I wouldn’t even shower. I got really depressed within a couple of weeks and it got really bad to the point that my husband would come home from work and I would get mad at him because he would tell me about what a great day he had... and that wasn’t right. I figured I needed to get back into the work force again so I started looking for jobs in the classified ads.

In an ironic twist of fate, Julie’s position at her former institution was never filled. The administration was feeling pressure because it had been so long and they had not found anyone to do academic advising. Julie was able to negotiate a full-time schedule that involves three ten-hour days and two days telecommuting from home.
Summary

Chapter 5 explored the broad categories and emerging themes based on the analysis of the 17 interviews of mid-level student affairs professionals who opted out of and, in the case of some, re-entered the field of higher education. The women in this study fell within categories based on self-efficacy and career goals. They talked most about the needs for supportive environments and discussed what those would look like for mid-level student affairs professionals, and they ultimately had to redefine for themselves what success meant to them personally.

It is important to note that as the current generation of student affairs professionals retire, there is a high probability that mid- and senior-level positions will be held by women, due to the simple fact that females have dominated enrollments in graduate preparation programs in recent decades. For this research study it is clear that the student affairs profession has a unique opportunity to challenge traditional patterns of career advancement. An example is creating supportive environments where employees can request alternative work arrangements without fear of professional penalty. Such innovative practices would surely reflect positively on the profession. Chapter 6 offers the conclusions and recommendations based on my 17 interviews with the participants of this study.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is about the decision-making process of women with young children at the mid-level student affairs position who decided to opt out of their career for a minimum of one year and, for some, a return to higher education. It is a phenomenological research study based on interviews with 17 mid-level college administrators and mothers of young children, infant to pre-teen, who chose to opt out of the work place in lieu of continuing to balance family and career. Though the individuals interviewed were each unique in their socioeconomic status, education, and career path, their issues and concerns were similar.

The participants interviewed for this study openly revealed the various compromises and tradeoffs they faced as professionals and parents. In deciding to leave higher education, they discussed the necessity of determining what one values in student development, whether one has stopped growing at one’s current institution, and why opting out would or would not be worthwhile. My conversations with the research participants who decided to opt out after they had children uncovered a web of complex, mixed feelings. Most firmly felt that they had done the right thing for their children by putting their own career pursuits aside. Common themes of the interviews noted that the participants felt that the lack of support and flexibility in the work environment and among their supervisors led to their decision to opt out of their career path for a particular period of time. Some chose to return to their career after some time away. Those interviewed indicated that they originally chose an altruistic career, wanting to make a
difference for the young minds of tomorrow. Altruism was a common theme that attracted these women to student affairs even prior to having their own children.

Overall, my study addressed four research questions that examined the participants’ experiences and allowed for themes to emerge. The broad research questions were:

1. How do mid-level female student affairs professionals with young children make the decision to leave the field of student affairs for a minimum of one year?

2. For those female student affairs professionals with young children who left and later returned to the field, how did they experience these transitions? What barriers did they encounter (if any), and how did they overcome those barriers?

3. For those female student affairs professionals with young children who left and did not return, what was their rationale? How have they redefined themselves (if at all) to life after a career in student affairs?

4. How did these women’s career decision-making experiences fit within the Social Cognitive Career Theory framework (particularly the components of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals)?

From those broad questions, common words and phrases were consistently repeated which eventually coalesced into five major themes: (1) participants exhibited a strong ambition and drive to achieve their aspirations whether professional or personal, but the demands of student affairs were too inflexible; (2) family support and sacrifice made the decision-making process easier to navigate, but all still consider the ability to
opt out a privilege; (3) many of the participants expressed feeling emotionally torn between work and motherhood; (4) mentoring and supervision were critical for women making career decisions; and (5) finding self-worth and fulfillment was the key for participants’ professional growth. These emerging themes are intertwined in the four research questions and influenced the recommendations and conclusions in this chapter. Theoretical and practical implications of this study are presented along with recommendations of ways to follow up on these insights with further research.

Lent, Brown, and Hackett’s Social Cognitive Career Theory incorporates some of the contextual influences that allow for the conversation regarding motherhood as a valid career choice. This theory contains a self-efficacy component, and also looks at the social context of career decisions so that the emotional side of the person can be evaluated within the context of larger society. Participants in this research study described the role that factors such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals played in their career decisions and, in turn, the decision to leave the field for a minimum of one year which was the root of the first research question. The next three sections provide an overview of the research questions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study and recommendations for the field of student affairs.

Research Question One

The first research question addressed mid-level female student affairs professionals with young children who made the decision to leave the field of student affairs for a minimum of one year.
Traditional Mother Roles

Only for a small minority of women could the decision to step off the career track be viewed solely as a choice to become a full-time, stay-at-home mother. Jessica said, “I always knew that I would stay home when I was a parent” but cited her husband’s business travel as one life situation that made the decision to leave a position she loved easier. Brittney indicated she did not want her children to be raised by a paid professional. Childhood memories seemed to influence their self-efficacy because they had pleasant memories associated with their upbringing. Some of the women who opted out and stayed out came from homes where their mothers did not work outside the home. An example is Carol, who opted out of the field of student affairs after the birth of her son. During her interview, she noted that her husband preferred the traditional roles of husband and wife. (“He likes having dinner prepared when he arrives home.”) However she also had the perception that her employer might assume that all women would simply want to remain in their current job without adding new responsibilities. She acknowledged the financial costs (loss of retirement savings, pension, and other benefits), but believed that changes were inevitable because employers assumed that after women had children their careers took second place.

Even women who returned to the field of student affairs indicated that their mothers played important roles in their own career choices. One example is Libby, who said:

I feel like my mom has always been supportive of the choices that I make, whether it’s to work or stay at home. She worked crazy long hours and when my mom was home she was always tired, and I felt like there was that missing time with her.
Libby’s childhood memories of how she was raised greatly influenced her self-efficacy and helped her decide how she wanted to raise her family. The women in this study were influenced by numerous factors, involving the interplay of workplace pushes and family pulls. For example, theme two from chapter five described how family support and sacrifice made the decision-making process easier to navigate, however, most still consider opting out a privilege. The female participants also discussed the notion that all the women who opted out had a significant other who was able to cover the financial costs of the household.

*Flexibility of the Profession*

Workplace inflexibility and the inadequacy of reduced schedule options were one primary work-related dynamic which influenced women’s decisions to interrupt their careers. Women often faced intense pressure from the workplace to work long hours at a fast pace with little flexibility in scheduling and few reduced-hour options. When women did try to work part-time, they reported being denied the possibility of advancement or being penalized for working less than full time. As mentioned in chapter two, the October 2009 report by Maria Shriver indicated that it is smart family policy for businesses to retain women by figuring out how to help and support the American worker who is stretched (Boushey & O’Leary, 2009). As reflected in my interviews, the gender division of caregiving is often seen as a primary source of inequality for women. This connects to the third theme regarding the fact that many of the participants expressed feeling
emotionally torn between work and motherhood. The workplace setting needs to be sensitive to women's pushes and pulls in life.

