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# Female Student Affairs Professionals and Work-Life Balance

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**Female Student Affairs Professionals and Work-Life Balance**

by

Debra DeMinck

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how mothers, working as mid-level student affairs professionals, perceive and navigate their dual roles at work and in the home. This study asked the following: how does the participant's sense of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation shape her work-life balance decisions and practices? What personal strategies are these working mothers using as they respond to the demands of the dual roles of professional and parent? Using a basic qualitative research design, I explored the work-life experiences of eight female student affairs professionals through participant interviews. Data were coded and analyzed from the life course perspective, a theoretical framework that has identified four distinct factors found to be critical markers for shaping adult gender role choices and decisions: sense of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and personal drive and motivation (Giele, 2008). Several major findings emerged from the study. First, early life experiences significantly impacted the personal identity, relational style, drive and motivation, and adaptive style of the women participating in the study. Second, these four factors directly impact life course decisions and trajectory of mothers working as Student Affairs professionals. Finally, these four factors exert significant influence on the strategies employed by these women to promote work-life balance.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction of the Study

### Introduction

Historically considered to be one of the last deans of women, Emily Taylor served in several prestigious colleges and universities from 1956 to 1976. She was an unabashed feminist and “vocal” scholar who devoted her life to improving the status of women in higher education. Beginning at a very young age, Taylor’s feminist persona emerged as she experienced a variety of situations in which she found herself a victim of gender bias. Despite her strong personality and feminist convictions, Taylor struggled with her future direction. She poignantly recalls the defining moment in her career trajectory when, as a recent college graduate, she elected to “shadow” in the dean of women’s office suite at Ohio State University (OSU). In an effort to learn more about the profession of “deaning,” she quietly listened to a story that deeply disturbed her. A young woman lamented that she had dropped out of college to work as a waitress in order to finance her husband as he pursued his Ph.D. Unfortunately, her husband died shortly after earning his degree, leaving her a young uneducated widow with two children to support. Taylor, shocked and saddened by this woman’s plight, quickly grasped the profound need for improved female support and empowerment. Thus began a lifetime of women’s advocacy work that projected her from an activist dean of women to numerous prestigious and powerful public appointments in women’s affairs (Sartorius, 2014).

During her tenure as dean, Taylor navigated the “marginalized” terrain of her position by skillfully avoiding public controversy, while at the same time fostering non-normative women’s programs that included leadership, citizenship, career guidance, and sex education.

Taylor, along with those like-minded deans who preceded her, ultimately laid the foundation for the student affairs profession observed in institutions of higher education today. In effect, deans of women “crafted the premise that still largely undergirds the student personnel profession—the commitment to helping students fulfill their potential as full citizens of the nation” (Sartorius, 2014, p. 4). Consequently, Taylor and these other dedicated female advocates helped to carve a niche for women to serve in professional capacities in colleges and universities. However, despite the tireless efforts of these courageous pioneers to establish equal opportunity for women, issues pertaining to equity and gender remain problematic; the ability to pursue and successfully achieve work-life balance is one such prevalent issue faced by female employees working today in higher education (Boushey & O’Leary, 2009; Jones & Taylor, 2013; Melin, Astvik, & Bernhard-Oettel, 2014). In an effort to better understand the challenges faced by these working women, as well as discern the coping strategies they employ, this paper further examines the work-life balance of contemporary women working as student affairs professionals.

Emily Taylor’s experiences serve to help inform this paper; the intersection of her professional life and her family responsibilities offer insight into the many challenges working women face as they attempt to successfully navigate dual roles. In fact, Taylor’s legacy extends far beyond her role in higher education. As a woman who chose both marriage and a professional career, she confronted obstacles that challenged the new path she and other women were forging, thereby becoming a true pioneer in the art of work-life balance (Bordin, 1993).

Needless to say, the journey for women to access higher education and a fulfilling career has been long and arduous, filled with alternating periods of stagnation and immense growth. Women of today often take these rights for granted without having a clear understanding of the hard battle fought by courageous men and women determined to secure equality (Gerdes, 2006; Sartorius, 2014; Thelin, 2011). Due in large part to these dedicated individuals, women's access to and representation in higher education and professional employment has dramatically improved (Collins, Conner, McPherson, Midson, & Wilson, 2011; Thelin, 2011).

These opportunities, however, have not been proportionately reflected in the rise of female senior academics, senior student affairs professionals, and upper level administrators (Collins et al., 2011; Gerdes, 2006). According to Northouse (2013), more women today are employed in professional roles, but these positions tend to be of lower status with little authority in comparison to those occupied by men. Unfortunately, gender-related issues and problems persist in the quest for parity, especially when it comes to women desiring to attain professional positions and upward mobility in higher education.

The numerous challenges women face both in the workplace and at home continue to be a multifaceted issue for which there are no easy answers or solutions. The sheer number of women pursuing higher education and a career illustrates the intense desire of many women to achieve a status in life more personally satisfying than that of traditional wife and mother. Currently, women constitute the majority in undergraduate enrollment and graduation. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), women comprised over 56% of all undergraduate and almost 60% of graduate school enrollment in 2013-2014

(Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2015). Further, NCES predicts that the total female enrollment in college will increase to over 58% of the projected 19.5 million students enrolled by the end of year 2017 (Ginder et al., 2015). Graduation rates depict a similar trend. In 2012, females earned over 57% of all bachelor degrees, were awarded almost 60% of all master's degrees, and surpassed men in earned doctorates, as well as graduation rates from professional programs (Ginder et al., 2015).

Women also slightly outnumber men in the United States work force and nearly two-thirds of all American families include a working female. Furthermore, only one in five families with children constitute the stereotypical nuclear family of male breadwinner and stay-at-home wife/mother (Savitsky, 2010). According to Maria Shriver in *The Shriver Report* (2009), approximately 70% of all homes with children under the age of 18 have a working mother (p. 7). Women are assuming the responsibility of primary breadwinner or co-breadwinner in more than half of American families, which in turn has forced the issues of “childcare policy; caretaker leave; workplace attachment and workplace flexibility; and closing the gender pay gap...off the back burner and to the forefront of a brewing national dialogue about the relationship of family to the work force” (Boushey & O’Leary, 2009, p. 18). As a result, the dual-income family, in which both the husband and wife are gainfully employed, is now the norm.

Consequently, the influx of women in the world of work, especially for those wanting to experience upper-level professional positions, has not been facilitated by the necessary shift in cultural expectations regarding gender roles in marriage, family, and work (Hochschild, 1989; Loder, 2005; Northouse, 2013). The increased numbers of women in the workforce,

coupled with these antiquated beliefs and attitudes, has significantly impacted the work-life balance in families. Henderson (2006) aptly summarizes this work-life conflict as the “struggle to juggle”: a common phenomenon in which on-going conflict results in a significant impact on a woman’s health, her relationships, her performance at work, and her overall quality of life. Work/family conflict commonly leads to increased levels of stress, resulting in decreased performance and satisfaction in both domains (McMillan, Morris, & Atchley, 2011; Rotondo, Carlson, & Kincaid, 2003).

In summary, women are experiencing numerous obstacles in their on-going quest for work-life balance, as well as with establishing parity in the workplace and in the home.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The dilemma of work-life balance continues to be a multifaceted issue for women working as student affairs professionals on campuses across the nation. In an effort to navigate the diverse and complex struggles faced daily in the workplace and in the home, working mothers are often forced to make difficult choices and personal sacrifices. Subsequently, some women feel compelled to choose between work and family life rather than to adopt a lifestyle in which both roles are pursued simultaneously. Conversely, some women elect to take leaves of absence or choose part-time employment in an effort to juggle work and family responsibilities. Consequently, issues pertaining to work-life balance have resulted in what is now considered a primary social challenge of our era (Halpern, 2005).

Much of the existing literature attempts to explain or analyze work-life balance issues from an institutional perspective, blaming outdated policy and practice, as well as antiquated workplace culture and norms (Fu & Schaffer, 2001; Rotondo et al., 2003; Somech & Drach-

Zahavy, 2007). While these factors certainly play an important role in the working mother's ability to better manage dual roles, simply addressing family-friendly workplace policy has not solved the problem (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Loder, 2005). Rather, the focus must be on the working mother who will ultimately decide how to manage her dual obligations based on her values, attitudes, and/or personal characteristics (Arboleda, Chen, Shelley, & Whalen, 2004; Browne, 2005; Giele, 2008).

Relatively little research focuses on female student affairs professionals and the complexity of navigating and balancing dual roles (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). Further, even less research exists regarding those factors that shape the values, attitudes, and personal characteristics of these women that drive their work-life balance choices and decisions (Giele, 2008). This basic qualitative study attempts to add to this limited research by exploring the factors that impact life choices made by these working mothers as they strive to balance their personal and professional lives.

### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study is to investigate how mothers working as mid-level student affairs professionals perceive and navigate their dual roles at work and in the home. In order to accomplish this, a semi-structured interview was used to collect data from eight mothers working full-time as student affairs professionals in three mid-western state universities. Further, the data was coded and analyzed from the life course perspective, a theoretical framework that has identified four distinct factors found to be critical markers for shaping adult gender role choices and decisions: sense of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and personal drive and motivation (Giele, 2008). These four

factors, or dimensions, help to explain why women make different personal choices regarding gender role adoption and life course trajectory.

This study also seeks to understand if and how the four factors of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and personal drive and motivation coalesce with the work-life balance strategies employed by the female participants. In addition, this study examines the impact that navigating home and work has on desires and goals for future career and educational advancement. Finally, this study explores the various strategies, emerging from these narratives, that these mothers employ as they strive for work-life balance.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guide the study:

1. For mothers employed as student affairs professionals, how does their sense of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation shape their work-life balance decisions and practices?
2. What personal strategies are these working mothers using as they respond to the demands of the dual roles of professional and parent?

### **Description and Scope of the Research**

This basic interpretive qualitative study incorporates both purposive and snowball sampling techniques to identify potential research participants: mothers who are currently employed as mid-level student affairs professionals at several four-year state universities in the Midwest. Next, a semi-structured one-on-one interview approach was used to gather information and to answer the research questions informing this paper. Elder and Giele (2009) suggest that life histories emerging through the interview process reveal rich and abundant

information reflecting the past and present experiences of the participants, as well as their future expectations and goals.

As previously mentioned, the life course framework functions as a guide for this study, serving primarily as the “lens” from which the data is processed. Life course research consists of personal narratives, usually gathered from one or a series of interviews, about a participant’s past, present, and/or future (Elder & Giele, 2009). Further, the life course method allows for great flexibility in the ways it can be integrated and applied to a wide range of studies. In support, Atkinson (1998) suggests that the life course interview method can be adapted to fit the needs of almost any specific research topic, using only those segments of data for analysis and evaluation requisite to the individual study. This information can then be used to promote greater understanding and predictive capabilities, such as with the work-life balance issues and practices of mothers working as student affairs professionals detailed in this study.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations for the study are:

1. This study only examines female student affairs professionals who are also mothers of at least one child under the age of 18. Male student affairs professionals were not included.
2. This study limits participants to those student affairs professionals who are considered mid-level employees: directors or associate or assistant directors of administrative units such as housing, student activities, counseling, judicial affairs, and orientation programs. The position in which they work usually requires a



master's degree, often with supervisory responsibilities for departmental employees and student workers; they are typically responsible for bridging the gap between university policy makers and front line staff.

3. This study focuses on gender, and does not include other variables such as race, ethnicity, or culture. Age is a factor only to the extent in which the participants are mothers of children under the age of 18. This study does not distinguish between birth and adoptive mothers.
4. This study assumes that a woman's experiences in work-life balance may be significantly influenced by the presence of a partner in the home. This study will only examine the work-life balance of women sharing the home and child-rearing with a partner. Further, the gender of the partner is not considered a variable in this study.
5. This study focuses on the student affairs departments from several mid-western state universities. No other types of institutions are included in the study.
6. This study explores the life-story of only eight women. While this narrow focus allows for a more in-depth and rich narrative from each participant, it may not be representative of other female student affairs professionals.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Adaptive.* Innovative versus traditional, how a person responds to change and transition (Giele, 2002).

*Cohort.* A group of persons who were born during the same time period and who experience social changes within a given culture in the same sequence and at the same age (Harrigan, Baldwin, & Hutchison, 2013).

*Coping.* Establishing methods and goals in order to respond to conflict. Changing cognitive and behavioral responses to better manage psychological stress (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007).

*Culture of an organization.* The pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group has adopted as it solved problems of external adaptations and internal integration. Considered valid and therefore taught to new members as a correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems (Schein, 1992).

*Glass ceiling.* The invisible barrier that denies advancement to women into management and leadership positions (Smullen-Grob, 2003).

*Human agency.* Describes the human being as an actor on the larger life stage of society within the world (Giele, 2008).

*Identity.* Conventional versus being different, associated with time, space, and culture (Giele, 2002).

*Labyrinth.* The difficult path that women take in order to reach top executive positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

*Life course perspective.* A field of inquiry that provides a framework for research on problem identification and conceptual development that provides insight into the impact of changing societies on developing lives (Elder, 1974).

*Life event.* A significant occurrence involving a relatively abrupt change that may produce serious and long-lasting effects (Settersten & Owens, 2002).

*Mid-level student affairs professional.* Those who have 5 or more years of full-time professional experience that require a master's degree or higher. An exempt position which "includes the exercise of discretion and independent judgment with respect to matters of significance" (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, NASPA).

*Motivation.* Achievement versus nurturance reflecting an individual's goals and motivation (Giele, 2008).

*"Opting out."* A woman's decision to leave the workplace (Stone, 2007).

*Relationship.* Egalitarian versus deferent, shaped by social networks and loyalties (Giele, 2008).

*Student affairs.* Differentiated by functional area, specialization, expertise, and training and can include areas such as housing, student activities, judicial affairs, orientation programs, admissions, registration, financial aid, counseling, advising, and other aspects of student life (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000).

*Transitions.* Changes in roles and statuses that represent a distinct departure from prior roles and statuses: starting school, entering puberty, leaving school, getting a first job, leaving home, getting married, retiring, and so on (Elder Jr., Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003).

*Trajectories:* Long-term patterns of stability and change in a person's life, involving multiple transitions (Elder Jr. et al., 2003).

*Turning points.* A time when major change occurs in the life course trajectory (Harrigan et al., 2013).

*Work-life balance.* The accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007).

*Work-family conflict.* A form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

## **Summary**

The contemporary working mother faces daily challenges in regard to navigating the increasing demands and complexity surrounding their dual roles of work and family. Unfortunately, scant research examines specific ways in which these women personally cope with the stressors associated with work-life balance. In an effort to examine work-life balance from the personal perspective of the female student affairs professional, this study seeks to understand the strategies that these woman implement as they “struggle to juggle,” thereby striving for work/family balance in their lives.

Chapter 2 reviews literature on the history of women in higher education and of females employed as student affairs professionals, the work-life balance issues that these women currently face, the strategies these working mothers employ to promote work-life balance, and the unique struggles faced by women working as student affairs professionals on campuses across the nation. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and implementation of this basic qualitative research study. The chapter discusses how data was collected and analyzed, as well as outlines findings and viable recommendations for future study. Chapter 4 summarizes the study results, and Chapter 5 draws conclusions and presents suggestions for additional research.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), almost 70% of women with children under the age of 18 are either working or actively seeking work. Consequently, employed mothers routinely face numerous challenges and stressors associated with balancing work and family life. This chapter reviews the literature on women and their struggle to achieve equality in both the workplace and the home. Beginning with a historical context to better frame the emergence of women into higher education and the world of work, the focus of this review will then turn to work-life balance and the myriad of related issues that continue to impact families today. Further, an examination of the many strategies working mothers employ as they strive for balance in their varied roles as employee, wife, and mother will ensue. Finally, and as the primary focus of this project, this literature review will explore the work-balance issues and choices pertaining to the female student affairs professional, as well as the strategies these women use to promote balance in their lives.

Research consistently posits that most women struggle to successfully balance their duties in the home with their increasing responsibilities in the workplace (Loder, 2005). The underlying reason for this struggle is culture-bound; it has emerged from a “traditional concept of the ideal worker as someone for whom work is primary, time to spend at work is unlimited, and the demands of family, community, and personal life are secondary” (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002, p. 29). If women are to truly achieve healthy balance in their lives, a major paradigm shift must occur in both the workplace and in the home. Unfortunately, this remains a difficult task; current culture and the resulting stereotypes

pertaining to the role(s) of women, both in and outside of the home, are steeped in centuries-old beliefs and practices.

### **Historical Background**

**The colonial era.** On August 14, 1776, Abigail Adams wrote the following letter to her husband, John Adams:

If you complain of neglect of Education in sons, what shall I say with regard to daughters, who everyday experience the want of it. With regard to the Education of my own children, I find myself soon out of my depth, and destitute and deficient in every part of Education. I most sincerely wish that some more liberal plan might be laid and executed for the Benefit of the rising Generation, and that our new constitution may be distinguished for Learning and Virtue. If we mean to have Heroes, Statesmen and Philosophers, we should have learned women. (as cited in Solomon, 1985, p. 1)

Unfortunately, the liberal thinking expressed by Abigail Adams in this letter did not in any way reflect the typical beliefs found in colonial society.

In the colonial years of American history, women were vehemently prohibited from pursuing higher education and/or employment outside of the home. Women were viewed as “unsuitable” to either; the prevalent cultural view relegated women to domestic interests only: cleaning, cooking, and child-rearing. Beginning with the founding of Harvard College in 1636, the primary purpose of higher education was the preparation of men for the ministry or government service (Allan, 2011). The college opportunity was readily available to those men of privilege: white, wealthy, and powerful. The college experience was deemed both socially

desirable and prestigious, serving as “an insurance policy guaranteeing that these favored young men would acquire not only literacy but also a sense of leadership and service...” (Thelin, 2011, p. 26). Women simply had no place in this patriarchal system. A college student, John Randolph, sums up the colonial era sentiment when he states, “I am an Aristocrat. I love liberty; I hate equality” (as cited in Thelin, 2011, p. 26).

**The 19th century.** In comparison to the colonial era, women desiring a higher education and a career fared somewhat better in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Female institutions often called “academies” or “seminaries” flourished and soon became the academically rigorous alternative to the traditional “finishing school” (Griffin, 1984; Taggart, 2008). These female institutions also heralded the indisputable emergence of women working in higher education. In an effort to promote educational opportunity and standards equal to that of male higher education institutions, female educational leaders such as Catharine Beecher, Mary Lyon, and Emma Willard established the Female Seminary Movement in 1815 (Taggart, 2008). In 1837, Wesleyan Female Seminary and Mount Holyoke Seminary opened their doors to offer a curriculum that provided the traditional fare in which students were “prepared for life”, coupled with subjects unheard of in other women’s seminaries: Greek Testament, geometry, chemistry, natural philosophy, astronomy, and geology (Taggart, 2008, p. 222). Several decades later, women’s higher education took yet another historically important leap when, according to Griffin (1984):

The three “big sisters” were born: Vassar, in 1860, the first endowed women’s college in the country; Wellesley, in 1875, the first to have a female president from the start as

well as female faculty; and Smith, in the same year, the first to establish entrance requirements as rigorous as those of men's colleges. (Taggart, 2008, p. 33).

While colleges strictly dedicated to the higher education of women were beginning to realize some semblance of parity with all-male institutions, the struggle for equity would remain a contentious battle for years to come.

Beginning with the inception of these female institutions of higher education, funding loomed as a major issue. These early schools had no endowment funds; instead, they were self-supporting through a combination of college fees, donations and/or church support, and the sale of scholarships (Taggart, 2008). To further promote the continuation and permanence of higher education for women, Emma Willard addressed the New York Legislature in 1818, declaring the following:

Male education flourishes because from the guardian care of legislatures, the presidencies and professorships of our colleges are some of the highest objects to which the eye of ambition is directed. Not so with female institutions. Preceptresses of these are dependent on their pupils for support, and are consequently liable to become the victims of their caprice. (Beadie, 1993, p. 544)

In response to Ms. Willard's appeal, New York became one of the few states to provide operating funds to female institutions of higher learning, thus reducing their reliance on "individual patronage" (Beadie, 1993, p. 544) and securing some level of financial stability. Unfortunately, many seminaries and academies continued to rely on funding that was, at best, tenuous and inconsistent (Taggart, 2008).



***Coeducation.*** In addition to the surge of higher education opportunities in the female academies and seminaries, coeducational institutions also emerged. In 1833, Oberlin College in Ohio was founded and became the first collegiate institution in the country to accept female students (Gordon, 1990; Thelin, 2011). The first group of women admitted to Oberlin began with preparatory and secondary classes “to compensate for the previous inferior education of female students so that they could go on to the higher levels” (Griffin, 1984, p. 35). The college offered two tracts of study: the Ladies’ Course and the College Course leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree. Despite the selected course of study, these young women endured harsh public scrutiny, discrimination, and rejection (Griffin, 1984). Her experience as a graduate of Oberlin prompted suffragist Lucy Stone to lament that Oberlin co-eds were “being prepared for intelligent motherhood and properly subservient wifedom” (Griffin, 1984, p. 36).

Even though this first attempt at co-educational was far from perfect, women had started to realize their potential and demand the right to a quality education. As a result, coeducational institutions in the Midwestern and Western states began to emerge in response to this demand (Thelin, 2011). Unfortunately, despite the fact that women were becoming a routine part of campus life, they often were treated as unwanted and unwelcome outsiders (Horowitz, 1987). According to Thelin (2011),

Admission into the college or university hardly precluded segregation within the walls. Tracking into particular courses and majors, discouragement from some fields, and, above all, exclusion from extracurricular organizations and activities were the disappointing realities of coeducation. (p. 98)

Furthermore, the schools in the East were quite reluctant to embrace the concept of coeducation; they instead promoted “coordinate” colleges to meet the female demand for higher education (Graham, 1978). These coordinate colleges were “sister” colleges loosely affiliated with established men’s institutions: Radcliffe to Harvard, Barnard to Columbia, Evelyn to Princeton, and Pembroke to Brown (Graham, 1978). The schools in the South, also vehemently opposed to the concept of coeducation, opted to establish normal schools and women’s colleges rather than “subject females to the rigors of academic study with men as did colleges and universities in the north and west” (Riley, 2010, p. 411). Consequently, in 1870 only 30% of colleges were considered “coeducational” (Chamberlain, 1988). Although coeducation would become the widely accepted norm on the college campus in the twentieth century, the early success of these efforts remain questionable at best.