A flexible work schedule was available to some, but not all of the research participants. At twelve of their institutions, flexible hours (flextime) existed. A flexible schedule allows employees to differ either the number of hours worked each day or the time of day an employee works. An employee could choose to work 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., rather than the standard 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. workday in a flextime situation, in order to pick up her kids from school (Marshall, 2004). Flextime may allow a parent to leave during the workday to take a child to a dentist appointment, if the employee works until later in the day or even on Saturday or Sunday to make up the time lost when the parent left. As another example, an employee could choose to work four ten-hour days instead of five eight hour days. It should be noted that some institutions which offered flextime on paper did not actually institute the policy throughout all departments. For example, at one small, private, liberal arts college, one student affairs office had a supervisor who was extremely conscious of the balance between work and family. He offered his staff the opportunity to work flextime, but a colleague – a supervisor for another department – would not even allow his part-time employees to switch their work days.

It has been suggested that most writing on the opt-out phenomenon has done a great disservice to women by suggesting many of them have been pushed out of work by factors such as inflexible workplaces, lack of family support, and a bias against mothers in the workplace (Williams, 2008). Yet the interviews conducted for this study demonstrated the lack of human resource policy which provides for alternative, flexible
work schedules and quality childcare. Therefore, the explanation of the opt-out phenomenon is accurate according to the interviewees. Making human resource policy adjustments would help create more options for balancing work and family – potentially eliminating the “all or nothing” mindset that seems to exist today. Indeed, the women who returned to the workplace with flexible schedules had a healthy and positive outlook on life.

A woman’s responsibilities in the home are not typically reduced when she is employed outside the home. Therefore, recognizing a mother’s accomplishments inside the home will help the world see these women as “productive members of society who deserve the same social rights as all other workers and citizens” (Schultheiss, 2009, p. 42). As mentioned in the literature review, Reskin and Padavic (1994) observed that, in addition to working, “many women are responsible for caring for four groups: themselves, husbands, children, and elderly parents or in-laws which all require considerable time and emergencies that cannot be scheduled off work time” (p. 147). Women often leave their day jobs and still complete a full day’s work at home, including chores and caring for the kids. Studies show that women still spend almost twice the number of hours than men do on household tasks (Hochschild, 1989, Reskin & Padavic, Schultheiss, 2009). The estimated working hours per week for these “double day” women range from 65 to 84 hours a week (Carli & Eagley, 2008; Reskin & Padavic).

The escalating burdens required of women in this study are often emotionally taxing. For example, Theresa said:

I think the expectation for student affairs administrators to be student-centered is the same expectation of motherhood—child-centered, people-centered. It seems natural to me for many women to be in a nurturing, important, demanding, yet
undervalued profession—just like motherhood! I plan to work to make sure both roles are more fully appreciated.

Theresa’s quote really brings to the forefront the emotional struggle many women face when raising a family while having a career in student affairs. Both roles are “people-centered” and require they be nurturing, even when under stress. Unfortunately, too often motherhood and the student affairs professions are underappreciated roles, and this creates emotional stress as well. The field of student affairs has the opportunity to become a leader in best practices for smart family policy (Boushey & O’Leary, 2009) by making the necessary shifts to support a family structure that works for men and women in the workplace. Recent examples of effective smart family policy includes Purdue University’s flexible work arrangements found in the work life programs section of the 2008-2014 strategic plan found at http://www.purdue.edu/strategic_plan/documents/StrategicPlanBrochure.pdf.

The literature on working women constantly refers to the tension women go through while trying to balance work and home lives (Apter, 1993; Crittenden, 2003; Elliott, 2003; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Hochschild, 1997; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Levtov, 2001; Parker, 2009; Renn & Hughes, 2004). The research participants understood the role that self-efficacy and personal goals played in their career decision-making processes. All but one expressed concern about the time away from the profession. However, the gratification they accredited to focusing on their families was so strong that they recognized they would not be content if they stayed in their previous positions.
The fifth theme from chapter five discussed the fact that many of the participants expressed feeling emotionally torn between work and motherhood. Flexibility in the workplace would help to alleviate some of those emotional pushes and pulls. It was also a critical factor for reentry as indicated by the research participants in this study. Women’s desires to give up former careers and start again in new professions were motivated in large part by their need to find jobs which would offer greater family flexibility than their former occupation. While most women in the study wanted to return to work eventually, their time at home seemed to only intensify their desire to be a strong presence in their children’s lives. Therefore, it also heightened the value they placed on finding work which offered them the flexibility to do so. All of the women who planned to return to work wanted to return on a part-time or family-flexible schedule. The six women who reentered the workplace had positive experiences and did not experience any negative transitions. But, these reentries were accomplished by networking with former colleagues, taking a step down in their career track, articulating from the beginning that a flexible schedule was important.

Many of the participants enjoyed their professional careers and tried to blend their professional and personal lives for a period of time. However, their priorities were redefined by having children because a new perspective in life was added; the women in this study grew to be more focused about what they were prepared to surrender in their lives. When asked about the decision-making process, most women started by emphasizing the unique field of student affairs. They articulated that their jobs, prior to opting out, were incredibly demanding. For example, Diane’s original plan was to return to work after maternity leave; however, she did not know how she would achieve balance
because her husband’s job required frequent travel and she worked evenings and
weekends. Her decision was made easier by the fact that her husband accepted a new
position in another state. Noble and Manning (1997) write:

The work culture in student affairs organizations is one that demands long hours
of hard work for compensation that is not competitive with the private sector.
Those beginning their careers are generally the first to be asked to commit
themselves to evening and weekend engagements, to live on the job, or to
otherwise structure their time so that the task of managing a family would be
made especially difficult. (p. 108)

Krista explained the work setting in which she advised all the fraternity and sorority
leadership councils.

Sorority rush... I would put in hundreds of hours per week. I practically lived at
the office. I couldn’t have much leisure or relaxation opportunities outside of
work. I was expected to be accessible to students during standard work hours. I
was also easy to reach at any time by students or colleagues. I would get called at
two a.m. at home because someone was being transported to the hospital.

Krista’s description illustrates the unique field of student affairs. It shows why it can be a
rewarding career, but equally a demanding one that can greatly affect family life due to
long hours and working weekends.

Financial Implications

For many of the study participants, finances played a part in the decision to opt
out of the career world. Judy’s husband lost his job while she was on maternity leave;
thus, she did not give notice to her supervisor about her intent to leave the position
because her family needed her to continue working. About one month before she was
supposed to return to work, her husband found another position. This allowed her to
make the decision to quit her job. Jessica said that she and her husband discussed financial options:

I knew we could afford for me to stay home. We had the attitude we would just make it work no matter what... but it's hard to say if our financial situation would have been different what I would have done. I knew we could manage on one income because we did it while I was attending graduate school. I knew a lot of people who were used to two incomes for so many years that the idea of suddenly not having it is very difficult.

Another participant, Carol, said that some women just want to work for personal fulfillment. She wanted the option to stay home with her children. She said finances did play a role in the decision-making process because they [Carol and her husband] looked at how much it would cost for daycare versus how much she was making in the career services office. Weighing the costs associated with having a student affairs career and paying for childcare versus staying at home and having one income play a significant part in the decision-making process as demonstrated by Jessica and Carol. In the end, money was cited as one of the most influential factors in deciding whether to opt out of a career in student affairs for five women in this study (Beth, Carol, Catherine, Jessica, and Judy).

For some women, the decision-making process was made easier by the fact they relocated to another state because of their husband’s job. In my research, I saw five families move for the sake of a man’s budding career even when his wife had to give up a well-paying job. The families of the research participants Betty, Catherine, Christy, Diane, and Judy fall into this category. For example, Diane’s husband accepted a new, higher level position at another institution while she was pregnant with their first child. She said:
I probably would have stayed. It may have been different. The move helped in the transition for me. Moving to a totally new environment has probably been easier on me because I think if I would have chosen to stay at home, in the town we lived, I know I would have struggled with my identity and everything.

More than simply being focused on motherhood or career loss, it was that moving force or transition in identity which really affected the women in this study. Another participant, Judy, was more optimistic about the fact that she quit her position at a regional state university to move across the state for her husband’s career. She said the downside was that her options for working in higher education were much more limited in her new town than they would have been in Judy’s previous town because of the lower number of schools. Relocation, whether to a new state, or just a new town in the same state, often makes the decision-making process easier for some women. While it usually eases the transition from full-time professional to stay-at-home mom, it does not mean a woman will not miss her career in student affairs.

Research Question Two

Research question two focused on those female student affairs professionals with young children who left and later returned to the field and how they experienced these transitions. Most of the women in my study were interested in returning to work at some point in the future, with two-thirds saying they definitely intended to return and another quarter less certain, but considering it (see Table 5). However, most of these women anticipated making a career shift upon their return to work. Some women had clear plans to switch out of their student affairs profession and into another, while others were more adrift, searching for alternatives to their former professions.
Two emerging themes stood out in responding to my second research question. First, mentoring and supervision were critical for women making career decisions. A mentor can help advance an individual’s career and give social and psychological support to her as she develops her career plans (Carli & Eagley, 2008). A supportive supervisor can make negotiating family-friendly benefits smoother for the female student affairs professional in the workplace (Carli & Eagley). Second, institutional support was perceived to be crucial for persistence; alternately, the institution also created identified barriers which caused stress. Why does this matter? Higher education could do more to train supervisors to be sensitive to women’s needs or provide formal mentoring programs for employees.

Overwhelmingly, the women that I spoke to had positive things to say about the decision to stay home with their children and opt out of their mid-level student affairs position career. However, only five of the 17 women I spoke with during the research had been out of the profession for five years or more. The majority of the women I interviewed had been out of the workplace for one and a half to three years. Studies of women over time are necessary to comment on the long-term effects of opting out of a student affairs position. However, it did appear that there were some penalties for opting out even for a short time. For example, Christy recently applied for a position as the Assistant Director of Student Affairs at a mid-level public institution. She expressed concern that if she remained out of the workplace for too long she might lose her contacts
there which would make it harder to reenter the field. During the interview, a committee member made a reference to Facebook. He turned around to look Kristin directly in the eye and said, “You might not know what that is.” She said that she wanted to respond with something witty but was simply dumbfounded by the fact that he assumed she did not know that Facebook was an online social networking site. Throughout much of the interview, she experienced the same feeling of being judged. These experiences emphasize the importance of professional networks because the women who opt out need to stay connected somehow to the field of student affairs. The participants who easily navigated their way back into student affairs had one thing in common: they utilized their personal network of former colleagues to research career opportunities. Libby was able to connect with a former Resident Assistant with whom she had kept in contact.

He or his wife emailed me and said, “Hey, there’s a great position opening at XXXX and I think you should apply.” I had told them that I was going to reenter [the workplace] and look for jobs and so she told me about it and said, “Justin knows the director and if he can put a good word in for you he’ll do that.” And so I asked Justin, “If you could do that that’d be great.”

Utilizing one’s personal network, both friends and former colleagues, helps one learn about a new position and also can help ease the transition back into student affairs. Most of the participants understood the advantages of keeping in touch with former colleagues in order to more easily locate career opportunities.

For those female student affairs professionals with young children who left and then later returned to the field, the transitions of their initial departure and eventual return were made easier through the long-term relationships developed earlier in their careers. One of the barriers encountered was being the first person in student affairs at their institution to have a flexible or part-time position. Seven women in this study returned to
the field of student affairs after a period of time away from the work force. Only half of this group returned to full-time positions at their respective institutions. The other three participants work part-time at their institutions in various positions. The research participants agreed that combining the roles of mother and mid-level student affairs professional was complicated. These women led busy lives that were had both standard and unexpected challenges. They used intricate support systems to manage both the day-to-day and long-term needs in both their personal and professional lives. Strategies for managing their professional and personal lives stretched from the concrete, such as having a flexible schedule in the workplace, to the individual, such as “letting some things go.” One woman even said, “I just get up earlier.” Interviewees repeatedly emphasized common strategies that I explored in detail: developing wide-ranging support systems, negotiating flexible schedules in the workplace, and exploring entrepreneurial opportunities for success.

Catherine’s institution has a person who is the “work-life balance” representative in the human resources department, yet Catherine was not supported in her effort to work part-time. She realized that despite institutional attempts at change, there needed to be supervisory support of the process to make it happen in each department. This demonstrated that Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2001) were correct when they said that policies to support working parents are present in colleges and universities. However, this does not ensure that individuals are able to exercise these policies freely. My findings support the research of others which indicates work and family benefits in higher education are not utilized even though they are written in staff handbooks and policies (Finkel, Olswang, & She, 1994; Friedman et al., 1996; Gappa & MacDermid, 1997). The
number of mothers in the field of student affairs also influences the cultural climate. It was interesting to note that many of the women in this study did not have female role models in the senior-level administrative positions navigating the field with young children. The underutilization of work and family benefits can lead to that infamous “mommy track” and it will not change until those policies become common practice.

Environments that were supportive of outside commitments, and also had an overall family-friendly institutional culture, were vital for the participants in this study. Supervisors who recognized and accepted employees’ parental obligations made managing multiple commitments much easier for the participants in this study. In addition, having an institutional culture that valued children by supporting working parents was helpful. Smith (2009) indicated that creating an attitude of gratitude is as important as the division of labor. This awareness and understanding enabled women to develop flexible work schedules. An understanding institutional culture also persuaded women to involve their husbands and children in appropriate work events.

Work-family benefits played a key role in determining whether an individual opted-out and stayed out, or opted-out and later returned to the workforce. The individuals who felt they did not receive enough incentives to return to the field of student affairs stayed out, while the ones who felt they would acquire work place benefits (i.e., flexible schedules or rewarding job descriptions) were those who returned to the profession. Although few individuals utilized the work and family benefits offered, simply knowing there were options available was reassuring to these women because they knew there were long-term benefits as well (e.g., retirement savings, life insurance, and pensions). The women who returned to the field of student affairs also felt pulled
towards that altruistic concern for student success. Carli and Eagley (2008) conducted a study which demonstrated that multiple roles (for example, mother and professional) are more psychologically beneficial (increased well-being) than a single role. This is a supportive piece of literature that helps explain why some women want to work, and thus why institutions of higher education should be supportive in creating equitable family policies.

Libby talked about her experience transitioning back to student affairs and how she felt lucky to find a career counseling position.

Even when you’re talking salary, I pretty much was offered the same salary that I was getting at a private high school when I was a guidance counselor, so they pretty much continued where I left off. So I don’t feel like I was penalized in that way where they say “you have to start at this amount” or whatever, so I feel like they really did look at my previous salary and are continuing where I kind of left off, though it was a different work setting. So, yeah, I don’t feel penalized in that respect. I felt very lucky to get this job, even with my work history being so kind of staggered here and there. My career goal now is just to have some stability and some longevity in a place.

The above quote is another subtle example of institutional support easing the transition back into the career field. Libby felt lucky to find a career counseling position and she felt she did not experience any salary penalties for opting out. This certainly eased her transition back into student affairs.