Several historical events significantly impacted the perception and subsequent growth in numbers of women pursuing higher education in the nineteenth century. First of all, the Civil War resulted in far fewer male students, leaving colleges and universities in financial trouble (Graham, 1978). These institutions, in an effort to keep their doors open, became “willing to consider tuition-paying women” (Graham, 1978, p. 764). In addition, the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 served to stimulate the growth of state universities and consequently promoted discussion and general acceptance of a woman’s right to public education (Graham, 1978). Subsequently, by the 1890s, women were enjoying new academic opportunities in coeducational institutions, as well as in private women’s colleges (Hoffman, 2011). Furthermore, these colleges and universities tended to promote a liberal arts curriculum, enabling women to experience a variety of subjects previously unattainable to them:

engineering, agriculture, mathematics, science, and home economics (Graham, 1978; Hoffman, 2011).

***Deans of women.*** Due to this influx of female students, coeducational institutions markedly increased to 70%, with women constituting over 30% of the student population (Chamberlain, 1988). This increase in female students heralded the arrival of a new position in higher education: the dean of women (Gangone, 2008; Hoffman, 2011). In large part, this new position was created to assuage the fears of male top-level administrators and their governing boards; deans of women would ensure that female students were controlled, thereby posing no threat to the institution or its male students (Hoffman, 2011). According to Tuttle (1996), “Deans of women arrived on coeducational campuses...partly to ‘defend the position of women’ but primarily to help disconcerted presidents deal with the increasing numbers of female students and their housing, health, counseling, and social needs” (p. 2).

Schwartz (1997b) suggests that deans of women were expected to serve dual purposes on the college campuses: to insulate the historically male campuses from the female “influence,” as well as to supervise, protect and guide these young female students by providing them with rigid standards of expected behavior. Not surprisingly, the first women appointed to look after female students were “wise and pious matrons” with little or no formal education (Nidiffer, 2002, p. 12). Furthermore, these women typically had no power on the campus; their duties were clearly delineated, providing them with minimal authority and virtually no recognition as a member of the administrative team (Nidiffer, 2002). Due to the nature of these first hires, Nidiffer (2002) humorously notes “the term *dean of women* conjures up enduring images of prudish busybodies or harmless matrons” (p. 10). In support,

Schwartz (1997a) laments that modern history often inaccurately characterizes deans of women as “snooping battle axes—prudish spinsters who bedeviled the harmless fun-seeking of their students” (p. 422).

Fortunately, the perception of the dean of women began to change when Alice Freeman Palmer was hired at the University of Chicago in 1892 (Bordin, 1993). Palmer had previously served as “Principal” of Wellesley College from 1882 to 1887, becoming the first female to serve as a “real, and clearly seminal, [female] president” of a respected college (Bordin, 1993, p. 1). After resigning her post to marry, Palmer reluctantly agreed to become the nation’s first professional dean of women under two conditions: she would work part-time and she would share her position with fellow Wellesley colleague and friend, Marion Talbot (Nidiffer, 2002; Schwartz, 1997b). Through hard work and perseverance, these highly educated and ambitious women earned renown for their unwavering dedication to women in higher education, as well as their advocacy of coeducation and professional collaboration (Nidiffer, 2002). Consequently, both Alice Freeman Palmer and Marion Talbot are regarded as two of the most influential figures in expanding academic horizons for women in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bordin, 1993).

Beginning in the late 1800s and under the direction of women leaders such as Palmer and Talbot, deans of women worked doggedly to “legitimize” their role as essential professionals on predominantly male campuses (Schwartz, 1997b). Subsequently, a *separate spheres* philosophy ensued in which female administrators created and led separate, but parallel, departments and activities for the enrolled females (Hoffman, 2011). Glazer and Slater (1987) suggest that deans of women were thereby able to secure a place for female

advancement, while at the same time minimizing adversity and antagonism, by avoiding direct competition with men through the creation of this female programming. As a result, women were provided with professional opportunities within higher education, as well as the opportunity to earn advanced degrees in professional arenas previously closed to them (Hoffman, 2011).

In addition, many of these women were also faculty members with advanced degrees in their own fields, maintaining a teaching schedule along with their duties as dean (Schwartz, 1997b). Consequently, the women who gravitated to the position of dean typically demonstrated commitment to professional standards that encompassed academic discipline, scholarly research and publication, and new scientific methods of guidance for students (Gangone, 2008; Nidiffer, 2002; Schwartz, 1997b). For the next 60 years, these dedicated women “laid the foundation of professional practice for higher education administration and student services, including graduate study, the development of professional associations, research on students, college environments, and student guidance and counseling” (Schwartz, 1997a, p. 504).

**The 20<sup>th</sup> century.** The first four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reveal a significant increase in the numbers of women attending, and working in, institutions of higher education (Graham, 1978). Women enrolled in undergraduate programs constituted anywhere from 40% to 47% of the total campus population in any given year (Graham, 1978; Thelin, 2011). Much of this growth can be directly attributed to both World War I and World War II; the declining enrollment of men due to military obligation was a major catalyst for the increased female presence on campuses nationwide (Dorn, 2008; Graham, 1978). The twenties served as a

pinnacle decade, boasting women's highest representation in the undergraduate population, in doctoral programs, and as college faculty members (Graham, 1978). By the mid-1930s, deans of women were firmly entrenched in higher education administration; they were highly respected staples on the college campus, promoting both rigorous scholarship and student support (Schwartz, 1997b).

***Post World War II.*** Unfortunately, the proliferation of women in higher education would succumb to post-war change. When World War II ended in 1945, many women found themselves ousted from academics and the workplace, once again relegated to the home (Webb, 2010). The desire to return to “normalcy”, coupled with the homage paid to the men returning from war, resulted in a markedly negative perception of women as both students and employees (Schwartz, 1997b). Social opinion during this time dictated that jobs and academics were the male domain, while women were expected to conform to the subordinate position of homemaker (Webb, 2010).

According to Schwartz (1997b), “anti-woman” sentiment led to the unfortunate but inevitable decline of female professionals on college campuses. In an effort to become more “efficient,” many institutions elected to combine the roles of dean of women and dean of men, resulting in the dismissal of many female deans, as well as the demise of numerous women's departments and programs (Eisenmann, 2006). For those women avoiding dismissal, they often found themselves relegated to positions of less responsibility, demoted as “secondary officers” in reorganized offices of student affairs (Nidiffer, 2002, p. 149). Consequently, many former deans of women became counselors or associate deans, often reporting to men with far fewer qualifications and significantly less professional experience (Gangone, 2008).

Schwartz (1997b) observes that post-war era campus culture had become blatantly anti-feminist and was “increasingly indifferent and even hostile towards women” (p. 433). Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham clearly demonstrate this hostility in their 1947 tome *The Modern Woman*. In the book, they vilify feminism as a “deep illness” in which women who want equal pay and educational opportunities are “engaged in the ritual castration of men” (as cited in Webb, 2010). Thus, despite their numerous contributions and successes during the war, women once again became a marginalized, “misplaced” population (Webb, 2010, p. 3).

Not all women shared in the belief that they were disadvantaged or deprived, however. Women who upheld traditional gender roles argued that work outside the home was improper for women; the challenge to traditional roles that gender equity demanded was as threatening to some women as it was to most men (Eisenmann, 2006). Graham (1978) suggests that the feminist pursuit of independence and equality prevalent in the late 1800s and early 1900s was replaced by new virtues framing the “feminine ideal”: youth, beauty, compliance, and domesticity. College was now viewed as an opportunity for females to engage in “proper youthful behavior” and hopefully meet the man “with whom the domestic life would be shared” (Graham, 1978, p. 770). Consequently, many women of the forties and fifties once again embraced the theme of domesticity and withdrew from the professional arena (Graham, 1978).

Women serious about attaining a higher education, especially females electing to go to graduate or professional schools, now faced a serious dilemma: conform to societal expectations or risk rejection and disapproval. According to Graham (1978), the

“psychological and financial factors” were overwhelming because “graduate school was still seen as a prelude to a profession... twentieth century female virtues were seriously at odds with a career” (p. 771). The avenues women took to resolve this dilemma varied. Many women acquiesced to domesticity by marrying and having children, some women found the inner strength and determination to forge ahead with their academic and professional goals bereft of marriage and family, and yet others attempted to balance domestic responsibilities with an academic and/or professional life (Eisenmann, 2006; Graham, 1978). The latter was often very difficult to navigate, but Graham (1978) suggests that this effort spawned the movement, beginning in the sixties, “of women seeking full participation in society” (p. 771) while challenging the societal values imposed upon them in the previous decades.

*Legislative action.* During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite the negative cultural climate for women in higher education and professional work, several Supreme Court decisions and legislative actions did serve to expand opportunities available to women. First of all, women earned the right to vote when the Nineteenth Amendment was narrowly passed in 1920 (Thelin, 2011). Women now had a voice in the once masculine domain of politics and government. In addition, state policies known as “marriage bars” were phased out almost completely by the early 1940s (Goldin, 1991). Marriage bars, according to Goldin (1991), were regulations enacted against teachers and some clerical workers in an effort to reinforce men’s socioeconomic status and the traditional family patriarchy. Specifically, marriage bars were a direct legislative response to the perceived threat of female empowerment both in and outside of the home; economic hardship, chronic unemployment, and heightened competition



for jobs were mitigating factors for this legislation which served to bar married women from employment (Goldin, 1991; Scharf, 1980).

Possibly the most significant legislative act for women and gender equity was Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX states that:

No person in the United State shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (U.S. Department of Education, 2014)

According to Thelin (2011), Title IX enforcement and litigation positively impacted enrollment of female college students, as well as increased enrollment and graduation from fields of study historically deemed male. Unfortunately, despite the importance of this (and other) progressive legislation, gender-based issues continued to plague women in their quest for equality in academics and in the workplace.

**The new millennium.** Women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century constitute the majority in undergraduate enrollment and graduation, have recently surpassed men in earned doctorates, and continue to close the gap in full professors and upper-level administrative positions (Thelin, 2011, p. 371). A 2012 Pew study found that 66% of women ages 18 to 34 rated “success in a high-paying career or profession” as important in their lives, as compared to 59% of the male respondents (Sandberg, 2013, p. 16). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), almost 70% of women with children under the age of 18 are either working or actively seeking work. From this group, the labor force participation rate of mothers with

children under 6 years old is almost 64%. Consequently, employed mothers routinely face numerous challenges and stressors associated with balancing work and family life.

**Gender bias.** In general, the gender gap both in and out of the home persists; women have not been able to significantly reduce their duties in the home to offset their increasing responsibilities in the workplace (Loder, 2005). Northouse (2013) summarizes the situation succinctly when he states, “Research on gender... focuses on decreasing the gender gap in leadership positions, thereby lessening gender segregation at work; however, the leadership gap will not be closed without a concurrent focus on closing the gender gap at home” (p. 365). Further, David (2009) cautions “there is an assumption in mainstream public policies and practices that gender equality has been ‘achieved’ for women... and the problem is now one of male disadvantage” (p. 3). While numerous theories abound to either confirm or discredit this assumption, there is no doubt that the issue of gender gap is complex and laden with “independent causal factors” that are extremely difficult to understand and conceptualize (Jacob, 2002, p. 597).

With a shift in focus specific to higher education, Allan (2011) contends that gender equity should never be assumed based on enrollment rates and graduation figures. Rather, equality should be measured by the way “gender representation tends to be stratified across types of institutions and by rank and discipline in institutions where women are underrepresented in particular fields, in the ranks of senior faculty... and in senior leadership positions” (Allan, 2011, p. 1). Consequently, persistent problems and gender-related challenges for women working in higher education also remain prevalent, warranting continued study and analysis.

Although significant strides have been made in the workplace, much work remains; rules and policy can be put in place, but gender biases and stereotypes remain pervasive and highly resistant to change (Northouse, 2013). McEwen and Agno (2011) discuss the damage that gender-based stereotyping can cause in the workplace, especially when these stereotypes foster the perception that women are inherently “lacking” in qualities associated with effective leadership and business acumen:

Consider, for example, how a male co-worker expects a woman to convey competence, face competition, present ideas, get involved in corporate policies, and determine their role on a team. If a woman unwittingly perpetuates a stereotypical bias, it will undermine her credibility. Why? Because of gender expectations and misconceptions. Men in business will expect women to behave like them, while women will expect a female counterpart to behave in a more feminine manner. (p. 5)

Further, they caution that the workplace continues to be contaminated by age-old stereotypes in which women “take care” and men “take charge” (McEwen & Agno, 2011).

Rapoport et al. (2002) discuss the concept of organizational culture and the expectation that the good employee will do “whatever it takes” to get the job done. In their explanation of this “commitment” ethic promoted in many organizations, the authors discuss the low morale and inherent fear that women experience because of the choices they are forced to make as they navigate home and family (Rapoport et al., 2002). They caution, “Organizational cultures that glorify employees who work as if they had no personal-life needs or responsibilities silence personal concerns and make it difficult to recognize or admit

the costs of overwork” (Rapoport et al., 2002, p. 31). As a result, women who choose family over work are often viewed as unreliable and/or less interested in challenging work.

Current research clearly demonstrates that gender expectations and stereotypical thinking continues to thrive in both the workplace and in the home (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). In an attempt to address the extent to which change for women has evolved, Gerdes (2006) conducted a qualitative study involving female college staff, faculty, and administrators. Her purpose was to ascertain if these women, by comparing the past and present, perceived their current situation as improved or static. Study results revealed that these women, while satisfied overall, easily identified two barriers that have remained intact over the years: family issues and gender bias (para. 47). “Family issues” constituted the most frequently cited problem and encompassed numerous areas of concern: childcare problems, leave and family policies, conflict of childbearing/rearing years and tenure clocks, primary domestic responsibility, institutional expectations of work before family, and “not having a wife.” Gender bias, as identified in the study, included such workplace practices as gender stereotyping, less pay and chance for promotion because of family-related absences or part-time status, and “masculine” work standards/rules. Furthermore, Gerdes (2006) concludes that family issues are particularly relevant for women employed in institutions of higher education because they “are expected to demonstrate singular devotion to a career during their prime childbearing years” (para. 48).

The difficulty of raising a family while simultaneously pursuing a satisfying work life is well documented throughout the literature (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gerdes, 2006; Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Loder, 2005). In her discussion of workplace bias, Madden (2005) argues

that women are victims of “unconscious stereotyping,” a phenomenon in which traditionally oppressed groups are treated as one-dimensional; hence, women are viewed from the false dichotomy of “housewife” versus “career woman” (p. 4). Subsequently, a woman attempting to balance both may be viewed as incompetent, detached, or both (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Furthermore, these “housewife” expectations are often applied to the workplace in the form of overt and/or covert sexist behavior. In a survey of college department chairs, Mullen (2009) found that female faculty and staff were expected to perform service-related duties: committee work, departmental “housekeeping” functions, extra course loads, and increased student advising. Conversely, male colleagues were free to engage in more prestigious functions such as research, often resulting in a fast track to tenure and promotion (Bird, Litt, & Wang, 2004; Mullen, 2009).

The marginalization of women in higher education also continues in ways that are more subtle, instinctual, and engrained. Following a recent study on gender bias conducted at Yale University, researchers observed:

It is noteworthy that female faculty members were just as likely as their male colleagues to favor the male student. The fact that faculty members’ bias was independent of their gender, scientific discipline, age and tenure status suggests that it is likely unintentional, generated from widespread cultural stereotypes... (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoli, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012, p. 1)

The harsh reality, as suggested in this passage, is that gender bias may be so engrained in the human psyche that even simple identification and acknowledgement may prove difficult.

*Overcoming gender bias.* In an effort to counteract gender bias in the workplace, women often resort to “bias avoidance” strategies (Drago et al., 2006). These strategies serve to structure life for the female employee in ways that will not detract from work, nor tarnish or derail her professional reputation and chance for advancement (Drago et al., 2006). These bias avoidance strategies may include remaining single; delaying the start of a family until tenure or promotion is achieved; prioritizing work over family events; refusing special considerations and family care options such as parental leave, part-time or flexible scheduling, extended maternity leave, asking to stop the tenure clock; and remaining childless or having fewer children than desired (Drago et al., 2006; Mason, Goulden, & Wolfinger, 2006).

Feminist scholars and sociologists caution “the American workplace and the home are in desperate need of another gender revolution if women are to gain real parity in educational administration” (Budig & England, 2001; Hochschild, 1989). Further, they argue that change must go far beyond workplace policy and practice; rather, pervasive and antiquated societal views regarding gender roles and expectations, as well as stereotypes that are deeply engrained in academic culture, must also change (Cress & Hart, 2009; Loder, 2005; Madden, 2005). In addition, systemic thinking that considers multiple perspectives and paradigms must be at the forefront of all campus structural change (Cress & Hart, 2009). The change process should be rooted in values promoting a shared belief system that not only demands transparent decision-making, but also “examines how institutional structures constrain women... and takes advantage of the gendered experiences of women” (Madden, 2005, p.

12). Former Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell aptly summarizes the need for structured, cultural change when she states:

What I think is interesting is when women become present in greater numbers, they have greater confidence in being able to be women. And not only do they speak in different voices—and perhaps we begin to see if there are any differences in their outlook—but they change the culture. (as cited in Gangone, 2008, p. 19)

Needless to say, the process of changing culturally engrained attitudes and practice will take concerted effort and collaboration in order for true institutional transformation to be realized.

*Additional issues facing women.* Today, certain issues remain standard for women in higher education, as well as in the professional workplace. First, women are less likely either to attend or be professionally employed by an institution considered to be “elite” or “top tier” (Allan, 2011; Buchmann, 2009). In colleges and universities, the percentage of women earning doctorates has increased significantly, but the percentage of academic females who achieve a full professorship status has not increased in the past four decades (Gangone, 2008). In addition, the earning potential for women is disproportionately low to men, even for “those who are similar in terms of their education, experience, and choice of careers” (Doyle, 2010, p. 52).

*Earnings.* Independent of the discipline of study, the institution for study, or the selected occupation of the woman, female employees continue to lag behind men in earnings (Doyle, 2010). Many theories abound to explain the gender gap in relation to earnings: women earn less because of the interruptions in their career to start a family, they earn less because they choose to major in traditional female disciplines, and they earn less because they

are not “career” oriented (Arboleda et al., 2004; Doyle, 2010). Further, women are also subject to pay inequity because they are not considered the primary breadwinner or because they are single, without family costs and responsibilities (Doyle, 2010). A study conducted by Padavic and Reskin (2002) found that “the more heavily female in occupation, the less both female and male workers earn” (p. 10). Furthermore, in societies that devalue women and the work they do, the pay for women is significantly lower relative to the pay of men (Padavic & Reskin, 2002).

Women also tend to view college as an “economic necessity” in order to have a decent standard of living (Doyle, 2010). According to Doyle (2010), “for women to earn competitively, the labor market requires that they have more education” (p. 54).

Unfortunately, women also tend to pursue studies that do not command a high wage, while men select majors based on high earning potential (Arboleda et al., 2004). As a consequence of these choices, working women with children earn approximately seventy cents to the dollar in comparison to men, and childless working women earn about ninety cents to every dollar earned by their male counterparts (Ellison, 2005).

Consequently, the desire to earn a decent wage has propelled women into institutions of higher learning at an unprecedented rate (Yakaboski, 2011). As previously mentioned, this is not a new occurrence in the history of the United States. The Civil War and both world wars saw an influx of women to higher education; war and the reduced male population created the demand for women in the work force and these women required education and training (Eisenmann, 2006). Unfortunately, women also experienced displacement from their



work once civilian life resumed, oftentimes leaving them feeling used and unimportant (Graham, 1978).

*Traditional female career choice.* Many women continue to choose fields of study and careers in disciplines traditionally viewed as “female”: nursing, teaching, social work, communication disorders, modern languages, and social work (Adebayo, 2008). The marginalization of these disciplines is well documented throughout history and is evidenced today through the premeditated and rigid discriminatory practices that permeates the hiring practices, pay, power, and prestige of women in these fields (Adebayo, 2008; Buchmann, 2009; Dziech, 2007; Jaschik, 2011; Trahan & Growe, 2012). Perhaps this workplace bias can be attributed, at least in part, to individuals such as the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, whose attitude of women was blatantly hostile:

You need only to look at the way in which she is formed to see that woman is not meant to undergo great labor, whether of the mind or of the body... Women are directly fitted for acting as the nurses and teachers of our early childhood by the fact that they are themselves childish, frivolous, and short-sighted; in a word, they are big children all their life long. (as cited in Dziech, 2007, p. 4)

Further, Meyers cautions that gender wage disparity often results from “comparable worth” theory that suggests that certain careers and jobs are “devalued” simply because they are primarily female (as cited in Jaschik, 2011, p. 1). A study conducted by Shauman (2006) found that gender differences in the choice of occupations accounted for approximately “41 percent of the sex differences in the odds of employment in high-paying occupations” (p. 602).

Conversely, Arboleda et al. (2004) suggest that, given the very real differences between the sexes, society cannot adopt an attitude of “one size fits all”; we cannot assume that educational and career choices and paths will be, or should be, the same simply because of gender. Browne (2005), a professor of law at Wayne State University, cautions that certain complex factors must be considered when examining female career choice. In a letter published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, he makes the following astute and timely observation:

Although we should be alert to arbitrary social barriers that might stand in the way of women’s participation in the occupations of their choice, it is not sensible to assume that when they do not enter all occupations in the same numbers as men, there is necessarily some barrier standing in their way. Freedom of choice should be the goal, and freedom to choose entails the freedom to choose differently. (Browne, 2005, p. 2)

In other words, gender equity in employment will not be achieved simply by demanding that women gravitate toward male-dominated occupations. Rather, women (as well as men) choosing a more traditionally female career should be afforded the opportunity to pursue their true interests and passion. Most importantly, though, occupational worth should not be based on the numbers of women versus men following a particular career path, nor on the arbitrary categorization of a job as feminine or masculine.

### **Work-Life Balance**

When Elizabeth Barrett Browning penned *Aurora Leigh* in 1856, she captured the very essence of woman’s struggle to define her own identity. In an effort to balance her vocational aspirations with the tradition role of wife, she writes:

With quiet indignation I broke in.  
 You misconceive the question like a man  
 Who sees a woman as the complement  
 Of his sex merely. You forget too much  
 That every creature, female as the male,  
 Stands single in responsible act and thought  
 As also in birth and death. Whoever says  
 To a loyal woman, 'Love and work with me,'  
 Will get fair answers if the work and love,  
 Being good themselves, are good for her—the best  
 She was born for...  
 But me your work  
 Is not the best for, –nor your love the best,  
 Nor able to commend the kind of work  
 For love's sake merely. Ah, you force me sir,  
 To be over-bold in speaking of myself:

I too have my vocation, –work to do. (Browning, 1995, p. 52)

As Browning alludes in her poem, the concept of work-life balance is complex and fraught with misinterpretation.

In an effort to define the concept, Kirchmeyer (2000) suggests that balance is the ability to achieve “satisfying experiences in all life domains” (p. 81). Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) further refine the definition of this balance as the “accomplishment of role-related

expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his/her role-related partners in the work and family domains” (p. 458). According to Goodchild (2006), work-life balance can be viewed as the conscious evaluation of a person’s priorities, followed by the appropriate allocation of time and energy, to that which is deemed most important. McMillan et al. (2011) suggests that harmonious balance is achieved and maintained when the resources gained through enrichment serve to reduce or eliminate the stressors associated with work/life conflict.

Numerous research studies discuss the concept of work/life balance in relation to conflict versus enrichment (Goode, 1960; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Hammer & Thompson, 2003; MacDermid & Harvey, 2006; Marks, 1977). MacDermid and Harvey (2006) state that conflict results when “the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (p. 77). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) differentiate between three types of conflict identified in the literature: strain-based, behavioral-based, and time-based. Strain-based conflict occurs when responsibilities of one role hinders ability to perform in the other role, behavioral-based conflict results when behaviors associated with one role are deemed inappropriate when used in the other role, and time-based pertains to the amount of time or preoccupation a person has with one role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time-based conflict is identified as the most prevalent type of conflict (Hammer & Thompson, 2003). Time-based conflict suggests that an individual is limited to a finite amount of time and energy; navigating multiple roles at work and in the home greatly decreases both the time and energy needed by an individual to successfully meet all demands, thereby creating conflict and strain (Goode, 1960; Marks, 1977).

Using role conflict theory as her guide, Sallee (2015) conducted a study with women pursuing graduate degrees in higher education who were simultaneously employed as student affairs professionals. She found that many of these women incorporated strategies of “compartmentalization” and/or role elimination in order to navigate the multiple roles of student, employee, and parent. Compartmentalization relies heavily on time management strategies that allow the individual to focus on one role at a time; a specific block of time during the day is typically devoted to tasks associated with one role, while another block of time is reserved for a different role. Role elimination, on the other hand, involves the rejection of burdensome roles, primarily by “eliminating hobbies and personal interests, as well as turning down professional development opportunities” (p. 403). Numerous studies suggest that these working mothers feel they have no time to exercise or tend to wellness issues, to cultivate personal friendships, and to engage in professional activities and other opportunities for involvement (Marshall, 2009; Robertson & Weiner, 2013; Wilson, 1997).

In addition to role compartmentalization and/or elimination, Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2012) discuss the concept of *satisficing* as a strategy that some working mothers use in order to manage competing roles and mounting responsibilities. They state that “satisficing” gives working mothers permission to be “good enough, though not necessarily optimal...[working] to the best of their abilities and in ways they might not have had to if there were fewer roles to play and responsibilities to juggle” (p. 42). In other words, satisficing is a coping mechanism that some women use to reduce the guilt and self-recrimination often associated with exceedingly high expectations and unattainable standards at work and in the home.

Conversely, the concept of enrichment encompasses the more positive qualities and benefits gained by an individual who successfully navigates the dual roles of work and family. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) define enrichment as “the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role” (p. 73). Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne and Grzywacz (2006) identify four “gains” of enrichment: developmental (knowledge, skills, values); affective (positive changes in mood); capital (acquisition of assets); and efficiency. Further, they identify two distinct pathways from which enrichment can occur: the instrumental path and the affect path (Carlson et al., 2006). The instrumental path suggests that gains in one role result in a direct and positive impact on the other role; the affect path suggests that gains in one role positively influence the other role because of the individual’s increased mood, attitude, and self-esteem (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Goodchild (2006) concludes that personal enrichment must also encompass strategies in which work-life balance is actively pursued and maintained.

### **Work-Life Balance Strategies**

A preponderance of literature focuses on strategies women should implement in order to create better balance between work and home life (Fu & Schaffer, 2001; James, 2006; Pless, 2006; Rotondo et al., 2003; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007; Tregeagle, 2006; Venker, 2004; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). While many of these strategies are based on solid and substantial research, there is no absolute theory or framework established to guarantee success in juggling multiple roles.

**Personal strategies.** In the book, *Balance: Real-life strategies for work/life balance* (Tregeagle, 2006), 12 women share their stories and subsequent strategies for work-life

balance. Each “expert” contributes a chapter to the book, sharing a different perspective on how to successfully balance work and family. In the introduction, Tregagle (2006) states some of these women “have gained their expertise through education, some through professional experience, and some through having lived to tell the tale and share what they have learned” (p. 7). Overall, the book provides a comprehensive detailing of the many strategies from which a woman may choose to gain better work-life balance, incorporating such topics as: mindfulness and mind management, exercise, nutrition, boundary-setting, positive attitude, avoiding the “superwoman” syndrome, meditation, stress reduction, values, discovering passion/creativity, and support networks.

James (2006) suggests that work-life integration is a far more effective approach than that of trying to achieve balance. Integration is adaptable and fluid, allowing the individual to adjust and modify to find a personally satisfying combination of work and play. Balance, on the other hand, can be precarious and difficult, often leading to a sense of failure. Further, in order to achieve work-life integration, an individual’s emotions, expectations, and environment must be working well and in unison. The first component, emotions, will be properly managed when a woman gives up feelings of guilt and learns to live in the moment. In order to manage expectations, a woman must stop harmful self-talk, avoid crazy deadlines, communicate openly, set achievable goals, be realistic, and set aside time for self. The final component, environment, exerts control over an individual’s emotional health and expectations. She goes on to suggest that women should surround themselves with positive people, remove clutter, and engage the five senses through aromatherapy, candles, and

soothing music; pleasant sounds, smells, and visuals facilitate a more pleasant and productive environment.

Pless (2006) also stresses the concept of work-life integration. She states that work-life balance is problematic because “people get caught up thinking that what needs to be balanced is ‘time,’ whereas what needs to be balanced is satisfaction” (p. 39). Further, she stresses the importance of a daily plan in which happiness (joy in life) and achievement (challenge and accomplishment) are the ultimate goals.

In an effort to address the greatest challenges that women face securing work/life balance, a study conducted by Molloy (2004) asked women to identify the issue they viewed as most problematic. Thirty-nine percent of the women identified time management as the greatest obstacle, followed by: being organized (16%), financial pressures (10%), lack of energy (9%), emotional management (9%), childcare (7%), saying ‘No’ (7%), and living with a focused partner (3%). Further, Molloy goes on to identify the strategies these women employ to overcome these obstacles: stress management techniques, organizational strategies, nurturing significant relationships, and prioritizing and working toward goals.

In order to establish the relevancy of “mindfulness” as an effective work-life balance strategy, Michel, Bosch, and Rexroth (2014), conducted a study with 246 working women in Germany. Their study was based on the following two assumptions:

- Mindfulness, a cognitive-emotional segmentation strategy, enables employees to balance between work and private life.
- Organizational health and work-life balance programs should include low-cost, but effective, brief mindfulness interventions.



The experimental group was provided an intensive, three-week online training from which they learned to incorporate mindfulness techniques into their daily lives. The study results revealed, in comparison to the control group participants, the experimental group “experienced significantly less strain-based work-family conflict and significantly more psychological detachment and satisfaction with work-life balance” (Michel et al., 2014, p. 733).

Strategies for work-life balance are prevalent in the literature (Campbell, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Goodchild, 2006; Henderson, 2006; Michel et al., 2014; Postans, 2006; Smallen-Grob, 2003). Goodchild (2006) describes strategies for prioritizing good self-care and pursuing passions in order to live a balanced life. Campbell (2006) recommends six strategies to obtain balance: view obstacles as opportunities, eliminate unhelpful guilt, build support networks with family and friends, and monitor and respond to changing needs. Practices such as journaling, attending support groups, working with a life coach or career mentor, and engaging in networking are some of the most commonly mentioned strategies (Campbell, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Goodchild, 2006; Smallen-Grob, 2003). In addition, many researchers promote self-care through adequate rest, maintaining close personal relationships, enlisting help in the home (from a partner, family members, and/or paid help), healthy eating and regular exercise, practicing yoga, and hobbies (Campbell, 2006; Goodchild, 2006; Henderson, 2006; Michel et al., 2014; Postans, 2006).

**Professional strategies.** The preponderance of research in recent years has focused on organizational policy and work-place strategies to reduce work-life conflict (Fu & Schaffer, 2001; Rotondo et al., 2003; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006).

While many strategies have been employed by individual organizations, no set approach has been universally accepted as best practice (Rotondo et al., 2003). Further, McMillan et al. (2011) contend that workplace interventions and cultural change will not succeed until the organization fully understands the nature and the implications that the struggle for employee work-life balance entails. This level of understanding can be gained through “the use of organized feedback systems, culture surveys, performance appraisal and communication systems, and the use of metrics to quantify utilization of existing policies and programs” (McMillan et al., 2011, p. 17). In support, Morris and Madsen (2007) state:

By better understanding work-life theory, issues, challenges, and possible solutions, human resource professionals can strategically change the work culture, redesign work, implement training programs, and tailor career programs or assistance strategies enabling employees to be more engaged, productive, and fulfilled. (p. 440)

Paramount to the success of any institutional intervention is the willingness to address culturally established attitudes and practices that may impede workplace satisfaction (Morris & Madsen, 2007).

Rapoport et al. (2002) discuss at length the concept of Collaborative Interactive Action Research (CIAR), a process in which an organization tries to uncover the underlying assumptions regarding gender, work, and success that either help or detract from equity and effectiveness in the workplace. This process is facilitated by outside consultants who work closely with employees of an organization to facilitate change; the “team” works together to critically evaluate ineffective, masculine-gendered workplace policy and practice, as well as

“envision and enact new ways of working that eliminate the negative impacts” of gender inequity (Rapoport et al., 2002, p. 171).

Current research does examine certain types of intervention that have been found to be helpful in creating a more equitable and gender-friendly work environment (Brough & Driscoll, 2010). Most organizational interventions focus on changing policy in four key areas: employee services, provision of employee benefits, job restructuring, and organizational development initiatives. Employee services encompass such offerings as on-site childcare and fitness centers, while employee benefits tends to focus more specifically on policies such as paid parental leave and partner benefits. Job restructuring pertains to an employee’s ability to “opt-out” for periods of time with no penalty and/or to work from home, as well as part-time work and other flexible work hour options. Finally, organizational development initiatives constitute those programs designed to improve skills in both the professional and personal domains and include such opportunities as diversity training and leadership development. Brough and O’Driscoll conclude that the adoption of a family-friendly workplace typically results in greater employee satisfaction and retention, improved physical health and emotional well-being, lower rates of absenteeism and sick leave, and improved productivity.

Guest (2002) acknowledges in his research findings that “those who reported that they worked in an organization with a friendly climate, where more human resource practices are in place and where they have more scope for direct participation and autonomy, reported less imbalance” (p. 269). He cautions, however, that a family-friendly workplace is not sufficient to completely eliminate work-life conflict. In support of this observation, McMillan et al. (2011) commend companies and organizations electing to implement family-friendly policies

and benefits, but also note that the employee must rely on individual resources in order to achieve work-life balance. Furthermore, Rotondo et al. (2003) contend that the ability to cope with the stress created from the simultaneous demands of work and family is ultimately the responsibility of the individual.

**Strategies on the college campus.** In light of the bias frequently exhibited in higher education, coupled with the numerous and extreme efforts by women to avoid the career-related consequences promoted by workplace gender bias, it becomes obvious that resolving work-life issues is paramount to the success of women working on the college campus (Cress & Hart, 2009; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Unfortunately, work-life policies and practices on campuses across the nation are, at best, inconsistent; in reality, these policies and practices are virtually ineffective in creating equity for female advancement and promotion (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Furthermore, those practices adopted at colleges to address issues of inequity are “almost exclusively from a structural perspective...when structural diversity is increased without consideration of other psychological and social dimensions of the campus climate, misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts are likely to result” (Cress & Hart, 2009, p. 474). In addition, Kettle (1996) argues that equal gender opportunities in higher education have not been realized because the focus remains on improving the current campus structure, rather than affecting significant and radical structural change. Without a comprehensive and inclusive approach, opportunities to sustain much-needed change and opportunity for women are compromised (Cress & Hart, 2009).

In their study of higher education trends, Mason and Goulden (2002) note that the gap between academic males and females remains significant and alarming. Their study examined

family formation and its effects on the career lives of both females and males employed as faculty, academic personnel, and staff at the University of California at Berkeley. They conclude that while having children has a positive effect on the man's career trajectory, starting a family seriously slows the advancement, promotion, and earnings potential for the academic woman. Consequently, they recommend the following strategies:

- A flexible part-time option...that can be used for limited periods (up to 5 years) as life-course needs arise.
- A guarantee to make high-quality childcare slots available, particularly for new hires.
- Discounting of family-related resume gaps in the hiring process.
- Establishment of school-break childcare and summer camps.
- Emergency backup childcare programs.
- Adoption benefits.
- Marketing of the family-friendly package as a major recruitment tool. Building of the necessary institutional mechanisms to ensure the success of new and existing policies. (p. 19)

Lester (2013), however, cautions that higher education must move beyond policy development and implementation. Rather, each campus must work toward building a culture founded on established values and norms associated with work-life balance. This culture of work-life balance serves to “acknowledge employee responsibilities outside of work, build structures that promote work-life balance through alternative work arrangements, and seeks to

modify attitudes about alternative work arrangements to make them more accessible” (Lester, 2013, p. 464).

Further, current research clearly documents an under-utilization of work-life policies and programs (Fochtman, 2011; Lester, 2013; Mason & Goulden, 2002; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). A major reason for this lack of usage is stigma; taking advantage of work-life balance policy may imply that the employee is weak or somehow flawed (Lester, 2013). Mason and Goulden (2002) note that a “mostly discouraging culture” significantly contributed to the lack of involvement in family-friendly programs at the University of California. According to Thompson et al. (1999), employee perceptions of campus culture directly impacts the usage associated with work-family benefits and programs.

### **The Student Affairs Professional**

Student affairs professionals can be described as non-instructional staff working in a variety of capacities on a college campus, ranging from academic support to college presidents (Duggan, 2008). Jones and Taylor (2013) define these employees as, “mid-level non-instructional professional staff who hold an administrative or professional role at the institution, but whose primary role is not teaching” (p. 938). Unfortunately, these professionals are often burdened with complex responsibilities and an ever-changing environment.

According to Shutt, Garrett, Lynch, and Dean (2012), the work that student affairs professionals face on diverse campuses is “multifaceted and continuously evolving to respond to changing student populations and demographics, budgets, technology, expectations, and roles” (p. 65). They further suggest that student affairs “foundation documents,” such as the

*CAS standards* (CAS, 2009) and the *Joint Statement* (ACPA & NASPA, 2010), provide an excellent foundation for the values and practices upon which all student affairs programming should be based. Finally, the authors stress the importance of having a continual process of assessment in place to evaluate and thereby ensure the efficacy of these programs and services. In support, Worley and Wells-Dolan (2012) discuss the need for a “professional transformation—from a workday focus on the ‘what’ is provided to students to the broader professionalized perspective of ‘how’ we go about the work of student development in the services provided to students” (p. 299).

Clark (2008) notes that all institutions of higher learning create a unique “developmental flow” of student affairs programming and services in order to best meet the changing needs of students. Further, even though the job description of the student affairs professional may vary dramatically depending on the individual student affairs department, certain responsibilities remain prevalent to the entire division. According to Barr (2004), helping students to optimize their learning, be successful, and achieve their goals is the foundation of all student affairs work. She also suggests that controversy, unpredictability, and the confrontation/problem-solving of complex situations also constitute the numerous and stressful tasks that student affairs professionals face daily.

Student affairs programming is rooted in the concept that higher education is responsible for developing well-rounded, balanced citizens (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). Levtov (2001) suggests the field of student services is “founded on the values of equal access, equal rights and the development of the whole person” (p. 30). Due to these stated values, student affairs professionals focus on the holistic development of college students in the academic

setting, as well as outside of traditional academic spaces. Consequently, as the numbers of students enrolled in institutions of higher learning increase, professional services are expanded to meet new and diverse student needs. In order to manage these new programs, student affairs professionals with specialized skills and training are required.

The majority of students pursuing specialized training in student affairs and higher education administration are female (Marshall, 2009). Consequently, women occupy approximately 64% of all administrative positions in higher education (Enke, 2014). Duggan (2008) cautions that despite their prevalence in higher education, these non-teaching staff members are “often marginalized, their experiences and input frequently discounted” (p. 47). The number of women serving as senior administrators in colleges and universities “is noticeably unbalanced not only in relation to men, but also in relation to the number of women who earn college degrees” (Turner, Norwood, & Noe, 2013). Further, female professionals working in student affairs administration are disproportionately employed in lower to mid-level positions that are typically regarded as non-academic (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). The areas in which most women are employed also tend to rank among the lowest-paying administrative posts (Allan, 2011). Tack and Patitu (1992), even after controlling for differences in race, level of family responsibility, and human capital, found that women far exceed men in full-time, non-tenure positions considered to be lower status in the labor market hierarchy. Subsequently, these women tend to be young professionals in their child-bearing years who will potentially face the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006).



In comparison to female faculty and senior administrators, minimal research has been conducted regarding work-life balance and the female student affairs professional (Fochtman, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). According to Marshall (2009), relatively little is known about how these mothers “function within the higher education system and there is some indication that women receive explicit or implicit messages about the feasibility and desirability of combining work and family” (p. 91). In support, Levitov (2001) argues that “socialized professional standards” are to blame by suggesting that these working mothers are somehow “incompatible with the current values of the profession” (p.17).

Howard-Hamilton (2004) suggests that due to the “care-taking” role often associated with student affairs, female professionals often “remain concentrated in a small number of low-status areas that are traditionally viewed as women’s fields...or in other academic support roles such as admissions officer, registrar, or bookstore manager” (p. 6). Further, these positions often reward long workweeks and relatively modest salaries. Renn and Hughes (2004) suggest that mid-level professionals are caught somewhere “between the idealism of the new professional and the development of vision necessary for institutional leadership” (p. 93). As a result, these women must continually navigate difficult professional decisions regarding family, work expectations, promotion, and institutional culture.

A study conducted by Melin et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between higher education work settings, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. They note that universities are no longer regarded as “low-stress” workplaces; rather, academic staff members are faced with tasks that are increasingly complex and demanding. “Work conditions characterized by

job insecurity and excessive administrative work and working hours, paired with higher levels of responsibility, external scrutiny and accountability...have been associated with lower levels of job satisfaction, impaired health, and lower productivity” (p. 291). Due to their findings, they caution that the stress resulting from a negative work environment can result in “compensatory” behaviors—negative coping strategies that further jeopardize the health and successful work-life balance of the employee. They conclude that continued research must focus on ways to create sustainable higher education work environments that serve to reinforce employee well-being and work-life balance (Melin et al., 2014).

Unfortunately, many of the policies and practices found in colleges and universities do not accurately address or support the work-life balance needs of female higher education professionals (Drago et al., 2006; Fochtman, 2011; Jones & Taylor, 2013). In their study on family friendly work environments in the community college, Jones and Taylor (2013) found that institutions of higher education remain gendered institutions in which policies and practices are based on the “male ideal worker.” They state that the notion of the ideal worker is outdated; in other words, the “ideal worker is no longer a male with a supportive wife at home” (p. 951). Furthermore, if the culture on campuses does not change to match the work-life balance demands of incoming higher education employees, they predict even higher levels of job dissatisfaction, employee attrition, poor morale, and low productivity.

Perna (2005) also argues for the redefining of the “ideal worker.” She suggests that institutions should not exalt employees for the number of work hours logged or vacation/sick days forfeited. Perna (2005) states that family commitments also require time, therefore “perceptions of the ideal worker that are based even in part on time are a substantial barrier to

achieving gender equity in family and career outcomes” (p. 21). Rather, institutions should gauge employee value based on quality of output, work performance, and other similar measures.

In addition to an antiquated campus culture, student affairs professionals are also subject to inequities in comparison to their colleagues who teach and conduct research (Lester, 2013). In her qualitative study on work-life balance and cultural change, Lester found that universities “valued faculty flexibility and used specific discourse to create an urgent need for flexible policies for faculty (as opposed to staff)...where faculty were the most in need or deserving of work-life benefits” (p. 471). When faculty needs and desires take precedence, fewer progressive policies to benefit the student affairs professional are often the result. Subsequently, professional staff may not be perceived as valued in the work-life process, “thus perpetuating a hierarchy of importance and inequity across the employment groups” found on the college campus (Lester, 2013, p. 483).