Overcoming Obstacles

My second research question also explores the barriers the participants encountered (if any), and how they overcame those barriers to reach personal and professional career goals. Approximately two-thirds of these women anticipated making
a major career shift upon their return to work. For example, some of the women indicated that they felt as if people doubted their knowledge of the latest trends in student affairs. The greater the perceived barriers to an occupation, the less likely individuals are to pursue those careers.

Modifying faulty self-efficacy and outcome expectations can help individuals acquire new successful experiences and open their eyes to new careers. They encouraged other female student affairs professionals to stay connected to recent workplace trends. Other participants reported that they received mixed messages from colleagues regarding childcare options and working full-time. For example, Theresa said that in order to achieve work and life balance, mid-level student affairs professionals must work hard and establish credibility in the workplace. A new professional cannot simply walk into the workplace and expect flexibility. She said:

You have to establish a track record that your supervisor knows that you are only going to work twenty hours a week but it will be a really good twenty hours a week. In addition, you will contribute to the organization in meaningful ways even as a part-time employee.

Even so, the best intentions of an employee can be tarnished when he or she does not feel comfortable in the workplace.

Betty said that her supervisor handed her a copy of chapter seven from Maria Shriver’s *Ten Things I Wish I’d Known – Before I Went Out into the Real World.* The chapter title was “Children Do Change Your Career (Not to Mention Your Entire Life)” and included Shriver’s personal comments about why she opted out of her career in broadcast journalism. The advice was an early example of what Blake-Beard, Ingols, and Shapiro (2008) called the “self-employment model” which goes against the current
language, including “opting out” and challenges the accepted norm of “work is primary” in higher education. The participant, however, kept wondering why it was handed to her during the middle of her annual review. Her belief in her abilities and confidence were challenged because she worried that her supervisor did not feel her performance was the same as it was prior to her having children. These illustrations from Theresa and Betty above show a possible, subtle sexism that can exist in the workplace for women.

Research Question Three

My third research question examines the rationale for those female student affairs professionals with young children who left and did not return. How have they redefined themselves (if at all) to life after a career in student affairs? Since leaving their career in student affairs, the women in this study repositioned themselves through heightened involvement in mothering and in volunteer work. Their adaptation to the new role of stay-at-home mother resulted in a profound shift in these women’s values and interests over time, such that their evaluation of care-work deepened. As Brittney said, “My responsibility changed from being someone who brought in money to being someone who would raise our kids.” These women often pursue motherhood and community volunteerism with the same intensity and commitment they formerly applied to their professions with equal success, sometimes referring to one or the other as a second career.

My analysis indicated that these women’s decisions were influenced by numerous factors, involving the interplay of workplace pushes and family pulls. Among women who cited a desire to stay home with their older children (Beth, Betty, Laurie, and
Brittney), an increase in the scope and complexity of their children’s needs, primarily as they related to academic and social development played a role in career interruption. In reference to her decision to opt out, Laurie said that $700 was not a lot of money compared to the amount of support her children needed at the young stage in their lives.

Other reasons cited for not returning include the fact that some women did not want to work within a system and preferred a supervisory position. At the point when they became parents, research participants had already achieved advanced positions of leadership and as a result may have benefited from more flexibility and decision-making power (Marshall, 2002; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). However, many of the women in this study redefined themselves after a career in student affairs through starting their own businesses. These individuals were supervisors before – at the mid-level student affairs position – but taking on the financial risk of starting their own business was something new. For some individuals like Beth, it was the opportunity to be in control of her time and it was connected to being a mom. For other individuals like Kristen, it was more of a discontent with her student affairs career and desire to channel her creative side.

While some women held strong in charting a new course for themselves in the face of changes in their lives, some floundered as they tried to plan for future lives which would include work that was both adaptable to their family needs and which suited their changing values and interests. For example, Diane, whose decision to opt out of the student affairs profession was aided by her husband’s promotion to an institution across the country, struggled to figure out the balance she was looking for between her career goals and her personal aspirations.
Being home was a transformative experience for many women. For some women this meant a heightened involvement in mothering, for others it included adding volunteer work. Laurie became very involved in her church and led service-learning projects for the youth groups. Amy said she got involved with her children’s school and the local Junior League after she opted out of the workplace. Many (like Catherine) held high-level volunteer positions in their community, serving as board presidents and community organizers. Catherine said she was never a person who could sit still so she has been able to use her skills and abilities in other areas. The time she previously spent in higher education was then channeled into volunteering within the local community. She was a board member of her children’s school and volunteered for another local organization. She believes it is good for women to work. One of the things she wishes is that “my boys would know me more as a worker; not a mom. So I assume leadership positions when I can.” This recently included a year as the Cub Master for her sons’ Boy Scout Troup where she facilitated a monthly meeting for 85 elementary school boys and their families.

*Importance of Work and Life Balance*

As a mid-level professional in student affairs, I have heard that a hot topic in graduate school is which area is more conducive to raising a family. According to many young professionals, they choose not to go into residence life and student activities because the hours in these departments can be very demanding and thus difficult to combine with having a family. Some supervisors of women in my study fed into this conversation by creating a two-tiered approach for women with children and other staff members in the department. One participant said that her supervisor told her that it would
be important to work part-time when her children were little because that was what his wife did and it worked for them. While young women agonize about such choices and receive confusing messages from supervisors, young men generally seem to avoid those types of conflicts (Crittenden, 2001).

In her role as Associate Dean of Students, Krista indicated that she became very close to the other female associate deans in her professional association because they recognized that, in Christian education especially, the senior-level positions tended to be male-dominated. She had indicated that “unintentionally there was a men’s club because they understand each other, respond more in a male way, and do things that are more oriented to their interests and comfort areas.” With the above in mind, it is essential that men are involved in creating a cultural shift in gender issues in higher education. As Krista mentioned, most of her mentors were male supervisors who understood the fact that families are often led by double-income parents. The simple fact is many men have wives that work. Many of the 17 women in this study acknowledged that their husbands supported them and understood the multiple roles their significant other took on at work and at home.

Both men and women have to push for change in the work environment and the family environment. Men and women need to foster personal and professional conversations that deal with family and career dynamics. This should include not only husbands and wives discussing the pros and cons of both parents working or one staying at home, but also men and women in student affairs positions at colleges and universities. This necessitates a woman in a mid-level student affairs position being comfortable speaking openly and honestly with her supervisor, regardless of gender.
Policies and Supervisors

For employers who want to retain workers in the long run, for women who seek to combine work and family, and for the advancement of gender equity, these results argue for policies that facilitate career persistence during periods of high family demand. This can be accomplished by accommodating work-family needs at different life-cycle and family stages and raising questions about policies that seek to accommodate women’s work-family responsibilities via career exit and re-entry. All participants emphasized that their families were a top priority when making personal career decisions. However, they also pointed out that women in student affairs should understand the financial and long-term career implications of opting out.

Participants’ advice generally belonged to one of three categories: (a) individualized plans are important; (b) institutional policies need to become common practice; and (c) self-advocacy in the workplace is crucial. The participants recognized that each woman is different and that what worked for one person may not necessarily work for another person. Participants recommended asking about an institution’s gender equity and work-life balance policies during the interview process for a position. Many of the research participants said that they simply relied on their intuition about what was right for their individual families. They suggested that women who wanted to follow their goal of being both a professional and a parent need to love both her career and her family. It is also vital to understand that sacrifices may have to be made and they need to know themselves well enough to be comfortable with that reality. They also counseled women
who opted out of the student affairs profession to open themselves up to new and exciting possibilities in life such as entrepreneurism and volunteer activity. The following table is a snapshot of the advice from research participants to female student affairs professionals. The advice provides value to both student affairs professionals and their supervisors. For student affairs professionals it offers important insights while navigating career and family considerations. Supervisors should also consider the advice from the participants as they consider the policies they put in place in their departments.

Comparative Findings

Throughout this research project, it was important to connect my findings to previous studies that inform the social cognitive career theory and research on female student affairs professionals at the mid-level of their career. Previous research has shown that taking time out of the workforce may have long-term adverse consequences for women's commitment to former careers (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Lovejoy & Stone, 2006, Marshall, 2006). My study reveals that key constructs of the social cognitive career theory are connected to the retention of female student affairs professionals in the workforce. These constructs include: (a) individuals are drawn to positions in which they feel knowledgeable and successful; (b) attitudes and values are tied to self-efficacy and outcome expectations; and (c) perceptions shape experiences which influence self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 2000). While my study would agree with these constructs, the reasons that women are opting out of the workforce are changing.
Table 7

**Advice from Research Participants to Female Student Affairs Professionals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stayed out</th>
<th>Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>Remember that family comes first, look for flexibility in the workplace, and be confident in yourself because there will be times when self-advocacy will be important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Enjoy the journey... don’t take it too seriously. Find mentors. Strive for balance in your life both professional and personal. Remember all the success that we have in our life versus all the things that we have to do or the challenges we have every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Decide what your priorities are and if your level of employment is of great importance to you. Obviously, you are making a big sacrifice to choose to stay home. Explore whether you are OK with that sacrifice of your job and having your spouse or partner are the sole income provider. It is a personal decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>Whether it’s student affairs or not, the big push for anyone is flexibility in the work place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>You have to go after your career goals and what you want to do. I don’t think you can plan your future career around “what ifs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>If you can afford it economically, I would encourage you to stay home when your kids are young. And, it only gets more complicated as they get older.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>The opportunities are there for you to juggle those multiple responsibilities if you are willing to negotiate. I see the stresses on those women who are trying to raise a family and be the best mom and the best professional possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krista</td>
<td>I would encourage people to go talk to the very highest level of administration to find out what their feelings are on family and to not be afraid of talking to someone at that level and to be known at that level. Be known... that would be my advice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>The vast burden of dropping off and picking up fell onto my shoulders and if I did it over again, I would ask my husband to divide the responsibilities more equally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britney</td>
<td>My advice would be to try to get as much experience as you can in different areas because there are a lot of different facets to an institution of higher education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>Stay connected and current in your profession through continued membership in professional associations. Volunteer in your local community and stay active because it is important to keep up with trends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Re-entered</th>
<th>Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Libby</td>
<td>Women need patience and foresight because it is just good planning for your family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie</td>
<td>I would advise women that if they choose to stay home with kids for a portion of the time that they continue to grow personally; that they kind of make some plans and goals to either take a class or be involved in some volunteer stuff or work part-time or something for themselves, because I think women tend to always think of everybody else first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>My advice to female student affairs professionals would be to get your education completed before you start having a family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jocelyn</td>
<td>Keep the communication open with your supervisors. I know you’re not supposed to talk about personal relations or aspects of your life during an interview, but I actually self-disclosed and I said flat out that I am looking for a position that offers flexibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Make sure you understand how flexible your position is ahead of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Assess the culture of the institution. Is the campus family-friendly? Would your supervisor be supportive of alterative work schedules? Ask others in the organization what the culture is like and decide if you believe it is congruent with your values.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For example, women in this study overwhelmingly said they were highly-motivated individuals and felt they had a positive outlook on the future. However, they observed that career flexibility and workplace challenges – including childcare concerns, long work commutes, and supervisory styles – often outweighed their positive outcome expectations. These findings are consistent with previous studies that indicate the push and pull factors in action and the penalties for taking time out of the workplace (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Lovejoy & Stone, 2006, Marshall, 2006).

In Table 8, a comparison of the dissertation themes to the Social Cognitive Career Theory Model of Performance is outlined. As Schultheiss (2009) indicated it is the role of career counselors to begin changing these cultural paradigms, by validating women who choose motherhood as their career path. Helping to facilitate their decision through planning, goal setting, exploration, and other important career development tasks will help women to see that this role is not only seen as important in society, but it's necessary to achieve positive results.

One of the benefits of qualitative research is that we hear the voice of the participants and, often, the stories of individual journeys are far more complex than theory. As researchers, we need to make sure that when we talk about theories and career paths we are not too rigid because the concept of a successful career path is different for everyone. There are three building blocks of career development: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Self-efficacy is belief about our ability to succeed and one of the key constructs is that gender influences self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Brown & Lent, 1996). Some individuals eliminate possible occupations due to faulty self-efficacy beliefs or outcome expectations. Table 8 on the following page identifies the

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Performance</strong> (external modes of excellence such as completion of graduate-level education or promotion)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-efficacy</strong> (a person’s perception of their ability to reach a goal)</td>
<td>Self-efficacy (the extent to which one believes that she has control over her social outcomes or conditions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome Expectations</strong> (Supermom, work/life balance)</td>
<td>Women had high outcome expectations at home and in the workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal and Career Goals</strong> (career advancement, motherhood, committed relationships, etc.)</td>
<td>Female student affairs professionals would benefit from a wide range of policies and benefits that allow employees to balance their professional and personal goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Outcome and Success from “Mother Role” and/or Student Affairs Professional Role.</strong></td>
<td>Satisfaction came from being a good mom and/or from employment. Success was independent from career.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 9, there is a comparison of Hebreard’s research with literature and previous research that confirms societal beliefs about gender roles are often challenged when women make career and family choices that go against traditional norms.

Table 9
Comparison of Hebreard Research with Literature and Previous Research (e.g., Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Lovejoy & Stone, 2006; Marshall, 2006; Schultheiss, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Research on Female Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals</th>
<th>Hebreard Research (2010) on Female Mid-Level Student Affairs Professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women Leave the Workplace for a variety of reasons including lack of flexibility in the workplace; supervisory style; family situation; spousal promotion or geographical factor in this study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In addition to the previous research on why women leave the workplace, it is important to note that lack of job satisfaction was not a situation.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Push and Pull Factors In Action. Torn between work and motherhood.

Penalties for Taking Time Out and Challenges of Reentry. Pay levels; difficulty finding positions in student affairs after a period of time outside the field.

Reversing the Trend of Brain Drain in the Workplace. Participants who reentered the field did find flexible schedules and/or reduced-hour positions.

Remove the Stigma of Motherhood and Career Advancement. Preventing the “Mommy Track” that happens when only women ask for reduced schedules.