Not only are student affairs professionals often undervalued in the college culture, they are also expected to abide by policy “guidelines” rather than the detailed, formal policies that faculty members typically enjoy (Lester, 2013; Jones & Taylor, 2013). This ambiguity in policy “can limit who is eligible and how they are eligible, thus creating increased strife between groups” (Lester, 2013, p. 484). According to Jones and Taylor (2013), the most significant inequity between student affairs professionals/non-instructional staff and their faculty colleagues pertains to work schedules. Instructional staff or faculty tend to enjoy flexible work hours and shorter academic contracts, often with options to have the summer months off (Jones & Taylor, 2013). Non-instructional staff members, on the other hand, are

typically expected to be on duty during regular business hours, making flexibility in scheduling more difficult (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010; Jones & Taylor, 2013). Furthermore, granting time-off and/or a flexible work arrangement is often left to the discretion of a supervisor who may or may not be sensitive to the work-life balance needs of the employee (Lester, 2013).

Mason et al. (2006) emphasize the grave importance of developing a family-friendly university that includes the unique needs of female staff members/student affairs professionals. Further, they suggest that non-instructional professionals are often better protected in many ways than second-tier faculty (adjuncts and part-time faculty), but they lack one very important benefit that faculty members enjoy: flexibility. As previously discussed, faculty members enjoy several significant breaks from work throughout the academic year, thereby allowing them ample time to devote to their families (Jones & Taylor, 2013). Conversely, staff members are subject to a limited number of days off from work each year. Further, while they share many childcare concerns with faculty, they have limited ability to organize their work lives around their children's school schedules. According to Mason and Goulden (2002), staff members working in a university setting need more flexibility and economic support in order to better balance their work with their family life. In addition, they recommend policy and practice that include paid parental leave for childbirth and family illness, flexible hours, and subsidized childcare.

Female student affairs professionals are faced with increasing work demands, stressful work environments, and minimal job flexibility. Current research, while not robust in regard to the work-life balance issues of these working women, clearly illustrates the need for fair

and equitable policy and practice for all campus personnel. Such programming would prove especially beneficial for the young female student affairs professional who is attempting to balance work demands with those numerous responsibilities associated with life outside of the workplace.

### **The Basic Qualitative Research Study**

With complex issues such as work-life balance, qualitative research offers the opportunity for a comprehensive, rich exploration of the issue far surpassing the statistical results generated from a quantitative study approach. Qualitative research studies are conducted for numerous reasons: to explore an issue or problem to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding, to identify variables that cannot be easily measured, and to empower people to tell their stories (Cresswell & Poth, 2017). Numerous qualitative approaches have surfaced over the years, with narrative inquiry, grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, and case study ranking as most prevalent in the social science and health science literature. This diversity of methods has afforded the researcher a wide range of designs and analytical strategies from which to choose.

However, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contend that the basic interpretive study is the most common type of qualitative research found in all fields of practice. In short, basic qualitative research involves the analysis of data in order to find patterns or common themes, resulting in a rich descriptive account that makes reference to the literature that helped frame the study (Merriam, 2009). Surprisingly, despite the widespread use of this approach, few qualitative methodologists acknowledge or include the basic or interpretive qualitative method as a valuable and effective category of research.

Merriam (2009) describes basic qualitative research as having been derived philosophically from constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interaction: *constructionism* assumes that people construct knowledge as they experience and apply meaning to an activity or phenomenon and *phenomenology* refers to how individuals “describe things and experience them through their senses” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). *Symbolic interaction* also focuses on meaning and interpretation, but this communication relies on signs and symbols—words, numbers, or gestures—created to represent something (Tracy, 2013). Consequently, the primary purpose of the basic qualitative research study is to gain an understanding of how people assign meaning, as well as describe and apply this meaning, to the events in their lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As previously mentioned, basic qualitative research can be characterized as a method that is both interpretative and focused on meaning. Data collection is usually conducted in a natural or comfortable setting, with the depth of the data gathered deemed much more important than a large sample size (Morse & Richards, 2002). Further, various techniques can be used for acquiring data using a basic qualitative design. Most commonly, an interview protocol is developed and used with a relatively small sample of individuals representing the population of interest (Patton, 2002). In addition, data collection may also include observations of an individual’s activities and behaviors, as well as through mining information about the individual from various types of pertinent documents and artifacts (Patton, 2002). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the data collection technique(s) ultimately selected will be based on “the researcher’s theoretical orientation, by the problem and purpose of the study, and by the selected sample” (p. 106).

According to Suter (2012), qualitative data collection and analysis “usually proceed simultaneously; ongoing findings affect what types of data are collected and how they are collected” (p. 346). Further, it is an inductive process with the explicit aim of describing and interpreting certain aspects of the phenomena being studied (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). As a result, conceptual categories and descriptive themes emerge and are connected in a way that makes conceptual sense to the researcher. Finally, the overall interpretation conveys the “researcher’s understanding of the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Every human being has a life story that progresses and unfolds over time. The life course perspective is a method to understand how time and human behavior interact; it looks at “how chronological age, relationships, common life transitions, and social change shape people’s lives from conception to death” (Harrigan et al., 2013, p. 383). In addition, the life course perspective provides a way to examine how historical time, social situation, and culture impact individual experience at each stage in life (Giele, 2002).

The life course perspective is a theoretical model that has emerged over the past 50 years. The model is founded in numerous disciplines including, but not limited to the following: sociology, anthropology, psychology, and history (Giele, 2002; Harrigan et al., 2013; Hutchinson, 2013). While the life course perspective is a relatively new approach, its relevance and viability has become widely acknowledged in the qualitative research community (Giele, 2002). Harrigan et al. (2013) suggest that life course has the “potential for understanding patterns of stability and change in all types of social systems” (p. 384).

Subsequently, life course methodology is currently used in studies to gain understanding about numerous human experiences and phenomenon: gerontologists use the perspective to gain understanding of perceptions and practice in old age (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009), it has become a major theoretical framework applied to the field of criminology (Haynie, Petts, Maimon, & Piquero, 2009), and has become the leading perspective for framing longitudinal studies of health behaviors and outcomes (Hutchinson, 2013).

Giele (2002) expanded on the life course theoretical framework when she adapted the model to better understand the roles of gender and diversity in her research. She acknowledges that she stumbled upon the model by accident; due to a lack of funding and other necessary resources, she resorted to the use of retroactive interviews to inquire about the life experiences of black and white college-educated women and their choices regarding career and family. Consequently, she found her results to be rich, rewarding, and of far greater value than her previous data collection methods. According to Giele (2002), the value of the life course method is “the observer can better understand why a person’s life path took the twists and turns that it did... understanding is much more complete when a person’s story is available to suggest the meaning and purpose of his or her actions” (p. 239). Further, knowledge embedded in these narratives can be both illuminating and transformative; the life course method may enable the researcher to uncover many layers of understanding about a person, their culture, and about how they have ultimately created change in their lives (Etherington, 2009).

Giele (2009) has identified certain factors deemed critical in shaping adult gender roles: sense of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and personal drive and motivation.



Sense of identity pertains to a conventional versus non-traditional view of self; relational style examines marital status, as well as certain relationship behaviors such as acting with independence versus deference; adaptive style examines level of innovation and risk-taking versus routine, comfort, and convention; and personal drive and motivation corresponds to life goals, desires, and ambitions. These four factors, or dimensions, combine to form a conceptual framework that helps to explain differences in gender role adoption and life course outcomes. To conclude, Giele (2009) notes that the life story method:

...suggests that women who are in many ways similar in terms of age, education, economic position, and race may have very different values or attitudes or personal characteristics...the most promising method [to better understand those factors impacting gender role attitude and behavior] is a qualitative approach that elicits as rich a story of a woman's life as possible in a one to two-hour interview. (p. 399)

The life course perspective serves to provide a narrative pinpointing significant events in an individual's life, an understanding of the personal meaning that the individual assigns to those life events, and an explanation for the resulting gender role choices and life decisions made by that individual.

### **Summary**

This review of the literature demonstrates the need for further research regarding student affairs professionals and work-life balance. While women in general are struggling to find balance with dual roles, there is a distinct void in the research regarding this particular population (Fochtman, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). In an effort to better understand both the challenges and the solutions that student affairs

professionals attempt to navigate, this study incorporates the theoretical framework presented by Giele (2008), described as “life course.”

Theories abound to explain the roles of conflict and enrichment, and how the interplay of these two constructs serves to impact work-life balance (Carlson et al., 2006; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; MacDermid & Harvey, 2006; McMillan et al., 2011). Further, the research is fairly robust regarding the many strategies that women employ to attain balance (Campbell, 2006; Goodchild, 2006; Majstorovic, 2006; Postans, 2006; Tregagle, 2006). Unfortunately, very little of this research focuses on the specific needs of the female student affairs professional. The primary objective of this qualitative research study, then, is to fill this research gap by analyzing the work-life balance experiences of the female student affairs professional.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, discusses the research design of the study, including the research questions, population sample and data selection process, instrumentation, criteria for excellence, data gathering, and data analysis.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Balancing the numerous responsibilities associated with work and family can be a daunting task for the mother working in higher education. While there has been significant research exploring the work-life balance of female faculty members, little research exists to address the specific challenges faced by female mothers employed in professional capacities throughout the various departments of student affairs (Fochtman, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). In order to better understand how this population responds to the challenges of work-life balance, this basic qualitative research study incorporates aspects of the life course theoretical framework employed by Giele (2008). Life course methodology examines four distinct factors that serve to directly impact a woman's belief system relating to gender role: identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation. The primary goal of this study is to explore the strategies, based on these factors, employed by mothers working in student affairs as they strive for work-life balance.

This section describes the qualitative methodology used in the study, beginning with a review of the research questions and a description of the research design. A description of the population sample and data selection process precedes a discussion on instrumentation, criteria for excellence, data gathering procedures, and data analysis processes. Finally, a description of the approval process from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), ensuring study participant safety, is provided.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. For mothers employed as student affairs professionals, how does their sense of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation shape their work-life balance decisions and practices?
2. What personal strategies are these working mothers using as they respond to the demands of the dual roles of professional and parent?

### **Research Design**

This study adheres to a basic qualitative research design. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a basic interpretive study constitutes the most commonly found type of qualitative research in several fields of practice, including education. Further, they suggest “qualitative researchers conducting a basic qualitative study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 24).

The overarching purpose of basic qualitative research is to better understand how individuals interpret and assign meaning to their life experiences. Although this description certainly fits all types of qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest the basic interpretive study does not have an additional “dimension” or focus, such as building a substantive theory in grounded theory or an in-depth analysis of a particular entity as in a case study. Rather, a basic qualitative study requires the researcher to analyze collected data in an effort to address the research questions posed.

The theoretical framework of this basic qualitative research study, *the life course perspective*, was selected as a guide to explore and analyze the ways in which individuals assign personal meaning to their life experiences. The theoretical model functions under three

common criteria: the use of interviewing as the mechanism for gathering data, the acknowledgement that talk and telling will reveal personal information that is socially and/or culturally relevant, and agreement that the primary focus will be on the construct of identity (Taylor, 2003). Subsequently, life course research can best be described as a series of narratives that serve to address the environmental, social, and cultural variables encountered by women, as well as the personal values, attitudes, and characteristics of the individual (Elder & Giele, 2009).

### **Selection of Data Sources**

For this study, I identified eight mid-level female student affairs professionals from three state universities in the upper Midwest. The institutions are all four-year universities, with campus rosters depicting a range of nine to fourteen individual student affairs departments. The selection of these institutions was primarily based on convenience; each university was within a 100-mile radius of my home institution. In addition, I was somewhat familiar with each campus and had contact persons from each whom I believed would greatly increase my ability to secure willing and appropriate participants.

Cognizant that my study adheres to a somewhat limiting set of criteria, coupled with the very busy schedules of the potential participants, I wanted a pool of at least 15 participants from which to choose. To accomplish this, I used a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is founded on the presumption that “one sees sampling as a series of strategic choices about with whom, where, and how one does one’s research...the way that researchers sample must be tied to their objectives” (Palys, 2008, p. 698).

For this study, I limited my research participants to female mid-level student affairs professionals. According to Mather, Bryan, and Faulkner (2009), mid-level staff members serve as assistant, associate, or full directors of administrative departments such as housing, student activities, diversity, disability services, judicial affairs, and first year/transfer student orientation programs. These mid-level administrators are expected to have a master's degree, but usually command limited formal authority. Further, they are expected to convey complex messages from upper administration to direct-service staff in a manner that is clear, concrete, and task-oriented (Young, 2007). In a study of organizational communication, Jensen (2000) found that professionals working as mid-level leaders in student affairs endured more complexity in problem-solving, decision-making, and cognitive overload as compared to any other staff level.

Each participant is also the mother of at least one child living in the home and under the age of 18. The age of their children is an extremely important factor; school-aged children or younger tend to command a much more demanding level of parental time and guidance than do adult children (Marshall, 2009). Restricting the study to women with younger children helps to better conceptualize the competing demands generated by both work and family. Consequently, each participant falls in the age group of 26 to 50 years of age.

Further, a woman's experiences in work-life balance may be significantly influenced by the presence of a partner in the home. In her extensive interviews of 291 co-parents, Kimball (1988) found that working mothers who juggled family and work commitments reported that shared parenting relieved stress and improved their overall sense of well-being. Numerous research studies have since supported the benefits of collaboration and shared

responsibility for improved work-life balance (Campbell, 2006; Dziech, 2007; Fu & Schaffer, 2001; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). In an effort to maintain consistency and for comparison purposes, this study examines the work-life balance of women sharing the home and child-rearing with a partner. No distinctions are made regarding race, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.

I initially contacted several student affairs administrators from each of the three institutions to request names of female staff meeting my study criteria. This resulted in the names of seven potential study candidates that I then contacted, via telephone, to briefly explain the study, confirm interest in participation, and to ensure the participant met the study criteria. According to Morgan (2008), small systematically selected samples are most appropriate for qualitative research for which the goals are “inductive theory building, subjective understanding, and detailed, holistic data” (p. 797). Following this initial telephone contact, several candidates were screened from the study: two candidates did not meet the criteria established for the study, one candidate had specific time constraints that precluded her from participation, and two candidates indicated a lack of interest in participation. Consequently, after the purpose and scope of the interview process was described to each potential participant, I was left with two student affairs professionals who were excited to discuss work-life balance issues.

Next, I incorporated snowball sampling to enlist additional study participants.

According to Noy (2008):

Snowball sampling is arguably the most widely employed method of sampling in qualitative research in various disciplines across the social sciences. It is sometimes

used as the main vehicle through which informants are accessed, or as an auxiliary mean, which assists researchers in enriching sampling clusters, and accessing new participants. (p. 230)

After reaching out to several colleagues with my request for names, coupled with a brief summary of the study criteria, I received fifteen names of potential candidates. I then emailed each of them with basic information regarding the study; six female student affairs participants meeting the stated criteria agreed to be interviewed either in-person and/or via the telephone, resulting in a total of eight participants.

### **Data Gathering**

In order to acquire a comprehensive narrative from each participant, I implemented a semi-structured, one-on-one interview format. I personally conducted all interviews, with each interview lasting one to two hours. Further, the interviews were all conducted in the participant's choice of location; each participant elected to interview in her personal office space. According to Elwood and Martin (2000), a more "personal" interview location provides "an important opportunity for researchers to make observations that generate richer and more detailed information than can be gleaned from the interview content alone" (p. 653). Consequently, I was able to gain additional insight by noting artifacts in the form of pictures, wall hangings, inspirational quotes and literature, and décor. I also gained important information regarding personal space: neatness, organization, and a general sense of priorities.

Before the initial interview session, each participant was once again informed of the purpose of the study and the interview format. In addition, the informed consent form was provided and thoroughly explained prior to signing (Appendix A). Further, I discussed



confidentiality and reminded each participant that they could withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. I also confirmed that each participant was willing to have the interview audio-recorded and transcribed. Finally, each participant was informed that their transcribed interview would be made available to them as a check for accuracy, thereby allowing the opportunity to make any changes deemed necessary in order to truly reflect their story. Ample time was then allowed for questions and informal discussion about the interview process.

### **Instrument**

As previously mentioned, each participant was instructed to complete an informed consent form prior to the first interview that detailed the research study and explained the options available to the participant regarding disclosure of information (Appendix A). Participants were also asked to complete a socio-demographic form (Appendix B) which included the following: mother's maiden name for coding, date of birth, place of birth, education level, student affairs department and title, marital status, date of marriage, spouse's date of birth, spouse's education and occupation, and children's gender and birth dates.

A semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C) was personally developed and implemented to gather data specific to the research questions directing this study. Further, I used the Giele (2008) theoretical framework to complement my personal protocol design; the four factors of identity, relational style, drive and motivation, and adaptive style *guide* my interview questions, although the actual interview protocol is of my own design and is unique and specific to this study. As a result, these four factors focus the direction of my interview protocol, answering my first research question by providing the rationale for life choice and

direction, as well as gender role adoption and practice. In addition, a fifth set of questions was developed to gather information regarding the proactive and coping strategies the participants employed for work-life balance (Appendix C). Consequently, the semi-structured interview format served to elicit participant narratives: their memories, personal perspectives, future goals, and the specific information they would like to impart to others (Tracy, 2013).

During each interview, I encouraged the participant to give extended answers and to reflect deeply on their response to each interview question. Due to the fluid and conversational nature of the open-ended question format, not all questions were necessary or appropriate. I adhered to the Rubin and Rubin (2011) model of *responsive interviewing* in which the researcher is responsible “for building a reciprocal relationship, honoring interviewees with unfailingly respectful behavior, reflecting on their own biases and openly acknowledging their potential effect, and owning the emotional effect of interviews” (p. 142). To better convey the intent of the interview protocol, Table 1 outlines each research question with the corresponding interview questions, as well as the guiding “factor” that each interview question most closely aligns.

Table 1

*Alignment of the Research and Interview Questions*

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. For mothers employed as student affairs professionals, how does their sense of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation shape their work-life balance decisions and practices?	<p><u><i>IDENTITY:</i></u>            Messages you got growing up about what you should “be” and “do” with your life?            Describe yourself today? Friend describes you?</p> <p><u><i>RELATIONAL STYLE:</i></u>            What does family look like. <i>Communication?</i>            Describe your role and that of partner.  <i>Divide responsibilities? If disagree?</i>            Who are your sources of support? <i>Family? Friends?</i>            How do you see self as an employee? <i>Colleague?</i>  <i>Communication? Conflict?</i></p> <p><u><i>DRIVE &amp; MOTIVATION:</i></u>            What do you see for future? <i>5 yrs.? 10yrs?</i>            What led to job in stud affairs? <i>Likes/dislikes?</i></p> <p><u><i>ADAPTIVE STYLE:</i></u>            Describe job responsibilities? <i>Schedule?</i>            Other personal priorities? <i>How do you set limits?</i>            How do you prioritize work and family life in order to manage all of your responsibilities?            What causes conflict for you in your dual roles?  <i>Challenges at work? Family?</i></p> <p><u><i>WORK-LIFE BALANCE STRATEGIES:</i></u>            How would you describe work-life balance?            Do you consider yourself to have work-life balance?  <i>Why or why not?</i>            Formal or informal practices at work that help?  <i>Supported by supervisor? Colleagues? Openly talk about needs as a working mom?</i>            Strategies to manage stress and for good self-care?  <i>Sufficient or lacking? New plans?</i></p>
2. What personal strategies are these working mothers using as they respond to the demands of the dual roles of professional and parent?	

## Data Analysis

This basic qualitative research study examines the work-life balance of mothers employed as student affairs professionals. From the interview process, themes emerged to further capture information regarding work-life balance from the perspective of the four life-course factors or dimensions developed by Giele (2008): identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation. Consequently, these four factors provide the overarching structure from which themes emerged, thereby serving to answer the research questions posed in the study. Ryan and Bernard (2003) describe these emerging themes as the “heart” of data analysis, stating:

By themes, we mean abstract, often fuzzy, constructs which investigators identify before, during, and after data collection. Where do these themes come from? They come from reviewing the literature, of course... They come from the characteristics of the phenomena being studied. And they come from already-agreed-upon professional definitions, from local common-sense constructs, and from researchers' values, theoretical orientation, and personal experience with the subject matter. (p. 87)

Further, Ryan and Bernhard (2003) suggest that the categorizing of themes under pre-determined constructs (in this case, factors), are helpful for collecting and coding data, but the researcher must remain vigilant and open to the emergence of themes outside of the theoretical perspective. The “key” is to not allow the conceptual framework to become a “mold” for the data; rather, the researcher must use “previous research to enhance, and not constrain, emerging findings” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 161). In other words, the researcher must use extreme caution to ensure that the analysis of data is characterized by

“theoretical sensitivity,” a concept best described as the necessary insight into existing research directly impacting the study, with a willingness to discover new emergent themes and meaningful corresponding interpretations (Glaser, 1978).

Finally, in order to analyze each interview, I also used a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Gibbs (2007), “Consistently reviewing your codes and their explanations and slightly modifying them or creating new ones along the way helps with avoiding ‘definitional drift’ as you code your data” (as cited in Tracy, 2013, p. 190). While using this method, I implemented a two-phase coding system to identify themes emerging from the following general guidelines designed by Giele (2008):

*Identity:* How does “P” (participant) see herself? What qualities does she mention that distinguish her—intelligent, introverted, likable, innovative, a good mother, wife, etc.?

*Relational style:* What is “P’s” typical way of relating to others? Is she a leader, follower, negotiator, equal colleague? Is she independent or reliant on others for company and support? Does she have friends or is she lonely? How does she describe her relationship with her husband/significant other and her children?

*Adaptive style:* What is “P’s” energy level? Is she an innovator and a risk taker or conventional and uncomfortable with change and new experience? Is she self-confident or cautious? Does she prefer a slow or fast pace, to routine and having plenty of time, or to doing several things at once?

*Drive and motivation:* Is “P” ambitious and driven or relaxed and easy going? Is she focused more on helping her husband and children than on her own needs (nurturance vs. personal achievement)? Does she mention enjoying life and wanting to have time for other things besides work? Does she want to be in control of her own schedule, to be in charge rather than to take orders?

*Work/life balance:* Does “P” feel satisfied with her current work/life balance? Does she identify pros and cons of having a dual role? Does she identify areas for improvement in work/life balance? What are her current strategies for work/life balance?

According to Charmaz (2006), “Coding means categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (p. 43). In the first phase, I used “initial coding” based on responses to the questions above that helped to categorize each of the interview segments (Charmaz, 2006). In order to reduce the number of codes, as well as establish relationship between codes, I followed the initial coding process with a second phase of axial coding. Axial coding involves the process of “putting back together the open codes [initial phase of coding] into categories (larger concepts) that relate to one another” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 165). According to Tracy (2013), axial coding includes “systematically grouping together various codes under a hierarchical ‘umbrella’ category that makes conceptual sense” (p. 195). Through this coding process, I was able to create a composite profile of each participant, looking specifically to those personal characteristics, attitudes, and experiences that either impede or support work-life balance.

### **Criteria for Excellence in Qualitative Research**

While there is ongoing debate in the literature regarding the best and most appropriate way in which to evaluate qualitative research, Morrow (2005) suggests that qualitative and quantitative methodology serve divergent purposes, thereby requiring different criteria for evaluating research quality. Further, criteria used to evaluate and judge quantitative research, specifically reliability and validity, is often mistakenly imposed upon qualitative research (Tracy, 2013). Rather, “trustworthiness” is the construct most often associated with high quality narrative inquiry; trustworthiness can be described as “competent practice and ethical considerations for the participants with the underlying demand that the relational matters” (Rossman & Rallis, 2010, p. 383). Consequently, trustworthiness can be ensured through “inquiry competence” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and “relational competence” (Jones et al., 2014).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), inquiry competence is demonstrated through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability throughout the research process. In an effort to ensure inquiry competence, I incorporated member-checking by asking participants to review and modify their transcribed interviews, thereby confirming accuracy in content and meaning. I also achieved thick description of the data through the semi-structured and open-ended interview process. Further, I believe the data resulting from the interview protocol was described in sufficient detail to establish patterns and themes, as well as to determine whether or not study results were transferable to other populations.

Relational competence can be described as those attributes the researcher brings to the interview process, such as social identity, researcher positionality, power relationships, and researcher pre-understanding. In an effort to ensure relational competency, I reflected on the following questions proposed by Jones et al. (2014):

1. Why is it that I am engaged in the present study?
2. What is it about me and my experiences that lead me to this study?
3. What personal biases and assumptions do I bring with me to this study?
4. What is my relationship to those in this study? (p. 38)

For this study, I do not believe that my responses to the above questions negatively impact or adversely affect the quality of my research. I have no preconceived assumptions or ulterior motives regarding the research process or outcomes. Although I am extremely interested in the topic of work-life balance, it is through an inquisitive lens only that I approached this research study. Further, I made every effort to be both professional and consistent, while at the same time demonstrating unconditional positive regard with each of my study participants.

### **IRB Process**

The St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) protects the rights and welfare of the human subjects interviewed for this study. Because this study focuses on potentially sensitive information provided by human subjects, a full board review was conducted and protocol approval was granted.

In addition, I contacted each individual university in which a participant was employed to inquire about the need for IRB approval from that institution or whether IRB



approval through St. Cloud State University would suffice. After a brief review of my study, each university indicated that IRB approval was not necessary for any study that did not involve students. I have included all IRB forms as an appendix at the end of my dissertation (Appendix D).

### **Summary**

The primary purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative research study is to explore the issue of work-life balance in the lives of mothers employed as student affairs professionals. Consequently, a semi-structured and open-ended interview protocol interview was used to elicit data necessary to answer the research questions foundational to this study. The four factors of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation served as a lens from which data was gathered, organized, and interpreted. Further, a fifth set of questions was added to ascertain the type of strategies participants employ for work-life balance. This chapter also discusses pertinent research methodology topics including population sample and data selection process, instrumentation, data gathering procedures, data analysis processes, and criteria for excellence. The next chapter, Chapter 4, discusses the research results of the study in detail.

## Chapter 4: Results

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

~Maya Angelou (1969)

This chapter begins with a participant overview to highlight some of the personal and professional commitments these women navigate in order to find balance in their dual roles as professional and parent. Following this overview, I explore the work-life balance of the participants in relation to the themes emerging from the four life course factors identified by Giele (2008): identity, relational style, drive and motivation, and adaptive style. Finally, I focus on the themes that emerge to describe the personal strategies used by these working mothers for work-life balance.

### Participant Overview

The designated demographic for this qualitative study are mothers employed as student affairs professionals. Each of the eight participants is either married or in a committed, live-in relationship and is a parent of at least one biological child under the age of 18. The average age for the participants is 32, with a range from 27 to 38 years of age. Because race and cultural ethnicity are not included as criteria for the study, this data is not reported in the descriptive analysis. Further, although the study criteria did not exclude same sex partners, all women identify as heterosexual. Table 2 highlights relevant family-related participant demographics.

Table 2

*Participant Family Related Demographics*

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Married	6	75	1	2	25
Divorced/Remarried	1	12.5	2	4	50
Living Together	1	12.5	3	2	25

All participants self-identify as a student affairs professional working in a mid-level role requiring a master's degree. Further, all eight women are employed in one of three, four-year state universities. The departments in which these women work are as follows: Career Center, Records/Registration, Academic Support Services, Financial Aid, First Year Programs, and the Student Union. Table 3 provides an overview of each participant's functional area and job title, organized alphabetically by their pseudonym.

Table 3

*Participant Overview*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Functional Area</b>	<b>Job Title</b>
Carol	Career Center	Career Counselor
Hannah	Registrar's Office	Director
Jane	Academic Support	Coordinator
Jen	Financial Aid	Assistant Director
Julie	First Year Programs	Director
Mary	Academic Support	Coordinator
Nancy	Student Union	Director
Susan	Academic Support	Coordinator

The women in this study are also active participants in their own professional growth and development. All of the participants are affiliated with at least one professional organization and attend at least one professional conference per year. Further, two of the women also serve in leadership roles in one or more professional organizations. In addition to

their regular duties, five participants also voluntarily teach a one-credit freshman orientation class in an effort to expand their skill set, as well as to impact student growth and retention.

### **The Four Factors**

In this section, I discuss findings related to my first research question, “For mothers employed as student affairs professionals, how does their sense of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation shape their work-life balance decisions and practices?”

This question is founded on the belief that the most powerful influence on a woman's career trajectory and family life are directly derived from her past experiences. According to Giele (2008), the four factors of identity, relational style, drive and motivation, and adaptive style serve as an antecedent to an individual's gender role choices and decisions. Further, these four areas are not independent entities; rather, they weave together, overlap, and meld together to form a composite of the individual's life experiences. Subsequently, the interview protocol incorporates these four factors, with themes emerging from each to describe life experiences common to, and shared by, the participants.

**Identity.** Major themes emerged as women described their unique sense of self and how their personal identity has impacted their life trajectory. These themes are empowerment, motherhood shift, and gains.

**Empowerment.** Each woman interviewed for this study readily identifies values, experiences, and inherent personality traits that combine together to create the person she is today. Much of the credit for their growth and development is given to family members, most specifically parents and grandparents. For example, Susan recalls:

Growing up, I was taught the message that I could do whatever I wanted to do. I was encouraged to follow my dreams as an artist, critical thinker, explorer, etc. I went through times of wanting to be a lawyer, brain surgeon, artist, baker and store owner and according to family and school, I was given the message to do what made me happy. Seven of the eight women share similar messages in which they were encouraged to follow their dreams and do what made them happy. The caveat, according to these women, was that they were expected to get a college education. As Hannah states, “It was never even a question of whether you were going to college or not. It was that you were going, so you better decide what you wanted to pursue.” Susan sums it up well, “It didn't really matter what I decided to do as long as I went to college to do it.”

Mary is the only participant sharing a very different story, indicating that her “very working class and conventional mother” showed little interest in higher education or a career track, “I’m a first-generation college student, so college was never really *encouraged*, though it also wasn’t discouraged.” Rather, Mary recalls that her mom was far more interested in her boyfriends and marriage, “Every boyfriend I had seemed to be a marriage prospect in her view. While I knew I wanted to get married and have a family someday, I pushed back from my mom knowing that I wanted to keep that private from her and make my own decisions.” Mary attributes the influence and encouragement of teachers, coaches, and friends as the reason she attended college and pursued her professional career.

***The motherhood shift.*** Possibly the most prominent theme emerging from the data is the shift in the primary role identified by each participant once her first child was born. To

illustrate the intensity of the experience of motherhood and the enormous “shift” in role identity away from working professional to that of mother, Jane states, “Having children changed my life completely. My priorities are totally different, like where we put our money and time. It’s them before you. Work is definitely not as much of a priority.” Carol concurs, stating that her life before kids was “carefree and easy—if I wanted to work late, I just did it. There was no worry about getting the kids to their activities or making sure dinner was ready.” Further, she states, “I was always willing to take on something new, especially if extra pay or big kudos were involved. My motivation was based on money and moving up to a higher level position.” Carol also readily admits that her life has dramatically changed since starting a family, “I really feel ‘mommy-guilt’ now when I am not able to spend time with my kids doing quality stuff. Too often we’re just getting the basic routine stuff done. So I have vowed, along with my husband, that quality family time comes first!”

Hannah further attests to the dramatic change in personal identity she experienced following the birth of her first daughter:

Before kids, I was a driven person, and my entire life was work. I was going to work my way up because I felt it was the most important thing...[Now] my kids are just everything. I didn’t know that you could love someone so much. They made work less important to me. I’m not going to work sixty hours a week; I just won’t do it. I won’t miss a soccer game or a concert. I don’t care if they’re just reading a poem at nine in the morning. I am there for it.

Each of the eight women in this study share similar views as to the remarkable and unexpected change in her personal priorities, as well as to the subsequent paradigm shift in her thinking regarding what is truly important in life.

*Secondary gains.* Another common theme emerging from sense of identity is the surprise and awe that the women share regarding the *additional* personal changes resulting from motherhood. Carol describes these changes as “really awe-inspiring. When you put other people first, it feels good and it kind of becomes a habit. I’m a much better, much kinder, person now.” Hannah also agrees that becoming a parent has affected her in numerous and surprising ways. Her perception of self prior to kids was that she was rather “cold, remote, and heartless.” Much to her amazement, she now acknowledges:

I cry way more than I ever did before I had kids. I feel like I have the Grinch’s heart—that it grew three sizes once I had them. I don’t know why I cry more now that I have kids... Things touch me more, like the stupid Folgers’s commercial when the guy comes and surprises his mom. Things that I would have never gotten teary-eyed at before make me cry now. I appreciate things so much more now. Further, Jen discusses the pride she feels because she is doing a “good job” at work and at home, Mary revels in her newfound “self-confidence” and her ability to balance numerous tasks “without losing my mind,” and Susan enjoys the freedom she has gained from motherhood by learning to “let things go.”

*Summary of identity.* These women initially thought their profession would serve as the basis to their identity. Independent of initially wanting children or not, each woman believed that her world would revolve around her career, with family serving to round out and

enrich her life. It was not until after the birth of her first child that each woman realized the enormity of motherhood, embracing this surprising revelation with awe and total devotion. Consequently, the identity of each woman emerging from her earlier life experiences, as well as from the empowering messages she received from people impacting her growth and development, dramatically (and unexpectedly) changed following motherhood.

**Interdependence is key with relationships.** The women in this study are driven by a tremendous love for their children, as well as the belief that they can successfully navigate the roles of wife, mother, and working professional. They exhibit a relational style based on mutual respect and open, honest communication. These women also value and depend on those persons most significant to them in both the personal and professional domains of their lives; they routinely expect help, as well as much needed support and encouragement, from those people instrumental to their lives.

Four distinct groups of people emerged to describe the importance of relationships, as well as those challenges associated with maintaining healthy, supportive relationships with others. These groups are husband/significant other, extended family and friends, professional relationships, and mentors. Following is a more specific description of the relationship these women have established with those persons who have tremendous impact on their lives.

***Husbands/significant other.*** While each woman describes her significant other in positive terms, each also openly shares the struggles that arise when sharing responsibilities of home and family. In addition, each woman speaks candidly of the instances in which “imbalance” occurs because of both expected and unexpected job responsibilities, as well as certain unavoidable real-life situations. However, all the participants share the expectation



that marriage (or cohabitation) should be both fair and equitable. According to Harris (2009), certain criteria must be in place in order for a couple to experience true marital equality:

First, the labor needs to be fairly divided. Egalitarian partners must share financial responsibility for financially supporting their family and for managing the housework and childcare. Second, power needs to be shared evenly. Each person must have an equal voice in major decisions. Third, egalitarian partners communicate in a nonhierarchical fashion. Each must reciprocate concern for the other's thoughts and avoid disproportionately interrupting the other... (p. 215)

To exemplify this, Susan discusses the "good place" she and her partner have worked hard to achieve. They both actively care for their young daughter, although Susan tends to do the routine tasks (bathing, feeding, etc.), while her partner loves to cuddle and play with their daughter. As for household chores, Susan lays claim to the inside of the house and her partner tends to do the outdoor tasks and maintenance, the "things we naturally enjoy more and so do the most." She goes on to state, duties "will fluctuate depending on work duties and events. We are both very flexible if changes need to be made in terms of accommodating life events." Jen describes a similar working relationship with her husband, "We both purchase any needed groceries, do laundry, and some cleaning. I don't think it fluctuates too much, we both usually know what needs to be done, so we just do it!" Jane summarizes her relationship, as well as the thoughts expressed by the other participants, when she states:

My husband and my responsibilities in the home are very balanced. I had expectations that whomever I married, it was going to be a partnership...we kind of

go back and forth getting them [our kids] ready. *It's both of us...* There are times where he'll have to get a lot of work done so I'll pick up the pace, but it's still always give and take. We have mutual respect for each other, and we don't want to see each other all stressed.

***Extended family and friends.*** Family members and friends are cherished by each of the women interviewed for this study. These two factions serve as the primary support group upon which each woman depends. Hannah affirms this significant bond with family when she states, "We all care about each other and like to spend time with each other, see each other, and love each other. It's not just my mom, dad, and sister—it's also my aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins..."

When asked specifically about personal sources of support that help to manage work and family responsibilities, Susan succinctly responds, "I have close family and friends." Jane discusses at length her reliance on her mom—even though she lives 200 miles away. Carol readily talks about her newly retired parents and their frequent visits, admitting this is when she and her husband are able to have "date night." Julie speaks fondly of the support she receives from her large family circle:

We have a great support network in our parents. I have two sets with my dad and his partner who live in Fargo who are always willing to help out when they are needed. My mom and her partner, and my husband's parents, both live only 45 minutes away and are equally as willing to help out when needed. This includes taking [our daughter] when we need a break or picking her up from daycare when we are both unable to do so. My mom and mother-in-law share care-taking duties during [a peak

work week] since my husband is equally as busy with [his job]. Our parents take our daughter for that week to allow us to focus on work and still know that she is being loved and cared for by our family.

While all of the women expressed great appreciation for supportive family and close friends, Nancy wishes that she could enjoy this support on a more regular basis. She laments:

My parents have recently retired and while they live about a two hour drive away, they have certainly been there for us when we've needed help when school or daycare is out or the kids have had extended illnesses. I wish we had family or close friends who lived closer so that we could take advantage of that support for little things or just to have extra love and support for the kids on a more day-to-day basis.

Nancy's desire for her support system to be more readily available underscores the significance that each woman ascribes to the family and friends that support her efforts to successfully navigate work-life balance.

***Professional relationships.*** Professional relationships with colleagues are valued and discussed at length by all participants in the study. These relationships vary greatly, encompassing colleagues who work both in and outside of the participant's department, women who are considered to be a professional "mentor," and those women for whom the participant serves as mentor.

The women all express a deep appreciation for a work environment characterized by helpful and supportive colleagues. For example, Jane states, "The people who are here now, male and female, all want to be doing this work for the students. It's pretty balanced when

taking on projects and helping each other out.” Further, all participants were readily able to identify colleagues who supported them in their quest for work-life balance. Carol states, “My co-workers are awesome. They understand when I call in because one of the kids is sick. They “get it” because they are moms or dads too.” She expounds on this, saying that her colleagues would help with her duties if she had to leave for family demands and she would in turn reciprocate.

Apparently, much of this expressed appreciation stems from prior experiences working with colleagues in less supportive environments. Several of the women discuss instances in which they felt demeaned or undervalued in the workplace due to competing family demands. For example, Hannah reflects on a former position she held in Student Affairs:

I’m also going to say that where I was, there were women who were jealous and didn’t like to see other women succeed. I think there’s way too much of that in the world. We are our own worst enemies sometimes. We have some of those types on this campus too. They don’t like to see you succeed, so they label you and try and keep you down. They don’t understand that if we just supported each other, life would be a lot better.

Jen and Julie also discuss issues with non-supportive colleagues who do not understand or care that they have a life outside of the workplace. Jen works with a single woman who does not understand when she has to miss work because of a sick child or a family commitment, stating, “she’s a nice lady, but she just thinks all things family should be done outside of the workday. So I guess I should just tell my kids they can only get sick

after hours! (*laughing*) She still wouldn't get it." Julie becomes annoyed with a colleague who "watches her clock" and makes comments behind her back about coming in late and leaving early—despite the fact that Julie works extra hours several evenings per week.

**Mentors.** Several of the women discuss the mentors who served to guide them both personally and professionally. Carol fondly recalls the influence of several mentors at different educational and professional stages in her life. She states, "I continued to have incredible mentors and gained a positive exposure to the many different fields within student affairs." Hannah recalls her supervisor/mentor at the onset of her student affairs career, "I would tear into her [boss/mentor] office all mad about something, and she'd be like, 'Okay, let's talk about it this way.' Now I find myself doing that. [I learned] everything is not a catastrophe!" Nancy also discusses the positive impact mentors had on her during graduate school regarding work-life balance:

I had some really good role models for work-life balance in graduate school and this was an issue that was very intentionally addressed in my graduate assistantship. We were warned that student affairs can be a high burnout field if professionals don't learn early on to establish limits and manage their health and stress levels. I'm glad that I was given that direction seeing many professionals over the years that fell into that.

Unfortunately, not all of the women interviewed had the opportunity to have someone actively serve as a mentor. While Jane believes she had some positive experiences with supervisors who tried to assist her through work-related problems, she realizes she would have benefitted from a designated mentor. She states:

Maybe having someone to actively mentor me would have helped with the stress and frustrations. I feel as though I had a lack of mentors, but I definitely had people there. My Dean was very helpful when we were within a period of transition, and she helped me grow the program and was full of support and encouragement...

When I was in my first position at the university, my particular supervisor at the time could have done more to help me when I was new. I needed the support from my supervisor to find those people who could be mentors to me.

The experiences these women share regarding the benefits of having a mentor versus no active mentor underscore the importance of this practice to promote personal growth, provide support, and establish a solid foundation for the effective practice of student affairs.

*Summary of interdependence in relationships.* The women in this study value, as well as demonstrate, a relational style that is based on respect, acceptance of others, and honest communication. They routinely expect help from their partners in raising the children and assisting with home maintenance. They also express tremendous appreciation for family members, friends, colleagues, and mentors who provide them with much needed support and encouragement. Finally, these women are driven by a tremendous love for their children, as well as the belief that they can successfully navigate the roles of wife, mother, and working professional.

**Drive and motivation.** Two distinct themes emerged to describe participant life goals, as well as the subsequent changes in attitude and achievement pertaining to these goals. These themes are changed life trajectory and enhanced life.

*Changed life trajectory.* The primary finding that emerged in this section is the tremendous impact that having a child has on life goals and career trajectory. Whether or not she initially wanted children, each woman expresses overwhelming gratitude and profound appreciation for the opportunity and experience of motherhood. While they readily described their ambitious professional aspirations, the women are equally amazed at their altered set of priorities once they became mothers.

Initially, each of the women exhibited a tremendous amount of ambition to succeed, especially in her pre-motherhood stages of life. Further, several of the participants seem to view their identity as somewhat dichotomous: before and after children. They readily admit that work, promotion, and ambition served as their primary goals prior to motherhood. To exemplify this, Hannah shares:

When I get to a new job, I'm going up the ladder, and I'm figuring out how to do that job. Usually what I do is take on extra responsibilities, volunteer to head things up, and remain visible on top of my everyday things. I just go up from there...I have good insight that way. I'm savvy when it comes to moving up, and I've never made that a secret.

Carol, expressing much of the same sentiment, candidly admits, "I had started a doctoral program and was so excited! I wasn't exactly sure where this would lead, but I knew it was my ticket to move up. Then I found out I was pregnant and I dropped out." Further, Nancy discusses her rapid progression through the student affairs hierarchy and her "single-minded" determination to quickly achieve "bigger and better." Acknowledging that she still has ambitions, she states, "I'm always on the lookout for opportunities to advance

my career or pursue new learning through different positions, but those opportunities will need to fit within the boundaries of our family life.”

Reflecting on her career trajectory, Jane shares her recent decision to take a voluntary “demotion,” as well as the resulting negative impact on her chance for advancement and promotion. In addition, her position change conflicts with her original intent to earn her doctorate. She states:

I didn’t ever think I’d take a step back, and I was very surprised with myself when that happened. I feel like in higher education, that’s unheard of. Why wouldn’t one want to move forward into a higher position? When I was younger and just starting out, I saw myself in a PhD program once I got to this point in my life.