This study affirmed the previous research that indicated women are more likely to drop out of mid-level student affairs positions before they advance very far due to the need for greater flexibility and the demands of parenting and care giving. However, one of the surprising aspects of this qualitative research was that none of the participants hated their job. This is striking when compared to research in other fields in which job satisfaction was cited as an attrition issue. It is important to note that lack of ability and job
satisfaction did not play a part in the decision-making process to opt out. This has important implications for the student affairs profession because it demonstrates the need to examine barriers and develop a plan as a professional to overcome the barriers. The next section offers recommendations for policy and practice.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The participants in this study were passionate and committed student affairs professionals. They tried to hold the profession accountable to the values of student development and the concept of development of the whole person that drew them to the work in the first place. In particular, they were open, supportive, and viewed their profession as more collaboration, than competition. They believed in bringing their personal value system into all aspects of their lives and hoped for a workplace where everyone would be valued for the diversity of their being. Their stories suggested that they have often encountered work environments that are fundamentally at odds with their belief systems. An example was dealing with a senior administrator who was from outside the student affairs framework where there does not appear to be a common ground of shared values and professional identity. Another consideration was the organizational culture of student affairs at their particular institution, which was at odds with their values, and a cultural clash was inevitable.
Cultural Implications

In the mid 1990’s, Rhodes and Black (1995) offered an alternative way of thinking about student affairs work which drew on the benefits of a critical cultural perspective. They saw some common themes in the feminist, multicultural, and postmodern approach which incorporated inclusiveness, collaborative decision-making as the ideal, egalitarian relationships and resistance to hierarchy, and an “overarching framework for building educational communities rooted in an ethic of care and connectedness, democratic ideals, and respect for diverse cultures and voices” (p. 417). It is crucial that student affairs environments become more gender-neutral so that the facts and necessities of motherhood can be easily blended into the work routine (Trombley, 2003). With the number of women in student affairs positions continuing at high numbers, institutions of higher education need to continually explore the best possible recruitment and retention efforts. This exploration will continue to ensure that more women’s voices are heard and inclusiveness is promoted.

Practical Implications

Career counselors play a critical role in supporting the decision-making process that goes with a typical job search. However, they are generally only connected to a job seeker prior to that first professional career. The typical job search is complicated by the career paradigm shift that occurs when an individual has young children or opts out of the work force for a particular period of time. Therefore, it is extremely important for female student affairs professionals to be educated at the beginning of their career about
everything from salary negotiations to workplace culture. From the study participants, it would be helpful to highlight the lessons learned through their shared experiences. The women who reentered the student affairs profession typically stayed connected to colleagues and to industry trends. Secondly, they kept their skills sharp through community volunteerism and/or part-time job opportunities. Third, they updated their resumes and cover letters to reflect the current styles. All of the above reflect the professional commitment these women continually display. Additionally, organizations need to minimize the "mommy tax" that often results with the temporary loss of income from opting out. Hewlett and Luce (2005) discovered that a woman experienced an average 18% reduction in lifetime earning power when she opted out and 37% if she took three or more years off.

Social Cognitive Career Theory Connection

Constructs and tenets of social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) were described and applied to the socio-cultural context of female mid-level student affairs professional women's career experiences. Below, framework for empowering women and promoting their career development and attainment using SCCT is provided.

Throughout this qualitative research project, I thought the Social-Cognitive Career Theory Model of Performance seemed quite rigid and linear. This is not to say that it did not have a purpose as the theorized socio-cognitive determinant of interests. However, over time I began to believe the concepts of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, personal and career goals, and performance outcomes were synergistic. For
most individuals, these areas are either developing or redefining themselves at multiple points along a career trajectory. Rather than being linear in progression, they are all tied together and, when in harmony, help people achieve their career goals. The point of convergence of these four concepts is where self-efficacy, outcome expectations, personal and career goals, and performance outcomes will be most effective.

Furthermore, successful performance doesn’t always line up with or equal a successful career advancement. As demonstrated by the women in this study, if a person believes that opting out of the student affairs profession is the right thing to do for herself and her family, then that decision can actually be viewed as career success. We need to develop other models and ways to look at the definition of success beyond the patriarchal linear career path.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Hebreard’s recommendation in 2010 is that employees and institutions need to continually focus on creating better transparency in the workplace. It was an important finding that job dissatisfaction was not listed as a reason that the women opted out of their mid-level student affairs profession.

As stated in Chapter 5, social cognitive variables (such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations) as well as environmental influences and individual variables are all highlighted in the SCCT as factors in determining behavior. The 17 participants in this study responded as predicted by the SCCT because they continually developed and/or refined themselves throughout their career path and as they made their personal choices that helped determine their professional decisions. As Carol said, there is not “one size
fits all” in terms of institutional fit and career journey. Each woman needs to make her own decision based on personal and professional needs. However, in order to retain the best talent in the workplace, it would be important to have strong mentors and supervisors, especially female ones.

Areas for Future Research

In this section, I turn to my recommendations for future research. First, I examine the limitations of this study. Then I look at the implications these limitations present. Finally, I offer a few recommendations for future research in the area of women in student affairs.

Due to the small sample size of this dissertation, future research with additional participants is necessary. This study only dealt with mid-level administrators and there were demographic limitations in this study. For example, only one of the 17 women interviewed was a woman of color, all 17 women were heterosexual and only one of the women was divorced. While the number of children was not an explicit research question, it did appear to play a role in the decision to leave mid-level student affairs positions for some of the participants. As Beth indicated “Opt out would imply options… I felt forced out of student affairs due to inflexible circumstances and not being able to afford proper care of three small children on my salary.” Thirteen of the 17 participants had multiple children and cited the financial implications of child care as a factor for leaving student affairs. With this factor in mind, additional research could be explored on whether or not the number of children makes a difference in the decision-making process.
The interviews were also reviewed through the lens of the social cognitive career theory. Self-efficacy was a large portion of the theory and the participants were categorized within this framework. It would be helpful to include an assessment such as the Career Barriers Inventory (Swanson & Daniels, 1997) or some other social cognitive career theory tool.

This research, I believe, also provides a catalyst for future research in at least four different areas: fathers in student affairs, race considerations, cultural/ethnic differences, effective human resource policies in higher education, and self-advocacy in the workplace. For example, I am acquainted with one individual who graduated with his Masters of Education in College Student Personnel who decided to stay at home with his children because his wife is a medical professional. His decision fit into one of the emerging themes of this research because finances played a role in his decision-making process. As connected to contemporary research, the biggest reason is that the mother makes more money than the father or has better career prospects (Smith, 2009). Economics certainly played a factor in the decisions of these 17 research participants, but it should be noted that the interviews were conducted in early 2007 before the recession hit the United State’s economy. It would also be beneficial to do a post-recession study because the decision to leave the workplace might be quite different based on the new economic circumstances.

During the data collection, an e-mail was sent out to the NASPA list serve to recruit research participations. In addition, a recruitment technique referred to as “snowball sampling” was employed. Throughout this process, it was challenging to find women of color who had opted out of the student affairs profession. Additionally, many
of the research participants felt that race was a factor in how women perceived the
decision-making process to opt out of the workplace. It would be misrepresentative to
assume that my research covered all women; this area is a very important topic for future
exploration. On the national average, only five percent of articles about working mothers
and the “opt out revolution” mentioned African American or Latina women with children
(McGinnis, 2008). True equality and diversity in the field of student affairs would
indicate that all individuals within a given environment are equally or at least
proportionately represented, with respect to ethnicity, gender, age, and other demographic
factors. It is also hard to realize that such deeply personal choices as when or whether to
have a child can be powerfully circumscribed by broader social or emotional factors.

Jocelyn and Jamie are two of the research participants who seemed to understand
cultural differences first-hand. Jocelyn is half Puerto Rican and half Honduran, and she
explained that culture plays a big role in the life decisions that she makes. She wanted to
be able to adequately balance a career with the many duties at home in a way that
provided flexibility, especially at work. The appreciation and understanding of cultural
differences is extremely important in the student affairs profession, which is noted for
articulating a vision for building supportive and inclusive communities. For example,
Jamie married a man from Brazil and created an extended family with international
connections. Jamie’s story about how her administration was not understanding of her
need for flexibility during the one time of the year that her relatives visited the United
States not only demonstrated a lack of understanding of the role of mother and worker,
but also demonstrated a lack of racial and ethnic understanding.
All of the participants in this research project noted that when it comes to working mothers, racial and ethnic differences do occur in the student affairs profession. Judy noted that the decision-making process to opt out of a student affairs position does cross racial and ethnic lines because some believe career success is more important than being a stay-at-home mom while others believe that being a mom is more important than having a successful career.

I would like to explore how institutional policies on work life balance can become common practice in higher education. It would be worthwhile to work with universities to develop flexible or smart family policies and formalize mentoring programs that benefit both the employee and the institution.

Concluding Remarks

My qualitative study explored the stories of 17 women who were mid-level college and university administrators and mothers of young children. These participants illustrate that there is no ideal way to achieve professional and personal success. My conclusions reveal that while individualized personal and professional plans are important, it is also necessary for institutional policies already written to be implemented as intended. Additionally, self-advocacy in the workplace is paramount. Higher education must do more to train supervisors to be sensitive to women's needs and/or develop formal mentoring programs for employees. Maintaining a presence for female mid-level student affairs professionals in higher education is also extremely important for students because they need to observe working parents to "get it" and do good role modeling of family and work life balance.
Recently I had coffee with a young professional who is expecting her first child. She was torn because, although she was contracted to stay in her position for one year, she was not sure if she would be able to balance work and family life. Not only was missing time with her family a concern, but the financial costs of child care were not commensurate with her mid-level student affairs position salary at a small, private liberal arts institution. In speaking with her, it became clear to me that the issues studied here are still worrisome to women in academia. And, although this study does not lay out a definitive path for women to follow in order to manage both motherhood and a career in academic fields, it does demonstrate a need for further research on the mutual benefits to employee and employer for flexibility in the work place.

In conclusion, besides creating more institutional policies about flexible work arrangements, it is clear from the findings of this research that mentoring relationships help female mid-level student affairs professionals overcome barriers that persist in the workplace. The concept of “opting out” is viewed as a privilege, particularly so in the economic times of 2010. However, that doesn’t diminish the importance of what an emotionally difficult decision it is to leave a profession that you are passionate about and when you are educated beyond the undergraduate level. Theresa expressed her thoughts about the importance of two somewhat undervalued professions, motherhood and mid-level student affairs positions, when she said “The expectation of motherhood – child-centered, people-centered. It seems natural to me for many women to be in a nurturing, important, demanding, yet undervalued profession.” An ideal world would allow those undervalued professions to take on the prominent roles they deserve in our culture.
REFERENCES


Scott, F. J. (2003). *African American female senior student affairs officers: A case study of ten career pathways at both historically Black and predominantly white institutions.* (UMI No. 3088182)


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Appendix A

Human Subjects Institutional Review
Board Approval Letter
Date: August 14, 2007

To: Lesann Bierlein Palmer, Principal Investigator
    Dana Hobrecht, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 07-07-19

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Opt Out: Women with Children Leaving Mid-level Student Affairs Positions" has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: August 14, 2008
Appendix B

Initial Invitation to Participate
You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled "OPT OUT: WOMEN WITH CHILDREN LEAVING MIDDLE-LEVEL STUDENT AFFAIRS POSITIONS." This research is intended to study how women in middle-level student affairs positions have either successfully transitioned to professional roles after taking time out of the field, or completely "opted out" of the profession. This project is the dissertation project of Dana Heffernan, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology at Western Michigan University.

This study is qualitative in nature and hence potential participants may not be selected to participate due to the focus on diversity of the interview. If invited, you will be asked to participate in one private session, 60 to 120 minutes in length, with Dana Heffernan. The interview will be conducted either in person or via telephone. The first part of the session will involve providing general information about you, such as age, level of education, and employment status on an informational sheet. This second part of the session will involve an interview during which you will be asked questions regarding how you negotiated the decision making process of "opting out" of your career.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. One potential risk of participation in this project is that you may be upset by the content of the interview. However, Dana Heffernan, as a veteran career counselor, is prepared to provide initial counseling and appropriate referrals should you become significantly upset and need further counseling about this topic.

One way in which you may benefit from this activity is having the chance to talk about your career issues and research findings is beneficial for individuals. Others who are contemplating a career shift might also benefit from this knowledge that is gained from this research. All of the information collected from you is confidential. That means that your name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The interviews will be audio-recorded so you the researcher can pay close attention to the responses rather than having to rely on notes and asking the interviewee to repeat answers. The audio recordings will be converted onto hard copy. Audio tapes will not be released under any conditions without your direct written consent. At the completion of this project, the audio tapes will be destroyed.

The information will be coded, and Dana Heffernan will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in the principal investigator's office.

As a result of an initial screening of potential subjects, you may not be selected to participate. Furthermore, you may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Dana Heffernan at 616-996-0007 or Dr. Laura Bertram-Palmer at lbpalmer@wmich.edu. You may also contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 616-387-8133 with any concerns that you have.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is more than one year old. Your signature below indicates that you have read and/or had explained to you the purpose and requirements of the study and that you agree to participate.

By signing this document, I indicate that I freely and voluntarily consent to my participation in the research project.

Signatures

Date
Appendix C

Initial Email/Telephone
Script to Potential Participants
I am conducting dissertation research on women with young children that have left their mid-level student affairs positions. I am currently looking for women who might be interested in participating in my study. The purpose of this study is to understand how female student affairs administrators with children make sense of their multiple roles and commitments as professionals and parents. In particular, this research will focus the decision-making process involved in choosing to opt out of a professional career and, for some, re-enter after a period of time away from the profession.

I am looking for a diverse group of 20 female college or university administrators at the mid-level or above who have children under the age of eighteen. It would be helpful if these respondents have left the profession within the last five years. I hope to interview these individuals for approximately 2 hours either in person or via the telephone. If you know anyone who might be interested in learning more about participating in this study, please have them contact me, Dana Hebreard at hebreard@gvsu.edu.

By responding to this e-mail, you will not be automatically selected to participate in the process.

Thank you for your assistance!
Appendix D

Demographic Survey
Please complete the following demographic information. Demographic information will be used to analyze and compare responses from different groups of people.

1. What is your gender?
2. Please enter your age.
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. Institution Type.
5. Institution Enrollment.
6. Academic Level.
7. What is your current position?
8. How long have you been an employee of your particular institution?
9. If you opted out, please indicate for how long?
10. Why did you opt out?
Appendix E

Interview Protocol
Based on interview protocol from Marshall, 2004, with permission

Project: Women that opted out of the student affairs profession and stayed out of the field or came back after a period of a minimum of one year.

Time of interview: ________________________________

Date of interview: ________________________________

Location: ________________________________

Interviewer: ________________________________

Interviewee: ________________________________

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record the interview so the study can be as accurate as possible. You may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any point of the interview.

I. Initial Questions

As you know, I am interviewing you today because I am very interested how women negotiate the decision-making process of stopping out of their career for a period of time.

1. Tell me about your career path.
   a) How long were you working in student affairs before you had children?
   b) To what level had you advanced before you decided to stop out?

2. Did you start your first career with a five year plan? A ten year plan? What were your priorities at the beginning of your career? Now?

3. How do you feel about the time and energy you have to devote to your professional life? Your personal life? (Prompt if necessary: Do you wish you could dedicate more time and energy to certain professional or personal activities? Why or why not?). Why are you asking this 3rd question…what research question does that relate to??
II. **Self-Efficacy Questions: How do mid-level female student affairs professionals with young children experience the decision-making process to leave the field of student affairs for a minimum of one year?**

1. What messages did you receive from your employer regarding the lifestyle you would have in your specific career before you left your position? (after you left your position)? In general, do you perceive women receive similar messages in the workplace?

2. Tell me about your perception of your ability to reach your personal career goals. Did you have any outcome expectations?

3. Did you have any mentors in your life to help you navigate the career decision-making process?

4. Before you had children, how did you see your career evolving? How has that vision changed? Did you consider how children might affect or impact your advancement? Tell me about how, if at all, career factored into the decision-making process for each of your children. Has having children affected your decisions in any way? Have they enhanced or hindered your professional success?

5. What events or thoughts lead to your decision to leave the profession?

III. **Re-entry Questions**

1. What were the penalties, if any, that you incurred when you reentered the work force?

2. How easy was it to find a position in student affairs when you decided to return to higher education?

3. What were you looking for in a position when you decided to reenter the work force?

4. Were you able to return to the same level that you left?

5. If you had stayed in the field, would your salary be in the same pay range?
a) **Stopping Out Questions:** For those female student affairs professionals with young children who left and have not returned to the field of student affairs, why is this the case?

1. Was finances a part of the decision-making factor for stopping out? How important?
2. What price, if any, do you feel that you are paying for your time out of the work force?
3. When, if ever, are you interested in re-entering the workforce to work full-time?
4. Do you think you will re-enter the workforce in the same or different position?

V. **Re-entry Solutions/Strategies**

1. Do you feel like you are able to balance personal and professional?
2. Do you use specific strategies do you use to make it all work? For instance, what support systems are important to your success?
3. How do you handle unforeseen problems or unexpected obligations at home and at work?
4. What kinds of strategies does your current employer offer to help professionals with work/life balance?

VI. **Institutional Structures and Processes**

1. How did institutional structures and processes support or encumber you before you left?
   (after you returned to the workplace)? *(Prompt if necessary: How do institutional structures and processes support or encumber women as a whole?)*
2. How did your supervisors and co-workers react to each pregnancy? How have they reacted to your parental obligations over time and currently?
3. Many higher education institutions offer various work/family benefits. These may include job sharing, part-time work, extended leave, daycare, or flextime. What types of work/family benefits are available to you? Have you used or considered using them? Why or why not? If these benefits are not available to you, do you wish they were? How
can your employers be more supportive of your personal and professional needs? Why do you think that some work/family benefits go unused?

4. Student Affairs Questions – Work expectations? Office structure?

VII. Summary Questions

1. When you reflect back on what you have learned throughout your time as a professional and as a parent, I suspect there are things you would have done exactly the same and others you would have done differently. Based on your experience, what advice do you have for new female higher education administrators who are contemplating starting a family?

2. Most important, what are some ways that, if all things were possible, work could be structured so that women could maintain meaningful careers for as long as they choose to and that business could continue to benefit from their knowledge and commitment?

3. Is there anything you thought I would ask you that I did not? Is there anything else that you would like to share that we did not discuss?

Thank you for participating in this interview. If necessary, may I contact you for a follow-up interview or to clarify some of your responses?
Appendix F

Script for Potential Interview Follow-Up
Phone Call to Participants
Hello __________. 

Thank you once again for agreeing to participate in the study of Opt Out: Women with Children Leaving Mid-level Student Affairs Positions. Your participation in this study is very much appreciated.

In attempting to summarize the information collected during your interview, I have a few follow-up questions for clarification purposes. As a reminder, please refer to the copy of the consent document you signed when you agreed to participate. At that time, I indicated that you do not have to participate in any follow-up if you chose not to do so and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Are you willing to participate in this follow-up? If so, is this a good time for you? If not, can we schedule a time that would be most convenient for you? (Note: I may contact them by email to ask when a good time would be to call them.)

Once the time has been established, I would indicate the following:

As a follow-up to the question on __________, you indicated __________. Could you clarify (fill in whatever the question/clarification may relate to for this participant).

Thank you so much for your time. Once I have completed my summary of your interview, I will be sending it to you for your review, to insure its accuracy. Please feel free to contact me at any time to discuss the study, ask questions, or for any other reason related to the study. You may contact me by telephone at 616-485-2239, or by email at hebreard@sbcglobal.net. You may also contact Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer at l.bierleinpalmer@wmich.edu.

Sincerely,

Dana Hebreard
Appendix G

Letter to Participants Not Selected
Dear [Name]:
Thank you for expressing interest in my dissertation study entitled "Opt Out: Women with Children Leaving Mid-Level Student Affairs Positions". For this study, I am interviewing seventeen women in higher education administration with children. In order to ensure a diverse sample, the final pool of participants selected to interview varied by personal and professional characteristics.

Owing to these sampling considerations, I am unable to include you in this study at this time. I very much appreciate your interest in participating in this research, and your cooperation in completing and returning the background questionnaire I sent to you previously. In the event that I decide to build upon this study in the future, I would like to keep your name on file as a potential participant.

If you would like to discuss the study or its findings, please feel free to contact me. Again, I appreciate your willingness to participate and your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Dana Hebreard
Appendix H

Thank You Letter
I wanted to formally thank you for your help with my dissertation research. I enjoyed our conversation about your roles as both professional and working mother. Each interview I conduct offers new perspectives on this topic and I am eager to review the tape and transcript of our conversation.

As I mentioned to you, I expect that this transcription and review process will take a month or more to complete. When I have finished with this process, I will forward to you a copy of the transcription so you may review it for accuracy. At the completion of the study, I will also forward you an executive summary of my findings.

Once again, thank you for relating your experiences and thoughts and for sharing your time so generously with me.

My best wishes to you and your family.

Sincerely,

Dana Hebreard
Appendix I

Confidentiality Agreement
Transcriptionist Services

I, ____________________________, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Dana Hebreard related to her doctoral study on Women with Children Leaving Mid-level Student Affairs Positions.

Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audiotaped interviews, or in any associated documents;

2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Dana Hebreard;

3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;

4. To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Dana Hebreard in a complete and timely manner.

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

________________________________________
Signature
Appendix J

Summary of Participant Responses
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Public/Private</th>
<th>Position at the time of opting out</th>
<th>Number of years in the profession before opting out</th>
<th>Number of positions held in Higher Education before opting out</th>
<th>Number of years out of student affairs</th>
<th>Re-entry Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 boys</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 boy</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Director of Career Services</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 boy</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Program Assistant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 boy</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Assistant Director of Career Services</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 boy</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Career Services Coordinator</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3 girls</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Director of Greek Life</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5**</td>
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<td>40</td>
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<td>1 boy and 1 girl</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Director of Parent and Alumni Relations</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Twin boys and 1 girl</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Dean of Students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 boys</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8**</td>
<td></td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 boy (with another on the way)</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Assistant Director of Admissions</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>10**</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3 girls and 1 boy</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Adjunct Professor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3**</td>
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<td>Counseling</td>
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<td>Career Counselor</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 boy</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 girls</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Coordinator of Student Academic Services</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>11-month old girl</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Coordinator of Academic Services</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>3 girls</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Coordinator of Student Academic Services</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3 children</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Assistant to the Director</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5**</td>
<td></td>
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