Surprising to most of the women, a paradigm shift in thinking seems to appear almost simultaneously with the birth of the first child. The primary focus now becomes motherhood and how best to meet the needs of their children, with career aspirations viewed as secondary to family. Long-range plans to advance through the student affairs hierarchy are placed on hold for an undetermined length of time. Future goals become hazy, the women opting instead to focus on the here-and-now and on coping with life’s daily challenges. Directly addressing this significant paradigm shift, Susan states:

At this point in my personal life, I do not see myself pursuing additional education. Life is too busy right now with a baby. I have always thought I would work on my doctorate, but I am not even sure if that is something that I want to do anymore now that I have a child full time. If I were to start school again, I would have to give something up and that something would most likely be my personal time, and I am



someone who needs personal time. I feel like my current position is really flexible in terms of scheduling around family duties as well. Because of this flexibility, I don't see myself pursuing any type of new position either, be it a promotion or advancement. I'm not totally saying I will not pursue any sort of change in career or education, but at this time I am going to be very picky in terms of what the position will offer in terms of the work/life balance. I know that people say time will get tighter the older a kid gets, but I don't want to miss a moment of seeing my daughter grow up.

Hannah and Jane both concur, each stating that she likes her current job, her colleagues, and the flexibility offered in her current position. Further, Hannah believes that her workload would greatly increase if she sought advancement in her career, stating, "I don't want to put in more work time and less family time." Jane sums it up succinctly when she states, "I'm not willing to give up this gig quite yet, so I don't foresee leaving."

Even though the women express different views regarding their initial desire to have children, as well as their misgivings about navigating dual roles, they collectively agree that that the radical change in priorities and future goals after they became mothers was unexpected—even shocking. Jane astutely sums up this sentiment expressed by all of the women, stating, "Right now, I'll just be maintaining where I am. My kids are my first priority. They grow up too fast."

*Enhanced life.* Whether it is because they had a working mother and/or because the idea of a career following a college education was so thoroughly engrained at a young age, none of the women interviewed describes a desire to be a full-time mom or even questions

the assumption that it is possible both to have a career and be a good mother. To exemplify this, Jane discusses the ways in which dual roles have enhanced her life, stating, “Work has benefitted from me having a family. Organization has definitely gotten better for me, and I’m able to multi-task!” She further shares:

They [my three kids] know that ‘college is mom’s job.’ The college is like another home for us...my kids see that what I do is important, so when I am away from them, they remember that what I am doing is worthwhile. They benefit from getting to be around college kids, some of which are international students. I’m glad they get to experience people different from them.

Julie speaks to the personal growth she has experienced from navigating the dual roles of employee and mother, stating, “I am passionate about my work and therefore value it in my life. It’s a part of me. Life outside of work is equally as valuable and completes another part of me.” Also alluding to personal growth, Carol speaks of the many qualities that she already possessed, but were enhanced through her dual roles of employee and mother: organization, empathy, and patience. Further, Hannah shares her newfound ability to feel empathy and to better understand the perspective of others (colleagues, students) in the workplace. “I don’t have a lot of empathy now, imagine me before kids! I have mellowed out. I’m a little more sympathetic, and I have a bit more empathy. It’s still not a lot, but it’s there.”

***Summary of drive and motivation.*** These women were initially driven by an enormous ambition to achieve, with aspirations for high-level positions. After becoming mothers, many of these aspirations were either dismissed or delayed; each of the eight

women now adamantly state they will not sacrifice family and the responsibilities of motherhood for upward mobility in her job or in educational attainment—at least while their children are young.

**Adaptive style.** Two themes emerged to better describe how these women adapt to their very busy, often chaotic lifestyles. These themes are innovation and flexibility and the art of satisficing.

**Innovative and flexible.** Even though the women in this study demonstrate the ability to adapt to their dual roles of employee and mother, Jane reports a much more conservative and traditional approach regarding the ways she chooses to navigate her personal and professional life. She has a clear sense of what she values and what she is therefore willing to compromise. Jane tends to fit her work life around her family, with the needs of her children always coming first. Rather than adopt an attitude of “I can do it all,” Jane has evaluated her situation and made modifications she can live with:

In my [director] position, it was more difficult to stay home with a sick kiddo or take time off. I can't imagine how I would deal now if I had been in my other role. It's really hard to have that busy, busy job and maintain that quality time with your kids. Between [my husband] and I, one of us had to sort of give. His business had to be successful, so it was me. It was a good decision for us because I have more flexibility—both physical and emotional. There are busy times where I have a full calendar, but it's easier to maneuver compared to how it was in the other position.

Nancy also discusses how she applies creativity and flexibility to her job. Her position in the Student Union is extremely busy and often involves night and weekend commitments. To manage this, Nancy states:

I work hard during the day. I'm efficient with time management. I'm a natural task-master. I'm good at prioritizing. Traditional office hours at the university are 8:00am-4:30pm and I try to stick pretty closely to that. I'm usually in the office on time in the morning and typically stay another 15-20 minutes at the end of the day to wrap up, leaving in time to pick up my children from school and daycare. I typically work 3-4 hours for an evening event about once a week. I usually find I can take a few hours off during the workweek to compensate. At first, I was nervous about the evening time commitments of my current position, but I've found that this flexibility has actually been helpful.

Nancy goes on to describe the many ways she effectively uses her "comp" time by catching up on personal tasks, housework tasks, or errands while her children are in daycare and school.

***The art of satisficing.*** Prior to having children, each of the women shares that she was far more willing to work long days, put in 50 plus hour weeks, and sacrifice personal time for the job. They also agree that motherhood and family responsibility has seriously altered these former practices. For example, Carol leaves promptly at 4:30 each day, Mary and Susan leave early or arrive late to compensate for the occasional late night or if their weekly schedule surpasses 40 hours, and Nancy and Jen often work from home at times during the school year when students are not on campus. In addition, all of the women

occasionally use “flex” time to compensate for family duties and appointments. Julie aptly summarizes the concept of *satisficing*, a term coined by Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2012) to describe the coping mechanism in which women accept their inability to “do it all,” stating:

I want to be able see my daughter during the week more than just putting her to bed at night. I want to be able to pick her up from daycare and be present with her when I am home. This has forced me to be extremely efficient with my time at work. I know that I have a set amount of hours that I can devote to work and therefore do not have a lot of time for things that don't contribute to completing my work in the manner that I'd like to have it done. This has meant attending fewer meetings that are not necessarily vital to completing my work. Or cutting out having lunch with others, or even sitting down and actually eating lunch for that matter because I use every single moment. I use to finish work at home and that has completely gone out the window.

While Hannah also prioritizes her children, she appears to have more difficulty backing away from professional “opportunities” and challenges as compared to the other women in this study. She exhibits an extremely high energy level and tends to “multi-task,” working hard to get “the biggest bang for her buck” when it comes to filling her time. Although she has consciously made the decision to remain in her current professional position, she also admits she would never consider taking a lesser position. Moreover, her current position is highly visible, extremely important to campus functioning, and laden with responsibility. The concept of *satisficing* does not appear to be functioning in her personal or professional life. Hannah has high expectations for self, stating:

I know I get involved in too much sometimes, but I can't seem to stop myself... I'm very involved in our professional organizations. I'm currently president elect of our regional organization, and I'm proud of that. Our organization covers four states and a part of Canada. I was site selection chair for three years, I was membership chair for a while, and now I'm president elect. I'm also president of [another state-wide organization] right now. Of course I didn't leave it there. I'm taking on a new position as a state officer in 2017, and that even involves some release time. I'll be traveling around a lot...

*Summary of adaptive style.* The women in this study welcome new experiences and adapt by being innovative and flexible in finding new ways to navigate both work and family life. For example, Jane has adopted a more traditional approach in which she has voluntarily assumed a lower paying position with fewer responsibilities to allow for more flexible time to meet family needs. Six of the eight women have modified their work schedules in ways that better accommodate family responsibilities. Only one of the women, Hannah, continues to struggle with the concept of satisficing and balance. She has a high energy level and even higher ambitions. As a result, she often has difficulty establishing limits in her professional life and easily becomes overly committed in her work.

### **Strategies for Work-Life Balance**

In this section, I discuss findings related to my second research question, "What personal strategies are these working mothers using as they respond to the demands of the dual roles of professional and parent?" Seven themes, with subsequent sub-themes, emerge to explain the general groupings of strategies these women employ in the quest for balance.

It is important to note that, despite the common themes that emerge, each woman has her own “recipe” of balance strategies that works best for her unique circumstances. Further, while several women believe they have achieved a relatively good balance in their lives and are quite satisfied, this is not true for all; three of the eight women (38%) readily admit that they are stressed far too often and that their level of satisfactory work-life balance is transitory at best.

Despite their varying levels of personal satisfaction, all eight of the women were excited to share the ways in which they strive to achieve balance in their lives or (as several of them so aptly describe it) to “maintain sanity.” All of the women (100%) describe a fair and equitable division of household duties and childcare to be a high priority strategy. However, the ways in which this division occurs varies greatly between the individual participants. Active engagement in personal wellness also ranks as a high personal priority for all but one of the participants (88%). In addition, spending time with extended family ranks as extremely important for seven of the eight women interviewed (88%). Participation in church, church related activities, and time for personal devotion/meditation is a designated priority for six out of the eight women (75%); friendships are also prioritized by six of the women (75%). Five women discuss the need for downtime in the form of reading, television, social media, and computer games (62.5%). Finally, four women speak of community involvement, volunteerism, and the desire to “give back” (50%). Table 4 provides an overview of the personal strategies most commonly mentioned in the interviews.

Table 4

*Personal Strategies for Work-Life Balance*

Expressed Personal Strategy	n	%
Household Division of Labor	8	100
Personal Wellness: Nutrition, Exercise, Sleep	7	87.5
Family	6	75
Friendships	6	75
Faith/Church	6	75
Solitary Pursuits	5	62.5
Community Involvement/Volunteerism	4	50

**Household responsibilities and childcare.** The women in this study describe basic household responsibilities as follows: cooking, cleaning, laundry, financial management, pet care, and outdoor maintenance. Childcare, on the other hand, includes transportation to and from school and other activities, reading and study help, basic supervision and behavior management, tending to a sick child, and the somewhat ambiguous concept of “quality time.” Five of the eight women consider themselves to be the primary person in charge of the household (62.5%) and seven out of the eight women (87.5%) describe themselves as the primary caregiver for their children.

Conversely, almost all of the women (87.5%) believe that the household and childcare responsibilities are shared equitably with their partner. Hannah is the one exception, stating that she is not quite as satisfied; she describes her spouse as “great” with the kids, but wishes he would put “more effort” into household tasks. This dissonance between actual ownership of household and childcare tasks and the perception that this division is fair and equitable with one’s partner is perplexing; the answer appears to hinge on the expectations each woman has for her partner based on her inherent and internalized belief



system about domestic roles. For these women, satisfaction with a partner's involvement may be deemed "equitable," even though the actual division of tasks is far from equally distributed.

*The great divide.* Seven of the eight women describe their roles in the home and with the children as equitable, fair, and balanced with their partner. As Julie explains:

We are very good about splitting up the family duties. There are times when I am unable to fulfill many of the duties and there are times when he is unable to fulfill those duties. We try to even out the load as best as we can. He cooks, I clean, we alternate getting up with [our daughter] at night, we alternate who takes of days when she's sick. Typically I'll take her to appointments since my job is more flexible. [My husband] is a teacher and it's generally harder for him to leave during the day.

Mary describes a very similar situation in which she and her husband divide responsibilities "pretty evenly" by engaging together in activities such as cooking, cleaning, and shopping for groceries. Further, they "take turns" as primary caregiver based on certain job responsibilities and evening commitments they have on specific days of the week.

Seven of the eight women (87.5%) also admit they regularly assume more household and parenting duties than their partner. However, these women adamantly state that this is *their choice*, especially with children not yet in school. For example, Susan states, "I am the primary interior cleaner of the house (bathrooms, dusting, laundry and dishes). My time is also usually spent with the baby, taking care of her bathing, feeding, and playtime." At the same time, she quickly points out that this is her preference and that her partner does all outdoor maintenance and is a very active, caring father. Both Carol and Jane concur,

attributing their maternal instinct to their desire to be primary caregiver and nurturer while their children are still young and dependent upon them.

***Flexibility is key.*** Each of the eight women discuss how both her and her partner's work schedule and other obligations can significantly impact the distribution of household and caregiving responsibilities. They unanimously agree that flexibility is paramount for successful family functioning. For example, several of the women contend with partner schedules that radically change due to the season: Julie's husband is a head coach for a fall sport and is away from home most evenings from August through November and Jane's husband owns a business that is extremely busy in the spring. Jane aptly sums up the importance of flexibility, stating:

When you have kids that are ill, someone has to stay home. Between my husband and me, it has to be me. [My husband] can't really leave because there's no one to replace him. Because he owns his own company, it's his own show. When there are days that he has a more flexible schedule, he can stay home, but that doesn't always work out. I can remember the kids being ill in the winter, and he would have meetings out of town and things. If my kids had waited two more days, their dad would have been back so I could work!

**Personal wellness.** Personal wellness is deemed a top priority for almost all of the participants. Further, the top three aspects of wellness that each participant discusses are diet, exercise, and sleep. While all women agree about the importance of wellness and personal self-care, the practices of each woman is unique to her specific situation, her personal value system, and the support of her partner.

*Diet and exercise.* Even though all participants discuss the need for good nutrition and regular exercise, only four of the women (50%) actually engage in healthy eating habits and currently follow a regular exercise schedule. As one of the four women demonstrating a high commitment to her health, Nancy identifies exercise as her “biggest strategy for managing self-care.” She states:

I go to our campus Wellness Center 3-4 times a week over lunch to walk or strength train. It is something easily measured so when I work over my lunch and don't make it there I know I'm off balance or too busy. Sometimes I know that's temporary and I just need to push through a couple of busy weeks. Other times it hasn't seemed so temporary so I made some adjustments to my workload and tried to get back on routine. My husband and I both run so I'm up three mornings a week to exercise in the morning and I love sneaking off one or two hours a week to Zumba at a local fitness studio.

A self-described “running nut,” Carol works out a minimum of five times per week. In addition to running, she also discusses “clean eating.” She avoids processed and fast foods, sugar, rarely drinks alcohol, and has never smoked. Mary and Julie also eat healthy, preferring organic food for themselves and their families. In order to get daily exercise, Mary “wakes up before everyone during the week at 5:00 a.m. to do a quick 30-minute workout. This enables me to invest in myself, get ready, and think about what the day will bring.”

Julie, an avid runner, states:

I exercise...[However] I think the self-care aspect has been severely lacking because I feel guilty when I indulge in it. It's the last thing on my priority list and therefore it

does not happen as often as it should. It's hard for me to carve out time for just me as I feel like I should be spending the time with my husband and daughter since I spend so much time at work without them.

Of the remaining four, two of the women indicate that being a mother of a young child has disrupted her routine, but that she wants to "get back on track" to her former healthy lifestyle. Jen states, "Exercise used to help [with stress and sense of well-being], but that is one of the things that has been pushed aside. I haven't managed to fit it back in yet." Susan tries to take walks, often with her young daughter, but worries this will stop with winter. "Now that it is getting colder out I will need to make more of a point to exercise and take time for myself."

Hannah understands and values healthy eating and exercise, but she readily admits that she is not currently taking good care of herself. She states:

I worry about my health. I need to eat better and to exercise. I've gained so much weight. I've tried getting in shape before, where I'm exercising religiously and doing great at it. I'll let that go because it's the least important thing compared to all other stuff I have to do, so I put the weight back on.

**Sleep.** All of the women describe sleep as a luxury that they either prioritize or forfeit. Of the eight women interviewed, five of them (62.5%) average 7 to 8 hours per night and believe they regularly get adequate, restorative sleep. Of the remaining three, one woman (12.5%) struggles with inconsistent and somewhat restless sleep, resulting in occasional fatigue and compromised mental alertness. The final two women express deep concerns about their amount and quality of sleep, believing that fatigue is leading to higher

stress levels, lack of motivation, lapses in mental clarity, and weight gain. For example, Jen notes that her “self-care has been lacking this last year, I can tell I have felt more stressed and fatigued.” Hannah describes the reasons for her poor sleep habits, as well as the consequences:

I feel like I get enough “me time,” but I do it in place of sleep. Right now, I feel stressed out a lot. When I do take time for myself, it’s always taking the place of something else. My schedule is so tight. I love to read, so what suffers when I read is sleep or not paying my bills for five weeks. I didn’t pay our property taxes one year because I missed the deadline...I don’t take my car in for an oil change. I recently ran out of gas because I ignored the gas gauge, that kind of stuff. Things like that are what suffer for the sake of that time for me.

**Extended family.** All but two of the eight women interviewed discuss the love and close connections they experience and maintain with parents, in-laws, siblings, and other family members. Next to sharing responsibilities with a partner, family appears to rank as most important in helping each woman *manage* her very busy lifestyle. All six of these women indicate that they depend on family members to help alleviate some of their stress, whether it is due to a crisis or a simple daily need. Most often, it is a mother or both parents who provide this much needed and greatly appreciated assistance. Helping with a sick child appears to top the list as the most appreciated form of familial help. Routine babysitting, financial assistance, advice and emotional support, help with household chores, and companionship are also commonly mentioned. Susan summarizes the importance of her extended family when she states:

I am also lucky in that my parents are retired, yet physically and mentally able to help out with the family and kids when needed. They are just a call away and this is just such a huge relief! I also have other family members that I am very close to and who are willing to help out in a pinch. Not having to worry about their care lets me be “present” at work and do my job.

Hannah discusses at length the love she has for her entire “dysfunctional, Trump-loving” family. Her family is large, requiring a rented hall for Christmas to accommodate the 80 plus people. Prior to these gatherings, she always reminds her husband, “Extended family will be the people who are always going to be there for you.” Mary agrees, stating that family comes first. “We spend lots of time together as a family and often have in-laws or my parents visiting on the weekend, or we travel to see them.” Carol, too, values her family, stating:

My parents recently retired and are about a two drive from us. They visit all the time now. We all love it when they’re around—especially the kids. I think it is so important for them to have other important people in their lives, like grandparents. My parents dote on them and take them to do fun things. An added bonus—my husband and I get some much-needed time for us!

The love, respect, and appreciation these women express for family is profound and heart-felt. It is reassuring to hear that mothers, fathers, and family in general remain vital in the lives of these young working mothers.

**Faith and church.** Christian faith and personal spiritual belief are described as extremely important to six of the eight women (75%). For Mary, faith is an important

component to her daily routine. She discusses her faith as a way in which she engages in good self-care and balance:

Exercise, taking a lunch break, prayer. I would like to be more deliberative about journaling, doing a devotional, reading my bible, or prayer in the morning before I start my day. I feel good about my self-care; I'm always seeking balance.

Jane and Hannah concur, suggesting that the active practice of their faith provides them with a stress-relieving roadmap for navigating life. They also state that faith has become even more important since having children. Jane and Hannah see their children as “little miracles” in need of a strong spiritual upbringing in order to develop into successful, compassionate human beings.

Carol discusses her faith from the perspective of her children and how this leads to a healthy, well-rounded family. While they attend church regularly, she sees Sunday school as the real bonus—her kids are learning not only about God, but also how to be a good person.

Nancy believes that her faith helps her to examine her life on a regular basis and “make adjustments” as needed. She states:

I volunteer for an hour of prayer each week at my parish and have been doing that for about a year. It just so happens to fall on a Monday and it has been a huge blessing to me. It's forced me to take an hour out just once a week to reflect on my faith and how life is going. I keep a prayer journal so I've been able to recognize times where I've struggled more and come through and it gives me strength to push through rough patches.

**Friendships.** The importance of friendships, both in and outside of work, are discussed by six out of the eight women (75%). Interestingly enough, each of these women also talks about combining “friend” time with other commitments: family, work obligations, hobbies, and wellness pursuits. For example, Jane combines much of her “friend” time with opportunities to also spend time with her children. She states:

We try and get together with other families... I can remember [my husband] and the kids and I getting together with other families on New Year’s Day at one family’s house, and the kids just played. We all had brunch and hung out, and now it’s become a tradition. Some of the families have kids that are [my oldest son’s] friends from the preschool. Other things we do include Skateland, having cookouts, and meeting at the park.

Mary also combines time with friends with other commitments. She discusses building and maintaining friendships through her church group, allowing her to fulfill her spiritual, volunteerism, and social interests simultaneously. Because Mary’s husband is also very involved in the church, they have formed numerous friendships as a couple, “My husband and I are very active in our local church, so we spend a lot of time participating in small groups or other volunteer opportunities.”

Jen and Nancy discuss the friendships they have made through their children’s sporting and other events. Nancy reflects, “We have made great friendships through our kid’s sports. When your free time is very limited, it’s really convenient to see the same people all the time that you have so much in common with.” Jen also discusses the friendships forged through her child’s sporting events, but laments, “When the season is



over, it all changes. They're virtually gone until the next season." Apparently, these friendships are somewhat fragile; they are based on the children and their scheduled activities versus long-lasting, deep "adult" connections.

Jane views her friendships as personally important for her well-being and "sanity," as well as for serving as a healthy and balanced role model for her children. She states:

It's good for the kids to see us doing things together or with our friends. We'll go out for dinner, usually. We've been to hockey games and movies, and we'll try different restaurants or go downtown or meet up with friends...Some of my girlfriends and I set up a monthly meeting where we all get together, otherwise we would never meet. Every third Tuesday we try and get together...

The social and emotional support of friends is extremely important to these women. Each woman is exceedingly creative in carving out this niche, often "piggybacking" other commitments or opportunities together in order to get the "best bang for their buck." Combining family activities, volunteerism, social activities, and sporting and other events with friends allows each woman to better manage her time in a way that is both enjoyable and satisfying.

**Solitary pursuits.** Five out of the eight participants indicate that they enjoy "alone time" in which they engage in activities such as reading, watching television, social media, computer games, and internet shopping. Hannah, the most vocal advocate for her solitary endeavors, states, "Besides reading, I'm addicted to Farm Story, so I will sit and play that...I am an avid TV watcher, and I watch way too many shows. I DVR everything!" She also discusses her experience of writing a children's book, an endeavor for which she is

exceedingly proud. After much cajoling from her sister to write a book based on a Christian video, Hannah states:

I sat down one day and watched the video, got this idea, and I wrote the damn book. We found an illustrator who illustrated it, and the guy printed it. So it's out there! It took me about a day to write it. The crazy thing was that everything after that all came easily. It's got a five star rating from like one person... Writing this book is a personal thing that I'm very proud of. Obviously, I did not retire because of it, but if this is it, I did the one book!

Carol also discusses her need for down time, routinely watching a television show after the kids are in bed. She laments, "I look forward to this part of the day to unwind, but nine times out of ten, I fall asleep. I rarely see the end of the show I was watching!"

Nancy, Mary, and Jen love the temporary escape they experience through reading good literature, as well as scripture. Mary states, "It's a well-deserved escape, yet a real source of inspiration. I also get out of my own head for awhile." In addition, all three agree that reading the bible and other inspirational literature, coupled with meditation and prayer, are mandatory for their spiritual growth and emotional health.

**Community involvement and volunteerism.** One-half of the women interviewed discuss a desire to be involved in their community, as well as to spend time volunteering in areas of personal interest and work-related organizations. Each of these women also agrees that this type of involvement is often placed at the bottom of the list, especially when life becomes especially hectic or demanding. While these women clearly put effort into their

community and volunteerism in a variety of ways, each also describes this as an area in which she “should do more.” For example, Jane states:

I’d like to get into some here-and-there volunteer work. It would be nice to maybe even do that with my oldest, like around Christmas time and such. [We] could do some bell-ringing for the Salvation Army or help out at the program to feed the hungry. I’d also like to get more into NACADA, the advising association we’re affiliated with. I go to their conferences, but I would like to get more involved...

Both Jen and Hannah are also involved in work-related professional organizations. Jen has served as the president of her union since summer 2016 and Hannah has held numerous positions in several professional organizations: regional president-elect, site selection chair, membership chair, state officer, and current president. Both agree that these obligations *do* take time away from home and family, but are also equally adamant that the benefits of their involvement far outweighs any disadvantages. According to Jen, “the trick is to say ‘NO’ to the small, unimportant stuff and delegate tasks to those who have the extra time.” Hannah concurs, stating, “Ultimately, family comes first!”

Mary, on the other hand, values involvement and volunteerism, but severely limits these outside activities because her children are still so young. “I say no a lot. There are certain things I’d really like to attend/support/do, but that jeopardizes my family time and throws me off balance.” Mary realizes that her opportunity to be more involved in the community and in work-related organizations will happen in time. However, she also admits that she struggles with feelings of guilt when she declines opportunities and constantly questions whether or not she should be “doing more.”

**Summary of work-life balance strategies.** Seven themes emerged to answer my second research question: “What personal strategies are these working mothers using as they respond to the demands of the dual roles of professional and parent?” These themes encompass an essential part of each woman’s daily life: household division of labor, personal wellness, family, friendships, faith and church, solitary pursuits, and community involvement/volunteerism.

These themes serve to categorize the strategies the women in this study employ in their daily quest for work-life balance. Further, each woman has a different combination of strategies (her own personal “recipe”), as well as a personal way of prioritizing those strategies that work best for her. While the majority of the women in this study believe they have achieved a relatively good balance in their lives, three of the eight women lament that they do not believe their work-life balance is adequate, resulting in increased levels of stress and a compromised sense of life satisfaction.

### **Summary**

The qualitative research presented in this chapter explores the work-life balance of the eight participants in relation to the four life course factors identified by Giele (2008): identity, relational style, drive and motivation, and adaptive style. For each of these four constructs, themes emerge to provide a greater understanding of the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of these women as they navigate life choice and decision-making. In addition, seven themes emerge to describe the personal strategies used by these working mothers as they strive for work-life balance. Each of the women participating in this study is committed to her chosen profession in student affairs. However, all seven women also unanimously agree

that family always comes first. Hence, life satisfaction for these women hinges on their ability to successfully employ personally relevant strategies to manage and enhance their daily lives at both work and in the home.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, includes an overview of the study, discussion of major findings, limitations, suggestions for future research, recommendations, and the study conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Balance is a journey, not a destination.

(~Robyn Henderson, 2006)

### Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the study and a discussion of the major findings as they relate to the research questions. The questions guiding this study are restated below:

1. For mothers employed as student affairs professionals, how does their sense of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation shape their work-life balance decisions and practices?
2. What personal strategies are these working mothers using as they respond to the demands of the dual roles of professional and parent?

Although I presented each question as a separate entity, I found that the two research questions are actually intertwined in such a way that both are answered simultaneously. To further elaborate, the themes emerging from the constructs of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation inform the very ways in which these women function in their daily lives, clearly demonstrating the personal strategies they use to navigate the complexity of their dual roles of employee and mother. Even though each woman has her own preferred specific strategies for stress relief and/or personal fulfillment, these strategies are a product of her life experiences as depicted through the themes emerging from this study.

In addition to the research questions, I also discuss the potential implications these findings have for mothers working as student affairs professionals, as well as for the

institutions in which they work. I will conclude with a discussion of study limitations, suggestions for future research, recommendations, implications for practice/change, and my concluding thoughts.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how female student affairs professionals experience and navigate their dual roles at work and in the home. In order to accomplish this, the interviews from eight women were documented and analyzed from the perspective of “life-course,” a theoretical framework modified and used by Janet Giele (2008). Giele expanded on the life course theoretical framework to develop a set of four factors related to life experience and gender role: sense of identity, relational style, personal drive and motivation, and adaptive style. According to Giele, these factors are critical markers for shaping adult gender role choices and decisions.

The research questions guiding this study, as well as the open-ended interview format, allowed me to gain a good understanding of each participant’s current experiences with work-life balance, as well as to explore their future goals and ambitions. It is important to note that, from the interview questions and the resulting discussion, a variety of themes emerged that could have been analyzed in many possible ways. In order to accurately address my research questions, the four life course factors derived from life course research serve as the lens from which these themes are identified, analyzed, and reported.

### **Discussion**

The work-life experiences of the student affairs professional have frequently been described in current literature as *imbalanced*, suggesting that positions in student affairs may

negatively perpetuate overlap and/or enmeshment between work and personal responsibilities (Cameron, 2011; Isdell, 2016). Although balance was an on-going struggle described by each of the participants in this study, none of the women indicated that her life was out of balance. Rather, each woman employed specific strategies to overcome balance obstacles and create life satisfaction.

A primary finding resulting from this study confirms that holding multiple roles results in positive outcomes both at work and in the home. The women express appreciation for the organizational skills they have gained from navigating various roles, as well as for the personal growth and maturity that has resulted from successfully managing a complex world. This finding is significant because it is consistent with existing research extolling the virtues of dual roles. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) describe this as work-life enrichment in which “the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role” (p. 72). According to Goodchild (2006), work-life balance can be viewed as the conscious evaluation of a person’s priorities, followed by the appropriate allocation of time and energy, to that which is deemed most important. Finally, Kirchmeyer (2000) suggests that balance is the ability to achieve satisfying experience in all life domains.

**Identity.** Each of the eight women interviewed for this study initially thought their profession would serve as the basis to their identity. They believed that career would come first, with family serving as a complement to their professional life. However, upon the birth of her first child, each woman found that her personal identity was upended; family now came first. This revelation is consistent with prior research suggesting that the majority of women



view themselves as the primary caregiver to their children and that family ranks as the top priority (Fochtman, 2011; Sallee, 2015; Schueller-Weidekamm & Kautzky-Willer, 2012).

Further, after motherhood, each woman defines her primary (and most important) role in life as “mother.” This finding is supported in a study conducted by Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2012) in which they report that all 120 of their female participants “loved being mothers... They were almost glowing in their praise of their children and had a strong desire to spend time watching and helping their children grow” (p. 51). In addition, these women also state that having a child had imposed unexpected priorities in their lives; repeatedly, they “asserted that regardless of the consequences to their career, their children came first” (p. 59).

Conversely, Giele’s (2008) study comparing homemakers and career women found the following:

In stark contrast to the homemaker mothers, the mothers who have careers outside the home organize their life stories with work as the central theme and their families as the necessary added ingredient to their enjoyment of a full life. Rather than defining their primary role in life as that of “Mom,” they see themselves as a lawyer, manager, teacher, or doctor who has a rounded out private life as wife and mother. (p. 405)

This glaring contrast in study findings demands further analysis. I suggest that one major difference between Giele’s (2008) study and the current study (as well as other supporting studies) hinges on the inherent differences of the populations studied. Even though each woman in the current study expressed high expectations and were motivated to succeed prior to having children, they also overwhelmingly described themselves as “helpers” who wanted to work with others. When describing her current position in Student Affairs, each

woman exhibits a nurturing quality that is evidenced in the workplace and her commitment to her students. I propose a career choice with the desire to foster growth and success in others may differ somewhat from the “career” women participating in the Giele (2008) study—women who overwhelmingly represented the corporate and business world.

The way in which a woman finds personal empowerment, satisfaction, and self-esteem may also contribute to this dilemma. According to Giele (2008), women who primarily identify with their career role tend to see “achievement and recognition through their work as vindication and proof of their distinctive qualities” (p. 409). In other words, women who first identify with their career appear to have a much stronger need for external validation. In contrast, the women identifying first as “mother,” such as the women in this study, tend to view self from the perspective of “family-work” balance, with the responsibilities and rewards of motherhood routinely placed first in importance. I find this exhibited in numerous ways throughout this study: Jane takes a voluntary demotion to have extra months off in the summer, as well as less responsibility on the job; Carol and Mary say “no” regularly to overtime, thereby adhering to traditional work hours; and Nancy, Susan, and Julie demand flex time for their after-hours duties and work from home whenever possible. These women appear to be fully aware that these choices are not in their “professional” best interest and may potentially derail opportunities for advancement. Prior to motherhood, this behavior would have been alien to each woman’s sense of self and to her aspirations. As a result of her evolving identity due to her status of mother, these choices are now deemed as both necessary and desirable for a satisfying work-life balance.

However, I propose that these choices are potentially short-term versus permanent regarding future life goals, promotion, and higher educational attainment. To support this assertion, seven of the eight women are mothers of at least one child under the age of 6. As previously mentioned, young children require intensive parenting and constant attention. Consequently, these working mothers, despite their best efforts in navigating both work and family, have little time to think beyond daily responsibilities. They simply cannot fathom taking on any additional tasks or stressors while their daily schedule remains so tenuous. As their children become older and more self-sufficient, I suggest that these women will once again look to their earlier aspirations and (possibly) take action. For example, Hannah, the only woman in this study to have older children, has consistently taken on additional responsibilities since her daughters reached their teens. In fact, in a recent conversation several months after her interview, Hannah discussed her decision to enroll in an online doctoral course. I do not believe this is an isolated incident; rather, I propose that each of the women in this study will re-examine their priorities and future trajectory once the demands of motherhood lessen.

To further support this assertion, each woman also readily admits to having ambitious plans for upward mobility and further educational attainment prior to starting a family. Each woman's initial identity appeared to hinge on her proven ability to achieve and excel. As working mothers, these women were forced to lower expectations due to their busy, often chaotic, lifestyles. During each interview, these lowered expectations were often prefaced with clarifying comments such as "for now," "never say never," and "I'm not ruling it out."

Consequently, I have little doubt that these desires and aspirations (at least for some) will once again emerge and become reality—when the time is right.

As previously mentioned, the participants in this study share an overall positive attitude regarding their dual roles. However, the women also discuss at length their need to draw distinct boundaries between work and family. This is in direct contrast to Isdell's (2016) study, in which she found that women “did not set clear delineations between work and family, and instead the women embraced the overlap provided they had the support from work to manage their personal responsibilities that spilled over into traditional working hours” (p. 94).

Specifically, six of the women (75%) overtly state they consistently say “no” to work after hours and refuse to bring work home. Further, these women also express the importance of being totally “present” in the evenings with family, precluding any desire to intersperse work with family time. Consequently, the results of this study support the findings by Sallee (2015) regarding role “compartmentalization,” a strategy to navigate the multiple roles of employee and parent. Compartmentalization relies heavily on the working mother's conscious choice to focus on one role at a time. The women in this study obviously adhere to role compartmentalization, excluding work-related tasks during off-work hours whenever possible.

After further analysis of the very different views espoused in the current study as compared to the Isdell (2016) study, several potential explanations surfaced. First of all, Isdell's (2016) study examined two universities lauded in the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* annual list of the “Great Colleges to Work For” because of their recognition for

workplace supports. These universities offered outstanding supports, clearly resulting in loyal and dedicated employees: discounted family meals in dining services, family-centered recreational activities in the evenings and on weekends, generous holiday and leave time, on-site childcare, exercise time during the workday, and spiritual guidance. Possibly the most compelling reason for these very different results involves the concept of “flexitime.” In contrast to those institutions profiled in Isdell’s (2016) study, after hours work was viewed by the current study participants as a donation of personal time, with the biggest reward simply being a lightened workload for the next day. Partly due to the need for adequate staffing during the regular workday, flexitime was not always a practical or viable option for these student affairs professionals. Consequently, the idea of working after hours or from home was viewed by the women in this study as inherently negative versus positive.

**Relational style.** The relational style expressed by the women in this study is varied and unique. Several of the women are extremely kind, refusing to say anything negative about others. Several others consider themselves to be very assertive, with one woman actually referring to herself as a “sarcastic, smart-ass.” More important than their differences, though, is the amazing way in which they are similar; they all value, as well as demonstrate, a relational style that is based on respect, acceptance of others, and honest communication.

As with the career women interviewed in the Giele (2008) study, these women exhibit a relational style in which they are much more likely to expect and accept help from their partners in raising the children, as well as with household chores and home maintenance. Extended family is deemed a top priority for most; these relationships are nurtured and held in high-esteem. Also deemed extremely important for each of the women is the desire to

maintain personal friendships. This finding is consistent with existing research showing that family and friends serve in an essential support role for working mothers (Gallagher, 2000; Heath, 2012; Isdell, 2016). For example, in her study of over 200 working women, Gallagher (2000) found that a major key to personal and professional success was having family and friends “who provided crucial logistical and emotional support” (p. 193). Further, this support constitutes “an interpersonal transaction which demonstrates emotional concern, esteem, information and instrumental aid” (Heath, 2012, p. 55).

Unfortunately, most of the women in this study lament that time restraints take a negative toll on close friendships. They are therefore very deliberate about who they include in their life, demonstrating extreme resourcefulness in merging friendships with other important activities: spending time with family, hobbies and other interests, church and spiritual growth, and community involvement. This strategy is supported by Isdell (2016), who found that women are extremely adept at connecting and intertwining their numerous commitments as a way to better manage time constraints, as well to find greater enjoyment and satisfaction in these necessary daily functions and routine.

Finally, the importance of mentors is highlighted in several research studies on institutional support for work-life balance (Isdell, 2016; Krymis, 2011; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett (2003). The women in this study concur, discussing at length their appreciation of supportive colleagues and mentors. However, contrary to other study findings, the women in this study expressed a distinct preference and appreciation for professional-oriented mentors versus mentors who assisted with more personal issues, such as work-life balance. Although one participant, Nancy, raved about the stress management and balance strategies promoted

by her graduate school mentor, she primarily acknowledges the impact it had for her professionally. I propose that the women in this study, adequately skilled in “compartmentalization,” have prioritized and secured the support system necessary for success in the home. Consequently, they may not feel as confident or well-equipped in handling work-related issues or professional demands for several reasons: they have prioritized family and have therefore put more time and energy in establishing a supportive “home base,” and the unwritten professional etiquette established in the workplace encourages healthy boundary-setting, thereby forging connections with colleagues and mentors that is appropriately less intimate, more fluid, and less apt to be assumed or taken for granted. As a result, these women tend to prefer and need help with professional situations from mentors, and may be hesitant to blur boundaries between work and home.

**Drive and motivation.** The women in this study were initially driven by enormous ambition to achieve, with aspirations for high-level positions and advanced degrees. Apparently this is not unique to this study; several research studies have found that academic professionals frequently engage in “workaholic” behavior prior to having children (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). After becoming mothers, however, many of these aspirations are either dismissed or delayed. Especially while children are still young, each of these eight women adamantly refuse to sacrifice family and the responsibilities of motherhood for upward mobility in her job. Plans for further educational attainment, such as the pursuit of a doctorate, are also often placed on indefinite hold. Research conducted by Nobbe and Manning (1997) supports this assertion, finding that student affairs professionals with children often give up or change career goals once they enter motherhood. Further,

Wattis, Standing, and Yerkes (2013) found that qualified women will often choose “to halt progression within organizations, because managerial positions place excessive demands on time which conflict with caring responsibilities” (p. 3).

For these women, a primary finding associated with drive and motivation appears to be that of personal “choice” versus institutional and/or other obstacles. These findings contrast with much of the existing literature expounding the cultural and institutional “evils” of conscious and unconscious stereotyping, gender bias, and antiquated workplace norms (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gerdes, 2006; Hochschild & Machung, 2012; McEwen & Agno, 2011; Rapoport et al., 2002). While each of the women certainly express some concerns and share stories pertaining to incidents of gender discrimination in the workplace, none indicate that workplace culture had much to do with their decision to place family before career. Rather, this was a choice regarding the prioritization of what was personally of greatest value and importance—and family won.

Nevertheless, all of the women openly agree that some improvement and change is needed in the workplace. Several of the women clearly identify a “problem” person or persons with whom they have regular interaction. These individuals tend to “clock-watch,” as well as demonstrate an overall lack of understanding regarding the challenges of work-life balance for working mothers. Of course, it is reasonable to assume that this scrutiny may be warranted if a working mother neglects her work-related responsibilities, is frequently absent or late, and/or expects special treatment or considerations to the detriment of others. The situation then becomes one of competence and integrity versus that of navigating an active work and family life. However, if this “over-attentiveness” is due to a rigid adherence to the standard



workday and a lack of compassion for the working mother's extenuating circumstances, the situation may escalate to an unhealthy or hostile work environment. Work environments such as this are discussed in various studies throughout the literature, suggesting that antiquated workplace norms and gender bias are "alive and well" in the workplace and on the college campus (McEwen & Agno, 2011; Rapoport et al., 2002).

Conversely, the women also express an overall appreciation for the respectful way they are treated in the workplace. Although several of the women reported problems with specific individuals in their work setting, the women all denied feeling devalued or demeaned due to their status as a parent. Rather, they attribute the occasional "problem" to a lack of insight or understanding on the part of a particular person versus that of institutional culture. This finding directly contradicts with a study conducted by Eagly and Carli (2007) in which they conclude that working mothers are an "oppressed group" who are often treated as one-dimensional, incompetent, and detached. Rather than viewing themselves as oppressed, the women interviewed for this study believe that uninformed others simply suffer from an overall lack of understanding about the responsibilities associated with parenthood; the problem is more a lack of knowledge and insight rather than overt discrimination. As a result, several of the women agree that "backing off" from promotion, as well as consciously restricting additional work-related tasks, helps to relieve some of the stress associated with work-life balance and therefore promotes greater harmony on the job and with colleagues.

The women in this study also describe the ways in which their dual roles of parent and professional successfully impact their lives. They discuss at length how obligations in each role have served to improve their overall ability to navigate their complex world. This finding

is clearly supported in a study conducted by Marshall (2009) of female higher education administrators with children. Despite some frustrations with their busy lives, the women in this study repeatedly confirm that their lives are far better and more enriched because of their dual roles; the challenges they face daily, coupled with the skills they are forced to develop to meet these challenges, far outweigh any and all trade-offs of a more one-dimensional lifestyle. Further, the rewards associated with successfully navigating dual roles: increased self-confidence, self-esteem, better organization and time management skills, improved communication, and (as Hannah suggests) just being “nicer,” are all qualities for which these women share an intense sense of pride.

**Adaptive style.** The women involved in this study welcome new experiences and are innovative and flexible in finding new ways to navigate work and family life. In fact, seven of the eight women have modified their work schedules in ways that better accommodate family responsibilities. The women unanimously agree that they feel empowered when they can choose how and when they should modify their schedules to better meet their work responsibilities, as well as the needs of their families.

Pertaining specifically to work responsibilities, these women are committed to best practice in the way they provide services to the students, faculty, and staff with whom they work. The concept of using time wisely to avoid duplication and unnecessary busywork appears forefront in each of their minds. This results-oriented attitude toward efficacy is directly in line with Worley and Wells-Dolan (2012) and their researched-based suggestions for *professional transformation*: the need to move from a workday focus on “what” is

provided to students to the broader perspective of “how” student affairs professionals go about the work of student development in the services provided to students.

Many of the strategies for adaptation that these women employ, both in the home and at work, is focused on this same concept—using time wisely. The foremost emerging theme here is their ability to multi-task in some extremely clever and innovative ways. As previously mentioned, each woman is exceedingly creative in carving out her own niche, often “piggybacking” other commitments or opportunities together in order to get the “best bang for her buck.” Combining family activities, volunteerism, social activities, and sporting and other events with friends allows each woman to better manage their time in a way that is both enjoyable and satisfying.

Interestingly enough, the concept of merging different factions of life important to each woman is almost completely absent in the existing literature. Only one study openly addresses this phenomenon; Isdell (2016), in her study of mid-career female student affairs professionals, notes the repeated reference to the phrase “double-dipping” as a way to describe the method of using one priority to satisfy multiple commitments. As with this study, many of Isdell’s study participants routinely incorporate time spent with friends with family outings, as well as couple friend and/or family time with religious and community functions. As a relevant example, the participant in the current study who is completely satisfied with the time she devotes to exercise happens to jog regularly with her husband.

The second major theme that emerges regarding adaptability is the concept of “satisficing.” In their longitudinal study of female faculty members with children, Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2012) apply the concept of “satisficing,” a common coping mechanism in

which women recognize that they simply can't do it all and must be content with the idea of "good-enough." In addition, they suggest that some women have a very difficult time accepting the idea that they cannot be the "best" due to their high-achieving natures. However, this finding does not apply to the majority of the women interviewed for this study. Rather, with the exception of one participant, each woman in this study demonstrates a clear sense of what she values, as well as what she is therefore willing to compromise or *satisfice*. Rather than adopting an attitude of "I can do it all," each woman has carefully evaluated her unique situation and made modifications she can happily live with.

The differences between women choosing to cope with their hectic lifestyle by satisficing versus those women who resist this concept warrants further analysis. First of all, I believe the age of the participant's child(ren) directly impacts a working mother's willingness and ability to accept compromise and the notion of "good enough." Of the eight participants in the current study, seven (87.5%) had at least one child under the age of six. According to Marshall (2009), caring for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers requires an extremely demanding amount of parental time and guidance. Consequently, the absolute reliance of young children on the parent is, at times, overwhelming and exhausting. It is not surprising, then, that these working mothers are literally forced to lower their expectations, abandon any perfectionistic tendencies, and embrace the concept of satisficing.

In further support of this inference, Hannah was the only participant in the current study who adamantly rejected the concept of "good enough." She did not believe she was even *capable* of anything less than her absolute best. However, she is also the mother of two very independent teenage daughters who do not require, or even want, the level of care

demanded from the other participants. Consequently, Hannah has more time and energy to meet the high standards and levels of perfectionism that she demands of herself.

Basic differences in personality may also constitute a plausible reason for the differences between these women. I think it is reasonable to assume that certain women, for a variety of reasons, are driven to achieve at high levels despite their life circumstances. I also believe that these women are often at high risk for emotional and/or physical health problems due to the stress associated with unrelenting, and oftentimes unrealistic, expectations of self. These women tend to disregard healthy work-life balance strategies and do not engage in good self-care. Fortunately, none of the women in the current study exhibit the traits outlined in this profile; rather, they are self-aware and, to the best of their ability, are employing strategies for good emotional and physical health.

**Work-life balance.** Numerous studies suggest that working mothers believe they have little or no time to exercise or tend to wellness issues, to cultivate personal friendships, and to engage in professional activities and other opportunities for involvement (Marshall, 2009; Robertson & Weiner, 2013; Wilson, 1997). The innovative and varied strategies employed by the women in this study directly contradict these findings. While some of these women would clearly appreciate more personal time to engage in these endeavors, the women unanimously express appreciation for their overall lifestyle. They also believe that they have a great deal of control over their personal choices, as well as with their ability to prioritize those activities they find most meaningful. Rather than succumb to a “defeatist” or negative attitude, these women are finding joy and satisfaction in life by employing effective, realistic strategies to meet their needs both at home and in the workplace. Most importantly, though, is the positive

attitude that each woman personally ascribes to on a daily basis. Each woman reports feeling blessed to have a family she loves and is devoted to, as well as to have meaningful work that she finds both satisfying and affirming.

### **Limitations**

During the course of conducting this study, the researcher became aware of certain limitations that were not identified prior to the start of the study:

- The research method was changed from a narrative inquiry method to a basic qualitative research study and the study protocol was modified to include eight participants rather than two. In addition, the interview process was reduced from three interviews per participant to one. These changes were largely due to the inexperience (and subsequent inability) of this researcher to uncover relevant themes from long narratives focusing on daily routine.
- One participant was dropped late in the study due to the researcher mistakenly identifying her as a student affairs professional. Consequently, her data was removed from the study and a new participant was found, interviewed, and incorporated into the study.
- A pilot study was warranted. After the first two interviews were conducted, the interview questions were modified in order to gather data that more directly served to answer the research questions posed for the study. A pilot study involving one or two interviews to test the relevancy and appropriateness of the interview questions should have been conducted *prior* to the start of the study, thereby eliminating the need for a protocol change mid-study.

- The quality of this research relies greatly on the skill level of the researcher. Data collection through interviews is influenced by the researcher's ability and experience. While much of my training and experience is in counseling, which may have enhanced my ability to quickly build rapport with the women in this study, my experience conducting interviews for research is limited. In fact, my counseling background served as an unexpected hindrance; I found it very difficult to elicit information without delving deeper into areas that were not of importance to this research study. Consequently, my struggle to avoid the therapeutic role may have negatively affected the initial interviews (prior to the protocol change), thereby potentially rendering my data insufficient to answer the research questions posed in this study.
- Navigating complexity is central to qualitative research. In an effort to remain focused on the research questions guiding this study, as well as present findings that are as clear versus convoluted, I have confined the women in this study to the dualistic roles of employee and mother. This limiting description of the working mother's life, while unintentional, depicts them in a simplistic and inaccurate manner that does not acknowledge the other numerous, and often challenging, roles that these women also assume. Further, these additional roles may have significantly impacted the data and the findings emerging from this study.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study focused on understanding work-life balance among mothers working as mid-level student affairs professionals. There are numerous ways in which to broaden this

study in the future. First of all, similar research on single mothers, mothers in same sex relationships, or on fathers could serve to expand understanding of how student affairs professionals navigate work and family responsibilities. For example, a parallel to the current study could be conducted with men to identify how the four themes of identity, relational style, drive and motivation, and adaptive style (Giele, 2008) shape male gender role choices and work-life balance strategies. Future research could also involve a thorough examination of both the male and female perspective, including an understanding of work-life balance decisions between life partners. Another option for future research could focus on women who are single parents. The criteria for the current study included a “significant other” in the home who shares household and parenting duties; without a partner, a single mother would potentially face numerous additional challenges as she strives for work-life balance. Consequently, both men and women can benefit from such research as it holds implications for effective parenting and marriage, as well as overall health and well-being in the struggle for work-life balance.

Further, the sample for this study was intentionally selected based on both parental and employment status; the population was limited to mothers serving as student affairs professionals in a mid-level management capacity. The study could be expanded to include all women working in institutions of higher learning regardless of position, as well as with a focus on a specific campus work group: top-level administrators, faculty, adjunct faculty, support staff, or clerical. Further study could also explore the work-life balance strategies of women employed in industries and organizations other than higher education.



This study explored the work-life balance experiences of the participants from the somewhat simplistic perspective of work and home. The study did not look in-depth at other roles these women assume in their daily life, nor did the study consider additional responsibilities and stressors that may be impacting the work-life balance of these women. Future study could focus on these other life “realities” in an effort to better explore the complexities of each woman’s life. More specifically, further study could explore the physical and emotional barriers, interpersonal conflicts, and numerous other issues/problems that may impact a participant’s ability to achieve a satisfying level of work-life balance.

This study did not focus on university culture or workplace policy and practice. Additional study could investigate the extent to which formalized work-life balance programming informs and serves as change-agent to the (often entrenched) campus culture. In addition, further study could serve to identify those *factors* that statistically contribute to employee work-life balance. For a more comprehensive analysis, these studies could also incorporate a more diverse demographic of mothers and/or parents employed in student affairs roles.

Future research might also include evaluation of how family-friendly work environments influence employment outcomes such as “opting-out,” voluntary demotion, maintaining status quo, or professional advancement. Consequently, further research could examine employee retention among student affairs professionals employed at institutions designated as family-friendly versus those institutions viewed as “hostile” or alienating to women. Results of such studies could better inform policy and practice decisions made by

institutions wanting to improve campus morale and decrease rates of attrition not due to retirement.

### **Recommendations**

Although the participants in the current study expressed appreciation for the support they received in their individual departments, they also agreed that improvement was still needed. To accomplish this, campus-wide conversations should be initiated regarding the attitudes, policies, and practices currently in place to support working mothers. These work-life balance discussions should occur in informal and formalized settings to permeate the culture of the organization. According to the participants, education and training to improve the understanding and acceptance of their work-life balance issues may serve to minimize the negativity they sometimes experience from co-workers. In her study on college work environments and career trajectory, Isdell (2016) found that those student affairs professionals reporting a positive experience managing work and family responsibilities were much more likely to report overall job satisfaction and a desire to remain employed at that university.

The participants also perceived autonomy and flexibility in the workplace as a valued contribution to work-life balance. However, this flexibility was informally granted the women by their individual departments and was not campus-wide policy in any of the institutions in which the participants were employed. In an effort to promote consistent and equitable treatment for working mothers, campus administrators could strategize ways in which flex-time could be incorporated in formal policy and practice. These flexible work arrangements might include the ability to determine when and how much to work, as well as offer time off during the workweek in exchange for work after hours and on weekends. Consequently, these

strategies may improve job performance, increase campus loyalty, and promote a willingness to work hours outside the workweek when needed.

While some studies have suggested that work place bias and gendered institutional policy and practice remain the norm on most college campuses (Drago et al., 2006; Fochtman, 2011; Jones & Taylor, 2013; Ward & Wolf-Wendel (2012), this study does not corroborate these findings. Rather, the women interviewed for this study were *mostly* positive about their work environment and the support they experience in the workplace. They state that an environment characterized by respect, coupled with the sense they are valued as an employee, creates a very desirable work environment. Consequently, the importance of *campus-wide efforts* to promote a healthy working environment, as well as a culture of understanding and acceptance, cannot be either discounted or dismissed. Fostering an accepting culture in which empathy and understanding of the competing demands faced daily by the working mother should be a primary administrative goal. The participants in the current study are in complete agreement that their individual institutions need to focus more effort on policy and practice in which tolerance and acceptance of absences due to occasional family obligations, as well as support for employees utilizing institutional resources and help (such as flex time, leaves, work from home), is the established norm.

## **Conclusion**

Do the factors of identity, relational style, drive and motivation, and adaptive style serve to directly influence the decisions made by women regarding work, family, and career trajectory? Is work-life balance a reality for mothers working as student affairs

professionals? Based on this study, the answer to both of these questions is a resounding “yes.”

First of all, I elected to use aspects of life course theory after reading numerous corresponding studies I found both inspiring and illuminating. The theoretical framework, founded on the life course perspective and developed by Giele (2008), simply made conceptual sense to me. As a result, this basic qualitative research study incorporates the four factors considered by Giele (2008) to be critical in adult gender role identity and life course decisions: identity, relational style, drive and motivation, and adaptive style. This researcher believes that these factors combine to create a conceptual “roadmap” for adult choice and decision-making:

- An empowered sense of self clearly paves the way for a woman to make choices that are most meaningful to her; the women in this study exhibit confidence in their decision to combine career and family and show pride in their accomplishments.
- The quality of these women’s relationships is based on earlier life experiences in which they had both positive and negative experiences with others. These vital experiences helped each woman to value and expect healthy relationships based on trust and open communication, thereby allowing each woman to selectively choose significant others who would support her throughout her life span.
- Drive and motivation is encouraged by significant others wishing to see a child or young adult achieve success and lead a productive life. These messages, in part, led each woman in this study to seek an education that would enable her to secure

a satisfying career in student affairs. These same messages contributed to the ability of each woman to confidently and conscientiously make changes in career/educational trajectory once she became a mother.

- These women all show remarkable adaptability when it comes to navigating their very busy and somewhat hectic lifestyle. They have learned that life is constantly changing and fluid; they have learned that in order to adapt, they must be creative, flexible, and willing to “let go” of perfectionism and unattainable expectations.

Each of the women participating in this study believes she is successfully managing her dual roles and is actively engaging in strategies conducive to work-life balance. However, this researcher expected a clear delineation between the daily functioning of these women and the various work-life balance strategies they employed. Perhaps one of the most surprising findings of this study concerns the *reality* behind successful work-life balance. This study found that creativity, flexibility, and double-dipping (meeting numerous responsibilities simultaneously) *are* the primary work-life balance strategies employed by these women. Rather than a visit to the gym or a dinner out with friends, work-life balance strategies were embedded in everyday life activities. These strategies ranged from modified work schedules to child play dates incorporating “friend” time. Although each participant identified preferred activities and specific strategies that they engaged in and enjoyed, these were usually done in conjunction with other responsibilities or commitments.

As a final observation, the women in this study share the belief that their career and their family life have influenced each other positively, even though they have not entirely

escaped the guilt that attends traditional expectations of the maternal role. However, “mommy-guilt” was not expressed as often as this researcher had expected; rather, it was the engagement in daily work-life balance strategies that served to keep these dreaded feelings of inadequacy at bay.

### **Summary**

The primary goal of a qualitative study is to uncover potential factors contributing to particular phenomenon. In this study, my purpose was to explore work-family balance among mothers working as mid-level student affairs professionals. Each narrative shared in this study highlights a woman's accomplishments at work and with her family. The results clearly suggest that each woman is doing the best she can for both her family and her profession. Consequently, all of the women report periodic episodes of high stress, usually caused by an intensified workload and/or less availability and help from their partner. As is the nature of life, these periods of stress ebb and flow. However, despite the workload and occasional chaos, these women agree that their lifestyle is not only satisfying, but they are much happier than if they were to leave their careers and stay at home.

Women today have opportunities and choices that were unheard of a generation ago. Emily Taylor, the educator and feminist lauded in Chapter One, would probably be overjoyed with the dramatic rise contemporary women have experienced in overall degree attainment and professional employment in higher education. Unfortunately, current existing research also suggests that women are still far from reaching equitable status with their male counterparts.

Consequently, Emily Taylor would also undoubtedly be distressed with these negative research findings. However, the results of this study suggest a new perspective regarding the plight of women in academia. This study finds that female student affairs professionals, employed in Midwestern universities, are happy and thriving in their professional lives. Further, they are enjoying a satisfying work-life balance that allows them to successfully manage the dual roles of professional and mother.

For each woman participating in this study, the choice was never between motherhood and career; rather, it was about how they were going to successfully accomplish both. Even though they all describe motherhood as their most important role, these women are also quick to point out that they have not necessarily abandoned their future educational and career aspirations. Rather, at this extremely busy stage in their lives, they simply cannot fathom taking on the additional work and responsibility associated with upward mobility and higher degree attainment. For these women, the dual roles they navigate daily permeates their identity, their relationships to others, their goals and motivation, their mode of adapting to challenge or change, and the strategies they employ as they strive to maintain a meaningful level of balance between work and home.

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## **Appendix A: Informed Consent for Participation in Research for Dissertation**

Hello. My name is Debra DeMinck, and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education Administration at St. Cloud State University. I am completing my doctoral studies with a dissertation that will document and analyze work/life balance of mothers who are currently working as student affairs professionals.

This is a basic qualitative research study incorporating a life course perspective. The purpose of the interview process is to gather information regarding your life experiences, as well as evaluate how these experiences impact the strategies you put in place for work/life balance. The interview will last approximately one to two hours; I anticipate that we will only need to meet one time. Your responses will be recorded on audiotape, but only so I may transcribe your responses as accurately as possible for an exact representation of our conversation. All interview materials will be stored in a secure lockbox until they are transcribed. After each audiotape has been transcribed, it will be immediately destroyed. Further, the transcripts will be stored on my password-protected computer for which only I have access. The participant (you), the researcher (me), and the researcher's doctoral committee will be the only persons to have privilege to these interviews. The only alternative for which the tapes may be heard (or transcripts reviewed) by anyone other than those listed is by written permission from you, the participant.

To maintain confidentiality, I will not mention your name in the study results, although you may be identified by the personal information you provide as part of the interview process and by select demographic items I will use in my final report (age, number of children under the age of 18, and a very general description of the department in which you work). Further, information will be presented in aggregate form with no more than 1-2 descriptors presented together. Your interview will be coded using a fictitious name. During the interview, you may refuse to answer any questions you are not comfortable responding to. After the completion of the interviews, you will receive your

transcribed interviews for review and you may make changes or delete parts of the narrative or withdraw altogether from this research project. If you withdraw, none of your information will be included as part of this study. Upon completion of the study, the final report will be published and uploaded to the web.

This study is considered minimal risk although you may be identified by your responses. Some of the questions could be sensitive and may promote an uncomfortable or distressing emotional/psychological response. If this should occur, I have several excellent counseling resources here in the Fargo/Moorhead area that could be of great help. If you would like to pursue this option, I would be happy to assist you with the referral process. Finally, despite the efforts to assure your identity remains confidential, your supervisor may be able to identify you from details emerging from your life story. Private information previously unknown to your supervisor, as well as any negative statements about your workplace, could potentially result in undesirable consequences with your employment.

There are also many benefits associated with participation in this study. These benefits may include personal growth and greater self-awareness as you dialogue about life experiences and engage in personal reflection.

I very much appreciate your participation in this project. Please feel free to talk to me about any concerns you might have. My phone numbers are (cell) 701.212.2243 and (W) 218.477.4273; my email address is dede1202@stcloudstate.edu. You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Steven McCullar, at (320) 308-4727, email simccullar@stcloudstate.edu. Finally, if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at (320) 308-3290, email ri@stcloudstate.edu.

**Please sign below indicating that you are aware of your participation in the project and are agreeing to be a participant in the project.**

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**I have reviewed my interviews as transcribed by Debra DeMinck and hereby clarify my participation in the research study as follows:**

\_\_\_\_ You may use the transcription of my interview(s) as originally presented to me.

\_\_\_\_ You may use the transcription of my interview(s) based upon the edits I've made to the text provided for my review.

\_\_\_\_ I am hereby withdrawing from this research project and do not authorize any of my information to be used.

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B: Demographic Information****Socio-Demographic Questions:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred Contact (email/phone) \_\_\_\_\_

Highest degree attained \_\_\_\_\_

Student Affairs Dept. and Title \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_ Total years together \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Partner's highest level of education \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Partner's occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children, gender and age \_\_\_\_\_



### **Appendix C: Interview Protocol**

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study. You have already read and signed the consent form and filled out the short demographic form. Do you have any questions about those forms or about the study before we begin?

As we previously discussed, I am conducting a qualitative study regarding student affairs professionals and work-life balance. This interview will last approximately 1-2 hours. I hope to gain a good understanding of some of your life experiences, as well as insight into how you navigate your work and your personal life. Even though I have questions developed for this interview, my hope is this will simply be a rough guide leading to a more informal type of discussion.

The information you share during our time together will remain strictly confidential. I will be using a fictitious name to disguise your real identity. I also will not identify the department in which you work, nor will I reveal any other information that could potentially identify you. After I have transcribed each interview, I will give you a copy to review. I would ask that you read it carefully and make any necessary corrections so that the transcript accurately represents you. You can also delete any parts of the transcript that you are uncomfortable with and would prefer to not to reveal in the final paper. As you already know, these discussions will be tape-recorded. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

May I turn on the tape-recorder? Thank you. This is Debra DeMinck. The date, time, and location are as follows: \_\_\_\_\_. I am speaking with \_\_\_\_\_(participant).

Please state your name and confirm that you have read and signed the consent form. Thank you.

1. What kinds of messages did you get growing up about what you should “be” and “do” with your life? *Your future, your potential, education, work, and family, etc.?*
2. How would you describe yourself today? How would your best friend describe you?
3. What does your family look like? *Children’s names, ages, tell me a little about them; partner, name, describe him/her? What is communication like in your family?*
4. Within your family, please describe the your role and the role of your partner. *How do you divide responsibilities? Does this fluctuate/change at different times? Why? How do you decide who does what? What if you disagree?*
5. What led you to choose a job in student affairs?  
*What types of work experiences have you had within student affairs? Likes? Dislikes?*
6. How would you describe your current job responsibilities? *What is your typical work schedule? time arrive/depart? hours worked in a week? Any work from home?*
7. How do you see yourself as an employee? As a colleague? *What are the best things about working in your dept.? Worst? Dept. deal openly when problems come up?*
8. What other personal priorities or commitments require your attention in a typical week? (school, church, family, etc.) *How do you set limits? Can you say NO?*
9. How do you prioritize your work and family life in order to manage all of your responsibilities?
10. What tends to cause conflict for you in your dual roles?  
*What do you find most challenging in your professional life? In your family life? How do you typically handle these conflicts/challenges?*
11. What personal sources of support do you have that help manage work and family responsibilities? *Family? Friends?*
12. Tell me about any formal or informal practices at work that you have participated in to help manage your work and personal responsibilities? Examples: modified work schedule, work from home practices, changing job/role, part-time work *Was your use of these policies/practices supported by your supervisor? Colleagues? Do you openly talk about your needs as a working mom?*

13. What do you see in your future? *In 5 years? 10 years? Looking back from your porch swing?*
14. How would you describe work-life balance?
15. According to your definition of work-life balance, do you consider yourself to have work-life balance? *Why or why not?*
16. What other strategies do you use to manage your stress and engage in good self-care? *Is this sufficient or is your self-care lacking? Is there anything you would like to do in order to improve/enhance your self-care?*

*Conclusion [turn off tape]*

Do you have anything to add or clarify, or anything you'd like to change at this time?

Do you have any questions or suggestions that you would like to offer?

If need be, would you be willing to come back in for another interview or to talk on the phone if I needed additional information?

If something comes to mind later, I'd be glad to hear from you. You can find my phone number and email address on the consent form.

I will transcribe the entire interview over the next several weeks and will give you the hardcopy transcript for your review. As we previously discussed, you may make revisions, deletions, and/or additions at that time. Once again, thank you for participating in this interview process and in helping me to complete this very important research!

End of Interview \_\_\_\_\_(time).

## Appendix D: IRB Approval



### Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South MC 204K, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

**Name:** Debra DeMinck  
**Address:** 3105 Elm St. North  
 Fargo, ND 58102 USA  
**Email:** dede1202@stcloudstate.edu

### IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: Full Board Review

**Project Title:** Female Student Affairs Professionals and Work-Life Balance

**Advisor:** Steven McCullar and Michael Mills

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

#### NOTE TO PI: Must obtain permission from NDSU's IRB before conducting any interviews

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-3290 or email [ri@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:ri@stcloudstate.edu) and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

#### Institutional Review Board:

Linda Donnay, MBA  
 IRB Administrator  
 Director, Research Integrity

#### IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Marilyn Hart  
 Interim Associate Provost for Research  
 Dean of Graduate Studies

#### OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 1565 - 1956

1st Year Approval Date: 3/23/2016

1st Year Expiration Date: 3/22/2017

Type: Full Board Review

2nd Year Approval Date:

2nd Year Expiration Date:

Today's Date: 3/24/2016

3rd Year Approval Date:

3rd Year Expiration Date: