

DISSERTATION

TRANSITIONING FROM STUDENT TO PROFESSIONAL: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES  
OF NEW PROFESSIONALS IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### TRANSITIONING FROM STUDENT TO PROFESSIONAL: THE EXPERIENCES OF NEW PROFESSIONALS IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

New student-affairs professionals participated in a 6-month, qualitative, phenomenological study. The purpose of this study was to use the constructs of Schlossberg's Transition theory to explore the experiences of new professionals who had recently graduated from a college student-development master's program and their transitions to full-time, professional jobs. Monthly online journaling was used to collect the data, with a focus group at the end of the study. The results of this study provide insights on new student-affairs professionals' experiences during this transition from graduate school to work for the first 6 months of their new employment. The template analysis suggests that, overall, students felt their situation was manageable, they relied on their previous transition experiences during this period, their families and friends were their support systems, and the main strategy they used during this transition period was physical exercise. The data also suggest three emergent themes: communication was a must during transition, the process of transition takes time, and participants were excited to make a difference with students. Overall, this study provides the basis for academic professionals and others to gain a richer understanding of the experiences of young professionals in transition to their respective roles in student affairs.

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**Schimek** (the person who was my personal cheerleader and good friend ): I am stealing the lyrics

from the Broadway musical *Wicked* because they say exactly how I feel about all of you:

I've heard it said that people come into our lives for a reason, bringing something we must learn. And we are led to those who help us most to grow if we let them, and we help them in return. Well, I don't know if I believe that's true, but I know I'm who I am today because I knew [all of] you: Like a comet pulled from orbit as it passes the sun, like a stream that meets a boulder halfway through the wood. Who can say if I've been changed for the better? But because I knew [all of] you I have been changed for **[good]**.” It well may be that we will never meet again in this lifetime, so let me say before we part so much of me is made of what I learned from [all of] you

You'll be with me like a handprint on my heart and now whatever way our stories end [Please know that all of] you have re-written mine by being my friend... ( Schwartz, 2003).

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the following people:

To my mother, Katherine DeMuesy, and to my husband, Kuni Okuma, this dissertation is as much both of yours as it is mine.

Finally, to my kids, Katie and JD, and my nieces, Maddie Moo, Emma, Aliana, Abby, and Riley, and my nephews, Will and Kaiyoshi, don't let anyone tell you cannot do something. You can do anything YOU want to do. Just know that I will be with you and support you every step of the way!

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies encourage new employees from both undergraduate and graduate programs and their employers to acknowledge the challenges involved with the transition from school into the workplace. According to Graham and McKenzie (1995), a new employee's sense of belonging to an organization is directly related to an effective transition. Similarly, in a 1993 report, the National Commission on Education noted that providing a good start for an employee could have a significant influence on the employee's attitude, behavior, and productivity (Moser, Walton of Dechant, NCE, & BAAS, 1993). A good start can also have positive economic gains for the employer (Larson & Bell, 2013). Turnover is costly to a company's many resources, such as time and money (Allen, 2008). According to a 2008 Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) foundation report, "direct replacement costs can reach as high as 50%–60% of an employee's annual salary, with total costs associated with turnover ranging from 90% to 200% of annual salary" (Allen, 2008, p. 3; also see Cascio, 2006). Further, Holton (1995) found that 33% of new employees look for a new job within their first year.

The educational component of this issue is significant in light of the fact that, every year, more than a million young adults are graduating from undergraduate programs, excited to move into full-time employment or into graduate school (Aud et al., 2011). Also, as of 2009, fewer than a million students were graduating from graduate programs (Haley, Hephner, & Koutas, 2011). As Winston and Creamer (1997) stated, "Human capital is higher education's principal resource, development of which is its *"raison d'être"*" (p. I). Fried (2011) has echoed Winston and Creamer by pointing out that "ensuring the success and satisfaction of new professionals is not only essential to maintaining vibrancy in the college student personnel workforce but also the

success of undergraduate students for whom entry level professionals are primary points of contact” (p. 40). Earlier, Forney (1994) also observed, “For the sake of our institutions and our undergraduates, the personal success of new professionals, and the effectiveness of the profession as a whole, we ... must know our graduate students [and new professionals] and use the knowledge base proactively” (p. 337).

In addition to their importance in terms of both undergraduate student success and the subsequent credentialed personnel in the workforce, these new professionals represent a sizeable portion of the student-affairs field. Cilente, Henning, Skinner Jackson, Kennedy, and Sloane (2006) indicate these new professionals represent from about 15% to 20% of the student-affairs labor force. Given the substantial population and the research on student-affairs attrition and job satisfaction (Bender, 1980; Berwick, 1992; Evans, 1988; Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006), it would benefit supervisors of new professionals to focus in on the transition that occurs within the first couple of months and continues through the new professionals’ first year of employment. Further, research indicates that a little more than half of these new professionals leave the field before their fifth year (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Hull, 2006; Lorden, 1998; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Saunders, Cooper, Winston & Chernow, 2000). Without proper transitions, new employees will begin to question their job satisfaction and commitment to the organization, perform job tasks less efficiently, and finally leave the institution (Holton, 1995; Leibowitz, Schlossberg & Shore, 1991).

Other examples from the literature involving new professionals working in student affairs suggest that these employees are very excited to begin their employment; however, they need a transition or orientation period. Lorden (1998) noted, “new professionals in particular bring an essential energy and enthusiasm to the profession and to institutions of higher education in

general” (p. 214). Most of these professionals are graduate students coming from masters programs with an active undergraduate experience (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Typically, new professionals begin their jobs in July and are expected to be fully engaged and working hard by August. This scenario means there is little time for professional training and orientation. All new employees experience newcomer adjustment; however, this adjustment is a particular challenge for young adults (Larson & Bell, 2013). In many cases, these new professionals have relocated, are adjusting to work, and are connecting to a new surrounding area (Reichert & Philet, 2000). Other authors have indicated new master’s-level professionals are hired with the understanding they are going to “hit the ground running,” ready to begin their job (Ambler, Amey, & Reesor, 1994; Amey, Reesor, & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (US), 1998; Winston & Creamer, 1997). These authors concluded that such expectations might be unrealistic for new professionals.

“Transitions can be destabilizing and difficult” (Sperling, 2012, p. 174). Moving from school to one’s first professional job is a critical point in a student’s life and proves to be a transition both professionally and personally (Hodkinson, Hodkinson, & Sparkes, 2013). There is limited literature available about understanding transitions for the large number of new professionals who secure employment at higher-education institutions each year (Barham & Winston, 2006). In 2013, Larson and Bell researched undergraduate students and their transition into their first job. The researchers found that an unsuccessful adjustment had long-term negative consequences for young professionals. In addition, neither student-development nor human-resources literature addresses the challenges associated with newcomer adjustment (Larson & Bell, 2013). Janosik et al. (2003) indicated there was a general void regarding the employees’ transitions to their new roles. Haley, Hephner, and Koutas (2011) noted that the

literature addresses the transition for graduate students into graduate school; however, the literature is lacking regarding those students' transition into a graduate assistantship or their first job. These authors suggested that one's experience with transition can impact both future employment and one's continuing professional growth. There are additional studies around transition, although some fail to acknowledge a new employee's need to work through a transition on both a personal and a professional level (Bridges, 2003).

In addition to the void in newcomer-adjustment literature, there seems to be a lack of focus around transition in the graduate-school curriculum. The Council for Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education (2015) contains up-to-date information about what is expected in all functional areas of student affairs and for student-development preparation programs. These guidelines are helpful for preparation programs because CAS sets the principles for curriculum developed for these programs. There are suggested procedures for the program of study, yet they lack guidelines for new professionals leaving a master's program relative to what these graduates should have mastered in regard to transitioning to new employment.

In terms of another relevant aspect that affects education-to-job transitions, all institutions and student-affairs divisions are not staffed or organized the same, but many share similar support structures. Many campuses have supervisors or mentors, training, an institutional culture, and some form of professional development. On each campus, these support systems have differing amounts of dedicated resources and structures; nonetheless, they are all important for a new professional (Wood, Winston, & Polkosnik, 1985). Transition and change are at the same time exciting, stressful, and a natural part of life (Robertson, 1997). When persons leave their comfort zones, emotions can be a positive or negative experience, or a mix of both, with

rewards and challenges. These emotions can consume the thoughts of those involved to the point at which they find it hard to function (Craine, 2007).

Nancy Schlossberg (1984) has published a number of research studies involving transition and is an expert in the areas of adult transitions and career development. In addition to conducting studies she has also developed a transition theory (1995). Two recent studies of student-affairs practitioners have used Schlossberg's transition theory. One study focused on the transition of participants who were leaving their full-time employment and becoming full-time graduate students. This study found that the support structures were in place for these students, but the challenges were different for each participant (McCoy & Gardner, 2011). The Kuk, King, and Forrest (2012) study explored the transitions of senior student-affairs officers leaving the field. Although these studies examining Schlossberg's transition theory in student affairs have extended our understanding of the student-affairs professionals in transition, they did not directly examine the transitions of new professionals. And as Molly Reas Hall has stated, "the journey from graduate student to full-time professional in student affairs is an exhilarating, scary, rewarding and challenging rite of passage" (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2014, p. 1).

Although some literature exists on the experiences of new professionals in the student-affairs field, this literature seems to lack an exploration of the feelings and strategies these individuals used during the transition from school to work. For the same reasons that understanding today's college-student transition in effective job placement and longevity is important to educators and hiring professionals, understanding the similar transition for new professionals is equally important to student-affairs professionals and professions.



### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to use the constructs of Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, 1995) to explore the experiences of new student-affairs professionals who have recently graduated from a college student-development master's program, and the transitions of those professionals to full-time professional jobs. The results of this study provide insights into the experiences of new student-affairs professionals during this transition from graduate school to work during the first 6 months of their new employment.

### **Research Questions**

To accomplish the purpose of this study—using the constructs of Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, 1995) to explore the experiences of new student-affairs professionals who had recently graduated from a college student-development master's program, and their transitions to full-time professional jobs—the following research questions were used:

1. What are the personal and demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity, religion, relationship status, undergraduate degree, location and size of master's-degree program's institution, functional area, and location of professional job) of the study participants?
2. How do participants view their transition situation?
3. What support systems do the study participants perceive to be available to them in this transition process?
4. What strategies do the study participants use to manage their transition?
5. How do the identified support groups and the transitions strategies change over the 5-month time period?

## Definition of Terms

The following list of terms and definitions is provided for a common understanding of language used throughout this study:

*College student- development master's program:* Graduate program that trains professionals for careers in higher education. These programs can be found on both the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) and the College Student Educators International (ACPA) websites.

*Coping:* Any response used to prevent or respond to an event or stressful situation.

*Event:* Any incident or activity that is disruptive or life altering in such a way that it causes a change in the person's normal, day-to-day routine.

*Medium-size or Mid-size institution:* A college or university with 10,000+ full-time, enrolled students.

*Millennials:* The millennial cohort consists of individuals born between 1982 and 2004 (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

*Newcomer:* A person who has recently joined an organization (*Merriam-Webster* online, n.d.).

*New professional:* A person who has recently graduated with a master's degree in a college student-development program and is just beginning to work full time at a college/university.

*Onboarding:* As used in chapter 5, refers to "the mechanism through which new employees acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors to become effective organizational members and insiders" (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011, p. 51).

*Self:* As used in this paper, explains how one's experiences impact the individual's transition (Goodman, 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

*Situation:* The circumstances one is facing during the transition (Goodman, 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

*Strategies:* How an individual uses coping mechanisms that will help them positively navigate through transitions (Goodman, 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

*Stress:* The result of a struggle to reestablish oneself following change.

*Student-affairs functional area:* Typical departments in student affairs (i.e., advising, career services, orientation, residence life, student activities).

*Support:* The safety net in place to help one's transition (Goodman, 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

*Transition:* Any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, roles, or assumptions (Schlossberg, 1995).

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations for this study included the following: The group studied comprised recent graduates who had completed their degree from a college student-development master's program. An introductory email was sent out to all student-development master's program directors to pass along to students graduating the spring 2015 term. A follow-up invitation was sent out to the identified students in master's programs around the United States. In addition, one of the participants asked the researcher for permission to post the invitation on a student-affairs Facebook page. There were 50 participants from 27 graduate programs represented in the initial request. The college student-development master's programs are located across the United States.

## **Limitations**

Although the results in chapter 4 are informative and provide valuable insight, this study is not without its limitations. Because the study is qualitative in nature, these results cannot be generalized (Creswell, 2009). Also, the use of online surveys naturally excludes the use of nonverbal cues, which could limit the interpretation of data (Markham & Baym, 2009). The use of online surveys also did not allow the researcher to ask direct follow-up questions of the participants. Although the data collected in study cannot be generalized to all the new professionals in the student-affairs field, this study will provide a basis for further research about new professionals and their experiences transitioning into their first full-time positions.

## **Significance of Study**

This study provides insights into new student-affairs professionals' experiences for 5 months during their transition from school to work. Although these results cannot be generalized, this study provides the basis for gaining a deeper understanding of the transitions that occur with new professionals, to inform supervisors, graduate-program faculty, and the new professionals themselves.

## **Researcher's Perspective**

As a Vice President and Dean of Students at a small liberal arts institution, I work with new professionals every day. I spend more of my time working with new professionals than working with students on my campus. It is important that seasoned professionals understand who the new professionals are and how they are transitioning into their new jobs. I feel passionate about the success of new professionals. Just as with retaining students, training staff to stay for at least 3 to 5 years in their positions to increase consistency is important. I do understand I might have bias because I work closely with this population. I also might

demonstrate bias because I was a new professional transitioning from a graduate program to a full-time position some years ago. I remember the feelings I had during this time, and this association could contribute to my interpretations as I analyze the data. My being empathic also may bias the way I interpret the participant's journals.

Throughout my doctoral coursework, the work of Schlossberg and her transition theory have piqued my interest. At that time, I began to read and write papers on transition theory. This is a concept, in my opinion, on which we need to increase our focus as student-affairs professionals. Transitions happen with professionals at every level of their career, and I am particularly interested in the transitions of those professionals beginning in the field of student affairs. The comments and statements made by these new professionals could lead all professionals in the student-affairs field to a deeper understanding of how these new professionals feel and act as they begin their first full-time position in student affairs.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to use the constructs of Schlossberg's Transition theory (Schlossberg, 1995) to explore the experiences of new student-affairs professionals who had recently graduated from a college student-development master's program, and their transitions to full-time professional jobs. In this chapter, I examine the school-to-work transition, new professionals in student affairs, competencies needed for new professionals in student affairs, graduate-program preparation, and transition frameworks. In the last section of the chapter, I examine the primary tenets of Schlossberg's transition theory that provided the conceptual framework to guide this study, and also prior research inside and outside of higher education that has used Schlossberg's theory on transition.

### **School-to-Work Transition**

The transition from postsecondary education to the workforce is an important and at times a challenging progression (Holton, 2001; Polach, 2004). School-to-work transition has gained national attention recently as a result of the employer concerns expressed about the level of preparation of students entering the workforce (Lent & Worthington, 1999; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Saks & Ashford, 1997). For instance, as of 2009, fewer than a million students were graduating from graduate programs (Haley, Hephner, & Koutas, 2011).

Different types of research on school-to-work transition have primarily focused on the high-school or undergraduate populations. For example, both Arum and Shavit (1995) and Shavit and Muller (1998) conducted research on vocational education and the graduate's transition to work. Research has also been conducted that focused on prominent career-development theories with respect to school-to-work transitions. Savickas (1999) provided a historical account of career development and how that has applied to the school-to-work

transition. Much like the stages in other transitions, Savickas (1999) described the stages (tentative, trail, and stabilization) one moves through when transitioning from school to work. In other research, Krumboltz and Worthington (1999) argued that one's learning or knowledge is at the heart of a student's transition to work. Swanson and Fouad (1999) considered person-environment theory to be important in the transition. They indicated that equal focus should be given to the person and their new environment and that such balance was valuable when one was assessing the match between the new employee and the employer.

A number of transition-to-work studies also have been done outside of the United States (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Côté, & Bynner, 2008; Ryan, 2001; Tchibozo, 2007). For instance, Kerckhoff (2000) reviewed the education systems of France, Germany, and Great Britain. He found there were differences in how young people transition from school to work based on their educational systems. There appears to be a lack of research on the school-to-work transition in the United States. Research on graduate students and their transition into their first full-time careers also appears to be lacking.

### **New Professionals in Student Affairs**

The literature indicates that new student-affairs professionals come from a range of undergraduate backgrounds and from all different types of institutions (Cilente et al., 2006; Hirt, 2006). In this context, Harned and Murphy (1998) stated that “most student affairs staff fall into the profession through an engaging undergraduate experience, rather than through some longstanding professional vision, the dedication and the passion of a new professional is our greatest asset” (p. 45).

Student-affairs professional organizations have recognized the need to provide additional guidance to those entering the student-affairs workforce. In 1998, Amey and Ressor published a

monograph called *Beginning Your Journey: A Guide for New Professionals in Student Affairs*. Each chapter in this book included case studies and resource information for new professionals. Additionally, in 2004, Magolda and Carnaghi authored a book entitled *Job One*; then in 2014, they published *Job One 2.0*, which documents the experiences of new professionals.

In addition to the research focused on the experiences of new professionals, research has been conducted in the area of supervision of new student-affairs professionals. For example, Barham and Winston (2006) studied both the new professional and the new professional's supervisor to identify gaps in supervision. Through this study, they determined that new professionals could express their needs and wants to their supervisor. However, they reported that the supervision seemed to lack professional development (Barham & Winston, 2006). Studies on synergistic supervision (the idea that a supervisor is comprehensive in one's approach to supervision) also have been conducted with new professionals, and researchers have found that this relationship plays a key role in the new professionals' job satisfaction (Harned & Murphy 1998; Saunders et al., 2000; Shupp & Arminio 2012; Tull, 2006).

Other research has been conducted on the attrition of these new professionals. Winston and Creamer (1997), for example, suggested lack of supervision as one of the principle factors in attrition. Some researchers reported the attrition rate of new professionals at 40% to 60% during their first 5 years of employment (Lorden 1998; Tull, 2006; Ward, 1995). Bender (1980) suggested the lack of job satisfaction was also an issue. In their work, Wood, Winston, & Polkisnik (1985) mentioned the lack of independence in the entry-level positions and the micromanagement from the next level up as contributing factors for the attrition of new professionals. Winston and Creamer (1997) cited low wages, lack of "life work balance," the



low regard for student-affairs work on some campuses, and their struggle to move out of the entry level position as reasons for the loss of new professionals in the field.

### **Competencies for New Professionals in Student Affairs**

A number of studies have examined expectations for new student-affairs professionals. Lovell and Kosten (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of 30 years of research on competencies and personal traits for student-affairs professionals. In this analysis, the two studies related to new professionals. In earlier studies, Newton and Richardson (1976) and Ostroth (1981) indicated the importance of human-relations skills, group-counseling skills, having an understanding of how to work with minority students, and management skills. Herdlein (2004) asked 50 chief student-affairs officers to comment on their perception of graduate-school preparation for new professionals. The outcome of this study supported the importance of management skills, particularly around budgeting, and also identified the importance of relational skills. In addition, the study identified valuable personal attributes such as critical thinking, flexibility, and problem solving.

Burkard, Cole, Ott, and Stoflet (2005) conducted research with mid- and senior-level student-affairs administrators regarding competencies for new professionals. This study both validated prior studies and suggested additional competencies as a result of the changing nature of higher education, including such factors as technology. This study identified 32 essential competencies for new student-affairs professionals, with the top seven being personal qualities such as flexibility and interpersonal relations, time-management, multiple-task-management, problem-solving, and written and oral communication skills. Following the personal qualities were the human-relation skills such as teambuilding, counseling, understanding others different than oneself, and group facilitation. This study also identified research and report-writing skills,

proficiencies that had not been identified in the previous studies. Understanding what is expected of new professionals in student affairs is helpful to graduate-school faculty, supervisors, and the new professional themselves because these required skills impact the new professional's professional development (Burkard et al., 2005).

Kretovics (2002) conducted research on entry-level competencies and his findings were similar to those of Burkard et al. (2005). However, his research also suggested that a new professional should have a personal commitment to diversity. Kretovics (2002) clearly understood this commitment might be hard to measure, but it was an area that proved to be an important competency in his study results.

In a more recent study, Dickerson et al. (2011) conducted research that compared the expectations of senior student-affairs officers (SSAO) and preparatory program faculty expectations for the competencies of new professionals. The results of the research indicated that the SSAO and program faculty had the same desired competencies for new professionals. These authors arranged the competencies into the three subgroups of knowledge, skill, and disposition (Dickerson et al., 2011).

### **Graduate Programs and New Professionals**

Although some research has been conducted on the relationship between student-affairs graduate programs of study and a new professional's first job (Kretovics, 2002; Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Palmer, 1995), the literature seems to lack inquiry about how to prepare students for the transition into their first job. For instance, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) provided suggestions to graduate-program faculty regarding helping new professionals in the student-affairs field. The researchers suggested that graduate programs teach students how to find mentors and how to be self-directed in their learning. In their study, Kuk and Hughes (2003) discuss bridging the

competency gap for new professionals by encouraging programs that focus on quality-assurance standards and outcomes.

There have also been studies about the experiences of the student-affairs new professionals during their first year of employment. Clegorne (2012) found that those new professionals who are self-motivated with a clear understanding of their purpose were more likely to stay in the field. Fried (2011) suggested that engaging new professionals early can cultivate their skills and encourage new professionals to stay in the field. Renn and Hodges (2007) suggested relationships, fit, and competence as important themes for new professionals' first year on the job. Amey and Ressor (2002) and Magolda and Carnighi (2004), although their research was not empirical in nature, offered insights into the transition from school to work in their yearlong narrative studies with new professionals. They identified relationship formation, mentor seeking, and understanding life-work balance as themes for employers to keep in mind.

Although there is some literature on the experiences of new professionals in the student-affairs field, this literature seems lacking in the exploration of the feelings and strategies these professionals used during their transition. Once again, as noted previously, the importance to the student-affairs professional and profession of understanding the transition for new professionals is comparable to the value to educators and hiring professionals of understanding the similar transition of today's college-student.

### **Transition Framework**

Transition frameworks grew out of change, crisis theories, and cultural adjustment. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) wrote about the W-Curve Hypothesis Model, which was based on Lysgaard's (1955) U-Curve Theory of Cultural Adjustment. The basis for research with the U-Curve model was students traveling abroad and how they related to culture shock. Gullahorn

and Gullahorn (1963) expanded this model to the W-Curve and wrote about the five stages of that model: (a) honeymoon, (b) culture shock, (c) initial adjustment, (d) mental isolation, and (e) acceptance and integration. Many years later, Zeller and Mosier (1993) found that the W-Curve also could be applied to first-year college students in transition.

In other work, Moos and Tsu (1976) described a crisis as short intervals of time when problems occur and the individual must work out ways of handling the problem. Parkes (1971) used the term *psychosocial transition* to describe when individuals have to let go of their assumptions and develop new coping mechanisms within the change. Similarly, Waechler (1974) maintained that transitions contribute to one's psychosocial development as one has to adapt to the change. In 1980, Bridges described *transition* as "the natural process of disorientation and reorientation that marks the turning points of growth" (p. 5). Brammer and Abergo (1981) defined *transition* as a change that connects one with personal awareness that causes a new behavior. In a similar way, Mercer, Nichols, and Doyle, (1989) indicated that transitions are "turning points, a point of reference from which a person's life course takes a new direction requiring adaptation or change" (p. 2). As another example, Sugarman's 7-stage model of transitions (1986) emphasized both the emotional and physical facets of transition and, in particular, transitions involving unexpected life events. The first stage in Sugarman's (1986) model is immobilization, the shock that this event is happening. This stage is followed by the second phase, reaction, which in most cases leads to the third phase, self-doubt or despair. The fourth phase is letting go, which requires one to leave the past and move to the unknown. One can then move to the fifth phase, testing new options and, finally, the sixth phase, reflecting on or making meaning of the experience.

### **Bridges Transition Theory**

Unlike the other transition theories listed previously, the Bridges Model of Transition (1980) starts with how one reacts to endings. William Bridges (1991, 2000, and 2003) and Susan Mitchell-Bridges (2000) have studied transitions using a model with three stages of transition: endings, the neutral zone, and new beginnings. Bridges and Mitchell-Bridges (2000) found that “times of transitions are becoming the rule rather than the exception” (p. 5). Bridges (2003) belief is that transition is about letting go of one’s old ways so that one can enter into the neutral zone. It is during this in-between stage that one’s point of reference needs to be adjusted. The third and final phase is when one makes a new beginning, and Bridges (2003) noted that this 3-stage process is like a cycle and can be continuous. Bridges (2003) also suggested that an individual experiences transition based on where that individual is at the point of transition. Schlossberg’s transition theory (1995) has provided the context for others to study the transition skills of the individual experiencing the change.

### **Schlossberg’s Transition Theory**

The work of Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006), Schlossberg (1984), and Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) has provided a structure for those working with adults in transition. This structure incorporates both the academic and personal demands of transitions and an understanding the coping mechanisms used. Specifically, Schlossberg (1981) stated that “a transition is not so much the matter of change as of the individual perception of the change. A transition is only a transition if it is so defined by the person experiencing it” (p. 7). When an experience reworks one’s habits, norms, and interactions, one is more likely to be affected by the transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Further, Schlossberg et al. (1995)

stated, “The transitions differ, but the structure for understanding individuals in transition is stable” (p. 26).

Modeled after the work of Bridges (1991) and others, Schlossberg (1995) developed a transition framework with four constructs that impact one’s ability to cope with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies. This theory is often referred to as the 4 S system of transition theory. The first factor, *situation*, describes the circumstances one is facing during the transition. *Self*, the next factor, explains how one’s experiences impact the individual’s transition. The safety net in place to help one’s transition describes *support*, the third factor. The final factor, *strategies*, focuses on the individual’s current coping mechanisms, which will help them positively navigate through transitions (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Goodman, 2006). This framework is psychosocial in nature, does not have an age/stage component like other student-development theories do, and relies heavily on other theories and ideas and on Schlossberg’s own work with adults (Evans, Forney, Guido, Parron, & Renn, 2010). As Evans et al. have noted, a “need existed to develop a framework that would facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and aid them in connecting to the help they needed to cope with the *ordinary and extraordinary process of living*” (Evans, et al., 2010, p. 213). Schlossberg (1984) defined a transition as “any event or nonevent that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions and/or within the setting of self, work, family health and/or economics” (p. 43). Whether the transition is an event or a nonevent, it is important to understand the meaning of the transition based on type, context, and impact. The *type* is where the transition takes place (work, home, etc.), and the *context* would be the relationship to this transition (oneself, a spouse, a mom, etc.). Finally, *impact* relates to the degree to which the transition alters one’s ability to function (Evans et al, 2010; Schlossberg, 1995).

Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory has been used to help academic professionals and others understand how adults prepare for ("move in"), "move through," or end ("move out" of) a transition. Preparing for or *moving in* is the process of leaving one's known context behind and entering a new, exciting one. After the moving-in phase, the process of adjustment and learning the day-to-day routine is called *moving through*. Finally, *moving out* is all about where one goes from here. This stage also indicates that one cycle of transition has been completed. The theory has further developed into a framework that is used to illustrate and explain the necessary coping mechanisms that make the transitions more comprehensible (Evans et al., 2010). These four major factors influence how an individual copes with the transition: (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) coping strategies, known as the 4 S system. These four constructs, which are discussed in more detail in the following sections, work together to help provide resources for individuals in transition.

### **Situation**

Schlossberg (1995) evaluated a situation in terms of the following factors: (a) *triggers* (what triggered the event); (b) *timing* (considered "on-time" or "off-time"); (c) *control* (the amount of power one has through the transition); (d) *role change* (whether a role change occurs and, if so, whether the change is considered a gain or a loss); (e) *duration* (whether the situation is temporary or permanent); (f) *previous experience with a similar experience* (whether this has happened before and one coped with the transition successfully); (g) *concurrent stress* (whether there any other stress present in one's life); and (h) *assessment* (who is responsible for this transition). The next three factors of the 4 S system draw upon one's experience with previous, similar transitions, what other stressors are going on at the same time, and who is responsible for this transition (Evans et al, 2010; Goodman, 2006; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

## **Self**

Schlossberg (1995) highlighted two categories of self. The first is personal and includes demographic characteristics such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, health, and ethnicity. The second includes psychological resources that comprise ego development, outlook, commitment, values, resilience, and spirituality (Schlossberg, 1995). These first two characteristics work in conjunction with one other when an individual is experiencing transition. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) discussed psychological resources as the “personality characteristics that people draw upon to help them withstand threats” (p. 5). One’s demographics can impact one’s psychological state, and vice versa. Social constructs around the power and privilege associated with aspects of identity can also impact one’s sense of self (Doolin 2002; Halford & Leonard, 1998).

## **Support**

The support one receives during a transition might be the most influential piece for the individual to move successfully through the process, and Schlossberg (1995) divides support into three parts. First is the *type* of support one receives, such as from family, friends, partner, and workplace. *Function* is the second category of support, which includes the affection, affirmation, and honest feedback one receives during this transition. Finally, *measurement* of this support is also important (Evans et al, 2010; Goodman, 2006; Schlossberg 1995; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Goodman (2006) suggested that support can be measured based on stability, or whether the support is likely to change.

Kahn and Antonucci (1980) indicated that individuals move through life with a group of significant others who give and receive support within three circles or levels. The basis of the framework in this context is that the group surrounding the individual represents the smallest



circle and contains the individual and close family members. The larger middle circle contains close friends and family relatives, and the roles in this circle are stable. The outermost circle is made up of community agencies, coworkers, and distant relatives. The roles in the outermost circle are changing constantly.

Some new professionals gain support through mentoring. The emphasis on mentoring as a way to support a new professional has been studied extensively. Among the many different types of mentoring, the literature suggests formal peer mentoring as a good source of support for a new employee, and indicates that organizations should expand their thinking of peer mentoring programs (Allen, McManus & Russell 1999; Kram & Isabella, 1985). There are also studies on mentoring programs involving nonpeers and the positive impact of those programs on new employees (Chao, 1997; Le Maistre, Boudreau, & Paré, 2006). Group mentoring also has been introduced to support new employees (Dansky, 1996; Mitchell, 1999). Other studies indicate that having a mentor increases an employee's socialization and commitment to the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Cawyer, Simonds, & Davis, 2002; Heimann & Pittenger, 1996; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992).

## **Strategies**

When individuals are outside of their comfort zones, they rely on coping mechanisms to normalize their feelings (Craine, 2007). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) explained coping to be “any response that serves to prevent, avoid, or control emotional distress” (p. 3). Strategies, the last of the 4 Ss, has been broken down into two categories, with multiple subcategories for each. The first category, with three subcategories, includes the description of coping responses one gives in a transition: (a) those that modify the situation, (b) those that control the meaning, and (c) those that aid one in dealing with the aftermath (Schlossberg, 1995). In relation to those

responses, individuals may then employ one of these four coping modes: (a) information seeking, (b) direct action, (c) inhibition of action, and (d) intrapsychic behavior (Schlossberg, 1995).

In a 2011 study by Cooper-Thomas, Anderson, and Cash, 19 newcomer adjustment strategies emerged (role modeling, doing, gathering, following, waiting, attending, asking, talking, reading, networking, negotiating, socializing, befriending, exchanging, giving, flattering, minimizing, proving, and teaming), with the last seven strategies (befriending, exchanging, giving, flattering, minimizing, proving, and teaming) being newly identified since previous research (Ashford & Black, 1996; Feldman & Brett, 1983; Kozlowski, 1992; Kramer, 1993; Miller & Jablin, 1991, Bauer, & Green, 1994). Much earlier, the research of Harned and Murphy (1998) focused on four tenants they suggested as different coping strategies for new professionals; these strategies were anchored in the institution, profession, supervisor, and new professional. In each of these relationships, Harned and Murphy (1998) suggested the following strategies: In the profession-institution relationship, there must be institutional commitment to the young professionals, and the profession-new professional relationship should include conference activities or opportunities for professional development.

### **Schlossberg's Transition Theory in Higher Education**

Recent research has been conducted on different affinity groups in higher education and their transitions. However, none of these studies involves new professionals. In an earlier study, Jackson and Heggins (2003) followed the transition experience of Asian international students in the US system of higher education. This study identified seven factors ("choice, adjustment, communication, learning, participation, family pressures and traditional values," p. 379) that influenced their development. Additionally, Tovar and Simon (2006) used Schlossberg's theory

as the framework to create a reorientation program for Latino students attending a community college. And Rumann and Hamrick (2010) studied veteran students and their transition back into higher education after they had returned from service.

### **Other Research Studies Using Schlossberg's Transition Theory**

Although most of the transition models have been used in the counseling field (Goodman et al., 2006), there have been studies that used the framework to assess transitions within the fields of adult learning (Courtney, 1992; Levinson, 1978) and career development (Blustein, 2006; Leibowitz & Schlossberg, 1982). In addition, a number of more recent studies in the field of nursing use Schlossberg's theory to explore new nurses and their transitions (Dela Cruz, Farr, Klakovich, & Esslinger, 2013; Ellerton & Gregor, 2003; Poronsky, 2011). These studies have indicated that the transition from student nurse to professional nurse was challenging. The new nurses were not ready for transition, and many did not know where to find their support (Poronsky, 2011).

Finally, other studies using the Schlossberg's transition framework as the theoretical lens have involved secondary-education (Marks & Jones Robb, 2004; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2011) and professional-athlete (Pearson & Petitpas 1990; Sinclair & Orlick 1993) transitions. Again, the results of these studies pointed out the challenges associated with a transition.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to use the constructs of Schlossberg's transition theory (1995) to explore the experiences of new student-affairs professionals who had recently graduated from a college student-development master's program, and their transitions to full-time professional jobs. This study provides insights on new student-affairs professionals' experiences during this transition from graduate school to work during the first 6 months of their new employment.

### **Research Questions**

To accomplish the purpose of this study—using the constructs of Schlossberg's transition theory (1995) to explore the experiences of new student-affairs professionals who had recently graduated from a college student-development master's program and their transitions to full-time professional jobs—the following research questions were used:

1. What are the personal and demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity, religion, relationship status, undergraduate degree, location and size of master's-degree program's institution, functional area, and location of professional job) of the study participants?
2. How do participants view their transition situation?
3. What support systems do the study participants perceive to be available to them in this transition process?
4. What strategies do the study participants use to manage their transition?
5. How do the identified support groups and the transitions strategies change over the 5-month time period?

## **Research Design and Rationale for Qualitative Research**

Because this study was about understanding human experience and behaviors, the researcher approached this study using the constructivist paradigm (Husserl, 1936/1970; Kant, 1781/1966). Guba and Lincoln (2005) claimed that humans construct different realities. They would also argue that one's reality is constructed by reflecting upon experiences and interactions with others. Additionally, there are solid connections between phenomenology and constructivism (Chiari & Nuzzo, 1996) because the concern is with one's personal views about a particular situation. Also, Kuh and Andreas (1991) mentioned that qualitative research has "the potential to offer penetrating insights into the complexities and subtleties of college and university life" (p. 403).

In this current study, the researcher utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach and the constructs of Schlossberg's transition theory to gain a deeper understanding of how new professionals felt about the transitions and strategies used during their first 6 months in a new job. This approach required the participants to share their thoughts and perceptions about transitioning from graduate school to a full-time employment setting. In addition, this approach required that the researcher ask the participants to reflect personally and professionally in regard to the areas of transition. More specifically, the participants responded to a set of questions provided by the researcher each month over a 5-month period.

### **Pilot Study**

The researcher conducted a pilot study in summer 2014. This pilot study included 12 participants who were graduating from eight different college student-development master's

programs. All of these programs were located at medium-size institutions. Table 1 lists the summary of findings for the pilot study.

Table 1

*Summary of Pilot Study Findings*

Themes	General Feelings	Transition Strategies
Community	Not being a part of a community Missing having roommates Feeling isolated	Finding a church Meeting with colleagues
Routine	Feeling more settled/belonging Setting routine early Life-work balance Time away	Spending time with family Running or other physical activity Carving out personal time
Timing Process	Understanding that it is a process	Using self-talk

In this study, participants were asked to keep an online journal for the first 6 months of their new employment. In addition, a final phone interview was conducted to ask each participant about the online journaling process and to check the clarity of the questions asked each month. The participants all agreed the questions and directions were clear. The participants expressed that the online journaling was not difficult or time consuming; however, they felt that it ran a month too long. Some participants indicated that they had responded similarly in month 5 and month 6, which suggests the participants might have reached their saturation point (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Cobrin, 1990). For the later dissertation study, participants were asked to respond to a set of questions over the course of their 5-month transition period from school to work.

In addition to their feedback about journaling in the pilot study, the participants shared a suggestion about the researcher providing a focus group at the end of the study. Half of the participants mentioned they would have liked to meet the other participants in the study. They

thought a focus group would help normalize what they were feeling regarding their transition. This was helpful information, and a focus group was added to the data collection in the final (dissertation) study. The addition of the focus group allowed participants the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher and each other. The focus group also allowed the researcher to perform member checking with the analysis of the journaling process (Cassell & Symon, 2004).

During the pilot study, the researcher analyzed data as it was collected each month. During a number of months, the researcher wished she had added a question to follow up on a previous month's themes that emerged from the data.

## **Study Methods**

### **Participant Selection**

The researcher gained approval from the Colorado State University (CSU) Institutional Research Board (IRB) to secure participants and begin collecting data. Once approved, the researcher began to gather participants who were graduate students who had completed their degree from a college student-development master's program from across the United States. This study used "purposeful sampling" to find participants who could provide "information-rich cases" (Patton, 1990). The researcher sent an e-mail to all college student-development master's-program directors. The e-mail (Appendix A) explained the study and included an informational flyer (Appendix B) the directors could send to the students who were graduating from their program. Within a week of sending out the invitations to the graduate programs, the researcher identified more than 30 students interested in participating. An initial invitation (Appendix D) was sent to all participants. Some additional participants were identified through the snowball sampling technique (Mertens & Wilson, 2012).

All participants provided demographic information (Appendix E), which included gender; race; age; undergraduate major, institution, and year completed; graduate degree program, institution, and area of employment; relationship status; new institution and area of employment; and general transitional information. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent waiver (Appendix F). The participants assigned themselves a pseudonym to protect their privacy. Originally, the researcher anticipated conducting analysis on between eight and 12 participants; however, 50 students volunteered to journal each month. The researcher went back to the IRB to amend the sample size and received approval to collect data on 50 participants instead. Because the participant invitation process secured more volunteers than were needed, the researcher used the following criteria to narrow down the participants:

- Participants who answered every month's online journaling questions
- Gender diversity
- Ethnic and racial diversity
- All seven Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) location represented (see Appendix C for regions)
- Ten different student-affairs functional areas

After the sample was narrowed, 13 participants matched all of the above parameters, and the online journals of these participants were then analyzed.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection took place for 5 months, from April 2015 to August 2015, using a monthly, online-journal format. The researcher felt that these 5 months would provide a number of different transitions for the participants (ending graduate school, searching for a job, relocating, starting a new job, etc.). However, there was no theoretical reason behind the



decision to have participants journal once a month; the decision was made arbitrarily. The results from the researcher's pilot study, however, provided some data that this schedule seemed to work for the earlier participants.

The researcher sent the study timeline to participants (Appendix G) with the demographic information request and consent waiver. At the beginning of each month, the researcher also sent the participants an e-mail directing them to a new set of posted journal questions (Appendix H). A reminder e-mail was sent to those participants who had not responded at the third week of the month, to remind them of when the set of journals were due (Appendix I). All participants received the same questions. Each participant's responses were confidential. Demographic questions and information regarding how the student felt about the overall transitions were added to the first set of questions (Appendix E). In months 2, 3, 4, and 5, the researcher asked the participants the same five questions, which are outlined in Appendix J. Each participant was asked to write at least a paragraph in response to each question, and it was suggested that a paragraph was to contain no fewer than six to eight sentences.

In the sixth month, following the last online collection, the researcher set up an online focus group for all participants (see Appendix K). The purpose of this 1-hour focus group was threefold. First, it was important to gather feedback on the process of the study to understand what worked well for the participants and what might need to be adjusted if there were future studies. Second, the focus groups gave participants the opportunity to talk about their transition with the researcher and others. Finally, the focus groups were a way for the researcher to check with participants regarding the themes that emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the study. Participants were given open-ended, simple questions around the Schlossberg constructs, which made template analysis appropriate for this study (King, 1998). Template analysis has a phenomenological alignment while it also provides a structure and framework for the use of an existing theory (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Specifically, template analysis

Involves the construction of a coding template that comprises codes representing themes identified in the data through careful reading and rereading of the text. Codes are organized hierarchically so the highest level of codes represent broad themes in the data, with lower levels indexing more narrowly focused themes within these themes. It is important to note that codes are specified not only for the themes found in most or all transcripts [,] but also for those that are salient in only a small minority of transcripts. (King, Carroll, Newton, & Dornan, 2002, p. 333)

Chambers (2010) wrote, “template analysis can interpret data at both ends of the spectrum ... it can produce codes that rigidly adhere to the predetermined codes [; and] it can manoeuver around flexible template [,] allowing an open adaptable interpretation to occur” (p. 26). Different than phenomenological and grounded-theory analysis, template analysis encourages the use of *priori* codes, typically guided by the literature, and the researcher’s experience and previous research (King et al., 2002). For this study, the researcher used Schlossberg’s 4 S transition-theory constructs (self, situation, support, and strategies) as the *priori* codes. The researcher began by developing an initial template using Schlossberg’s theory (1995) and the researcher’s pilot study to outline the high-level coding template. The initial template (Appendix L) allowed analysis of the four constructs in Schlossberg’s theory at the five points of transition. The researcher used the initial template and analyzed each 4 S construct separately. Developing the codes and templates was just the beginning of the process. Other functions of this

interpretation method are to find the overarching themes and to identify the themes that might not have been part of the templates (King 1998). After the template analysis was completed, the researcher read all the journals again to look for themes outside of the template hierarchy (King, 1998). When the emergent-theme analysis was complete, the researcher revisited the template analysis to answer and expand on the study's research questions. The results of this study are discussed in chapter 4.

### **Trustworthiness**

The researcher was conscious of the importance of trustworthiness throughout the research process because trustworthiness is vital to a qualitative study (Creswell, 1998). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility, which involves the use of well-tested research methods, is a key factor in addressing trustworthiness. To learn from other scholars, the researcher reviewed several phenomenological research studies using journaling as the data-collection method (Blake, 2005; Caelli, 2001; Hayman, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012; Smith, 1999). The researcher used the experience gained in the pilot study that preceded the primary study to make adjustments to improve the design of the primary study.

The use of the online journaling technique ensured that the data collected was what the participants actually felt, and that approach left little room for misinterpretations or transcription errors. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to decrease subjectivity (Given, 2008). Furthermore, one purpose of the focus group was to member check the entries with the participants to make sure that what was indicated in the study was how the participants remembered feeling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is an important part of any qualitative study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln 2009). The researcher relied on class members (peer debriefing) to look at data to check the emerging themes (Guba & Lincoln, 1989;

Lincoln 2009). The peer debriefing was important because the researcher was keenly aware she could have been empathic, which could have biased how she analyzed the data.

Finally, the researcher maintained a journal during this process (Janesick, 1999). “This provided basic process procedures and decisions made at the time so the researcher did not need to depend on later recall” (C. Makela, personal communication, May, 5, 2014). In addition, since the researcher was using template analysis to review the data, journaling allowed the researcher to tie the data back to the theory, a process that promotes reflexivity (University of Huddersfield, 2014).

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to use the constructs of Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, 1995) to explore the experiences of new student-affairs professionals who had recently graduated from a college student-development master's program, and their transitions to full-time professional jobs.

In this chapter, the 13 participants are introduced in the Overview of the Participants section. Next, the researcher shares the template-analysis (King, 1998) findings, applying Schlossberg's (1995) 4 S transition-theory constructs (self, situation, support, and strategies). In addition to the four constructs, the data are reported over a 5-month period, from April through August. Each month is referred to as a *transition*, with April being transition 1; May, transition 2; and so on through August. After reporting the template analysis, the researcher presents the three main themes that emerged independent of the template analysis. Individual themes are identified and discussed for each of the research questions. Finally, the focus-group findings are reported.

### Overview of the Participants

After the researcher narrowed the sample of potential participants as noted in chapter 3, 13 final participants surfaced, and their experiences were analyzed for this study. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to preserve anonymity. The following are descriptions of the 13 participants (see Table 2 for a summary of the participants' demographic data):

**Raven** was a single, White female with an undergraduate degree in psychology; she received her master's degree from a midsize, state institution in the Midwest. She did not report a religious preference. She worked for 3 years as a full-time, student-affairs professional and for

4 years outside of student affairs before she began graduate school. She was currently working in career development in the NASPA IV-E region.

**Ella** was a single, White female with an undergraduate degree in political science; she received her master's degree from a midsize, state institution in the Southeast. She did not report a religious preference. Ella had 3 years of full-time, student-affairs experience before she began graduate school. She was working as a STEM counselor in the NASPA III region.

**Lisa** had a domestic partner, was Hispanic, and was agnostic. Her undergraduate degree was in biological sciences; she completed her master's degree from the same midsize, Midwest state institution where she completed her undergraduate degree. Lisa had 2 years of full-time, student-affairs experience before she began graduate school. She had secured a position in residence life in the NASPA IV-W region.

**Shannon** was a single, White, Catholic female. Her undergraduate degree was in both communications and pastoral ministry. She completed her master's degree from a private, midsize institution in the Midwest. Shannon had no prior work experience before she entered her master's program. She had secured a position in residence life in the NASPA IV-W region.

**Jamie** was a Black, Christian female in a committed relationship. Her undergraduate degree was in communications; she received her master's degree from the same midsize, state university in the South where she completed her undergraduate degree. She had no prior work experience before she entered her master's program. She had secured a position in residence life in the NASPA I region.

**James** was a White male, engaged to be married. He graduated with a Bachelor's of Arts in Communications degree; he received his master's degree from a midsize, state institution in the Southeast. James did not report a religious preference, and he had no prior work experience

before he began his master's degree. He was working in a success-coach position in the NASPA II region.

**Mills** was a White female, engaged to be married. She received a double major in communication and leadership studies for her undergraduate degree at a midsize, state institution in the Midwest, where she also received her master's degree. She did not list a religious preference, and she had no prior work experience before she entered her master's program. She had secured a position as a dual-degree specialist in the NASPA IV-E region.

**Rory** was a single, White, Catholic male. His undergraduate degree was in history and political science; he received his master's degree from a small, private school in the East. Rory had 2 years of full-time, student-affairs experience before he began graduate school. He had secured a position in Residence Life in the NASPA I region.

**Tracy** was a White, Episcopalian, male with an undergraduate degree in sociology and a master's degree from a midsize, state institution in the East. Tracy worked for 1 year as a full-time, student-affairs professional and for 4 years outside of student affairs before he began graduate school. He had secured a position in Residence Life in the NASPA II region.

**Laurie** was a single, White, Catholic female. Her undergraduate degree was in journalism; she completed her master's degree from a private, midsize institution in the Southeast. Laurie had no prior work experience before she started her master's degree. She was working in orientation programs in the NASPA V region.

**Jade** was a single, Asian, Christian female. Her undergraduate degree was in anthropology; she completed her master's degree from a midsize, state institution in the Midwest. She worked for 1 year as a full-time student-affairs professional and 1 year outside of

Table 2

*Demographics Data: Gender, Age, Ethnicity, Religious Preference, Previous Work Experience, Functional Area, and NASPA Region*

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Religious Preference	Previous Work Experience	Functional Area	NASPA Region
“Raven”	Female	26	White	Not Reported	3 yrs. inside and 4 yrs. outside Student Affairs (SA)	Career Development	NASPA IV-E
“Ella”	Female	24	White	Not Reported	3 yrs. inside SA	Stem Counselor	NASPA III
“Lisa”	Female	24	Hispanic	Agnostic	2 yrs. inside SA	Residence Life	NASPA IV-W
“Shannon”	Female	23	White	Catholic	None	Residence Life	NASPA IV-W
“Jamie”	Female	24	Black	Christian	None	Residence Life	NASPA I
“James”	Male	23	White	Not Reported	None	Success Coach	NASPA II
“Mills”	Female	23	White	Not Reported	None	Dual Degree Specialist	NASPA IV-E
“Rory”	Male	23	White	Catholic	2 yr. inside SA	Residence Life	NASPA I
“Tracy”	Male	28	White	Episcopalian	1 yr. inside and 4 yrs. outside SA	Residence Life	NASPA II
“Laurie”	Female	24	White	Catholic	None	Orientation	NASPA V
“Jade”	Female	25	Asian	Christian	1 yr. inside and 1 yr. outside SA	Career Development	NASPA II
“Sara”	Female	24	White	Christian	1 yr. inside SA	Study Abroad	NASPA VI
“Nikki”	Female	29	Black	Christian	4 yrs. inside and 1 yr. outside SA	Admissions	NASPA VI



student affairs before she began graduate school. She had secured a position in career development in the NASPA II region.

**Sara** was a single, White, Christian female with a double major in mathematics and Spanish. She worked for 1 year outside of student affairs before she began graduate school. She then went on to pursue her master's degree at the same midsize state institution in the Midwest. She was working in a study-abroad office in the NASPA VI region.

**Nikki** was a married, Black female with children and believes in God. She had a Bachelor's of Arts in sociology and then worked for 4 years inside student affairs and 1 year outside of student affairs before she attended a midsize, state institution in the West for both her undergraduate and graduate degrees. She was working in admissions in the NASPA VI region.

### **Template Themes**

The researcher used template analysis to identify the themes, using Schlossberg's transition theory (1995) as the theoretical framework. The researcher analyzed the data using the initial template (Appendix L), which was focused on Schlossberg's four constructs of situation, self, support, and strategies. The researcher provides in this section the analysis of constructs over the five different transition periods. The analysis is presented according to Schlossberg's 4 Ss.

#### **The First S: Situation**

As Schlossberg indicated, *situation* describes the circumstances one is facing during the transition (Goodman, 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995). All participants in this study had different thoughts about their situations related to their transitions. The participants also viewed their transition situations differently over the 5 months of journaling.

**Transition 1—April.** During the first month of journaling, many participants were finishing their graduate-school coursework and searching for full-time employment. For instance, Shannon wrote, “I am currently searching for entry-level, full-time, hall-director positions. It is very important to me that I find a job that I am happy with, specifically in Residence Life.”

Similarly, Lisa wrote,

Currently, I have a contract with my assistantship that lasts until July 1. I like having the security of knowing I have this position until then, and if I receive a job prior to July 1, I am free to go.

The job-search process for Rory was a rewarding one, as he wrote,

Currently I am searching for jobs. It is my first time looking for a job outside of school. The process has its ups and downs, but it is ultimately rewarding. I currently have two on-campus interviews scheduled for the next week, and I am scheduled for phone interviews later. I have also already declined an offer from another school.

Other participants seemed nervous and overwhelmed by the job search process. For example, Mills wrote, “I do not feel that either position [graduate assistantships] has adequately prepared me for full-time employment. I am very nervous about my transition to a full-time professional.”

Similarly, Jamie wrote,

I am currently job searching; it is my priority right now. I’m what you would call a workaholic; it’s challenging not knowing where I would be after graduation. I participated in The Placement Exchange (TPE) as well; I applied to 42 schools, [and] had 17 interviews at TPE, with nine second-round interviews. I currently only have two on campuses, and it makes me nervous; I’m ready to have a job already.

Jade added,

This whole job-search process has been stressful. I find myself feeling down that I haven’t received much contact from schools. I thought I was doing well with 12 interviews from The Placement Exchange. However, student-activities jobs have a slower timeline than residential-life jobs.

Raven, James, and Ella were bound by location with their search. Raven wrote, “I do not know what I’ll be doing. I hope to continue living with my aunt while I job search since I want to stay in Milwaukee.”

James, too, was bound by location and found he needed to be flexible with this job choice, however not with location. He wrote,

My employment situation is extremely important to me. My fiancée currently works as a full-time teacher in New York City and, with our wedding in late July, it would certainly be ideal if I had a job in the area by then. Because my search is so location bound, I am much more flexible with functional areas that I’m willing to work in, but would prefer to be working in a role related to student activities.

Ella was adamant about her search location and wrote,

I need to keep in mind that my search is so narrow because my partner and I want to continue our life together and move toward the next step. I will figure it out. I will find a job; it may not be my dream job, but your first one doesn’t have to be. I am confident in my ability and the past experiences I’ve had—but the uncertainty just really gets to me. My partner and I are moving into a new house and will actually live together. That alone will make things manageable. If I need to work part-time or wait tables for a little while, so be it. Location is key for me, and I’m not willing to give up on that.

Two participants secured their full-time positions during this first transition period.

Tracy wrote, “I am currently employed as a Resident Director in a first-year residence hall. I will supervise 18 Resident Assistants, and all of us oversee a building of approximately 650 first-year students.”

Laurie had also accepted a position and wrote,

I have recently accepted and started my first full-time job in the student-affairs field, which I am very proud of and excited for. It was important to me that I have a job by graduation (or before, as is what ended up being the case for me) because I was eager to start working in the field, and I wanted to ensure that I would have a source of income.

One participant, Nikki, was working full-time while she attended graduate school, so her transition was out of graduate school. She wrote, “I am already working full-time, so there is not going to be a huge ‘transition.’”

**Transition 2—May.** By this point, some participants already had completed commencement activities, while others were excited about graduating. Some participants had accepted full-time positions, and others were still searching for jobs. Those who were still looking for employment felt overwhelmed and concerned. Shannon wrote, “I am unsure as to what is next. I am in a unique position of being done with graduate school and my assistantship and not beginning my new position.”

On a similar note, Raven wrote,

Right now I just finished two on-campus interviews and will have a phone interview next Tuesday. I'm thankful that universities are reaching out to me, but now I'm worried about receiving an offer or not. What do I do if I receive multiple offers? What if the job I'm wanting the most doesn't offer before other places? I'm somewhat scared for when that moment comes...

Some participants were still looking for a position, but felt that the transition process was manageable. For example, Lisa wrote, “I am going into the unknown, so I honestly have no idea how things are going to happen; but right now, I feel confident in managing my transition.”

James agreed and wrote,

This situation will be manageable, although I also acknowledge that it will certainly be tough. Although I don't know exactly what role I'll be serving, working in or around New York City will absolutely be a significant transition from working on a “typical” college campus.

The participants who had secured employment were making the necessary arrangements. As an example, Shannon wrote, “Being that I'll be moving across the country, I am not denying that it will be a difficult transition, but one I need to prepare for now.”

Laurie added,

Now that I have moved across the country and have gotten settled into my new home, I feel that the transition is much more manageable than it was during the actual move. I am learning my way around my new city and am learning more about my duties at my job.

Jade was moving as well and wrote,

Since I know where I am going, it makes it easier to create tasks of what needs to be given away, things to be sold, clothes to be packed, or items to be mailed to my new office. In addition, the staff at the new institution is very helpful and willing to give advice on housing to make my transition easier.

Networking is what Sara did to make arrangements for her next step. She wrote,

I met many people while I was at my job interview who made me feel like I can easily create a friendship group when I move there, and many friends here in my hometown have put me in contact with individuals in my new city that I can reach out to upon arrival. Having these connections before I leave has been extremely comforting.

Nikki, who worked full-time during graduate school wrote,

I am already working full-time, so there is not going to be a huge “transition.” I also am struggling with staying in my current position, seeking new opportunities, or giving myself a couple years before moving on. I never really know what the best journey or decision is, and this is what ultimately makes me more hesitant when thinking about transitioning to something new.

**Transition 3—June.** At this transition, all study participants are employed. Some were excited that the search process was over, and others were moving to the next step in their transition. Those who were not employed the previous month were excited that the job search process was over.

Raven wrote, “...employed! I obtained a job, and I am doing a job I want to do!”

Similarly, Lisa wrote, “Excited. I just accepted a position this week, so I am beginning the paperwork, and it is getting me very excited for this transition.”

Ella added,

Feeling much more positive and encouraged. I’ve had several job interviews this month, and got offers from two [institutions]! I have informally accepted a job, pending a background check. The 6 weeks after graduation felt like 6 months while job searching.

Those participants who had secured employment in previous months were dealing with the realities of that transition. Jamie wrote, “I am at ease. I am not concerned at all about what’s

to come except for how I am going to pay for this transition, considering my travel expenses are not reimbursed.”

Rory wrote,

In late May I graduated. Over the past 2 weeks I have made the transition of moving from old job to my new job. I now work as a Residence Hall Director. I find myself learning new policies, procedures, and the protocols of my department. I am also learning more and more about my new home. I find myself excited and energized about the work that I will be conducting on campus.

Likewise, Mills wrote,

I am thriving. I enjoy coming to work each day and facing new challenges. In my position, I am building a program from the bottom up, so it is great to see the small successes along the way. The program has great support from around campus, so it is easy to collaborate with others.

Tracy added,

Feeling excited! The summer is proving to be a nice time to catch up and get acquainted and reoriented. It's nice to be able to figure everything out without the students here, because I know once they get here it will be tough to keep pace.

During this transition, Laurie wrote,

Adjusting really well. The first month was pretty rough as I moved across the country to a place where I didn't know anyone. For the first couple weeks, I was worried that I hadn't made friends yet. I began to think I wouldn't make any. However, I learned that it just takes a bit more time when you're not in a setting where your friends are easily built in (ex: student organizations in undergrad, a cohort in grad school, etc.). I hope it does not take too long.

In contrast, Nikki, who was employed full-time while in school, began to question her next steps, noting that

I [am] too much of a “worker bee,” that I am not being looked at for a promotion due to losing my work capabilities? Am I on the right track in my career? Should I be looking to move institutions even though I love where I am at and really do not want to go to another school? When I think of transition, I think of change, and sometimes change can be scary. The unknown is always a bit scary for me and difficult to handle, and I need to learn to trust in my abilities that no matter where I go or what I do, I'm going to be excellent at my job!

**Transition 4—July.** During this transition, the participants continued to settle into their new experiences. Many participants were moving into new cities, and some of them were moving across the country. Some participants were excited about their new jobs. Ella, for example, wrote, “I am happy to be in a full-time position and feeling like the work I am [doing]/will do will make a difference. I am excited about having the opportunity to work in a community college.”

Shannon also wrote, “I love this new opportunity!”

Raven added,

I know I deserve this job, but I have worked at quite a few bad jobs in the past. I feel lucky because this is exactly the job I wanted, and this was the only job offer I received. I could not have found a better match.

Laurie was excited about her new position and wrote,

This is Exciting! I feel accomplished after every successful orientation session. Even when we have little things go wrong during the days, I am able to “put out fires” and quickly intervene to fix any errors during the days. My job is always new and different, since every orientation session brings in a new group of incoming students. This transition keeps me on my toes, and I’ve had a lot of fun so far. It’s also exciting that I feel more settled in my personal life; my house is starting to feel like a home, and I’ve been meeting more people and making more friends around the area.

Some participants were still working to feel comfortable with this transition. Jade wrote, “I am slowly becoming an active member of the community. I’m provided with opportunities to get involved as a staff member, and [am] taking advantage of getting to know others in the field.”

In addition, Lisa wrote,

This is the first time I have moved somewhere on my own without anyone here that I already know. My parents are about 13 hours west of here, and my boyfriend and friends are about 17 hours east of here. So I seem to be right in the middle of familiarity. I have never lived somewhere without knowing a friend or a family member nearby, so the introvert in me has been feeling pressure to get out there and meet new people. I went on a hike yesterday by myself and met two very nice people on the trail. I want to get out

and do more activities like that, but right now I am tending to a small sunburn. But I am feeling more comfortable going to local events like farmers' markets and just doing things besides completing a jigsaw puzzle in my apartment alone. I want to socialize, but the introvert in me is still quite anxious. I know it will be easier for me to meet new people when I have my boyfriend out here with me. I am more comfortable checking out new things when I am with someone I know. So in a few weeks, I am sure I'll be more excited and enthusiastic about checking out new things!

James was also working to be comfortable with his new position. He wrote,

I view this transition as an opportunity for growth but also as a significant challenge. As my first real role as a professional and not a student, this position will take some getting used to, but I'm excited to see how I continue to grow throughout. Although I have just started in this role, I believe this transition will provide me with a wide array of skills, particularly in academic coaching, that I haven't had the opportunity to experience yet.

Although some participants were excited about this process and others were working still working through it, this was the first time in a transition that participants felt the transition was simple and over. Rory wrote, "Now that the initial excitement of moving in and everything [is over], I view the transition as simple."

Mills added,

I view this transition as over. I know exactly what time I have to get up in the morning to be ready on time, I know when to leave my apartment and the quickest way to drive to work, I park in the same spot every day, and I say good morning to the same people. At work, I know what to get done and how to do it. If I don't know how to do it, I know who to ask to assist me. I feel that I have been here longer than I have. This is my eighth week in my role. I am very happy with my choice.

One participant had additional life transitions during this period. James wrote,

I find myself feeling considerably more stress than I would have anticipated. I think with the added difficulties of getting married and moving to a new city, it can sometimes be difficult to organize priorities and stay on top of everything that's going on.

And one participant graduated with her master's degree, continued her full-time job, and was promoted. Nikki felt better about her work experience and wrote,

I have not only impressed my superiors with my work ethic and performance, but [also have received] confirmation that I am continuing to grow and am appreciated for all of



the work I have done thus far in my career. There are so many working parts, and you get shut down or out of things, which tend[s] to discourage you. Nevertheless, receiving this promotion to an Assistant Director has me ecstatic about the new opportunities, traveling, and relationships I will now be able to create and mold during my time in this position.

**Transition 5—August.** At this point, the participants had been in their jobs for 2 months, and many of them felt good about this transition. Lisa wrote, “I am beginning to be successful. I think I am finally getting the hang of the position and the institution.”

Tracy added, “This is exciting! I know that I am going to be getting great experiences helping to lead this team and shape what our department will become.”

Jade also was beginning to feel more comfortable and wrote, “Starting to truly be a part of the community. I’m starting to feel like I’m getting a handle on my position, and I’ve volunteered to [lead] group activities within the division on a social level.”

Rory was excited, as well and added, “As the academic year is coming to a start, I am still trying to learn as much as possible about the university. Overall, the transition is going well and I am excited for this upcoming month.”

Some participants were still working through their transitions. As an example, Ella wrote, “This is one that has taken time to get used to and one that will continue to evolve. I have to remember that you typically don’t jump into work on day 1 and get started; there is a learning curve.”

In this vein, Jamie added, “This is a learning curve and culture shock.”

Raven was one participant who began to question her decisions. She wrote,

I was slightly worried that I accepted the first job offer, but I was interning here since January 2015, and knew I wanted to work with these students specifically. This job incorporated all the things I was looking for, although I worry about the political environment here. I still witness the political “stuff” and unfortunately [am] having to get involved in some of it, but I knew that would happen.

On a related note, James wrote,

I view this transition as a continued part of my education as a student-affairs professional. The search process was daunting and intimidating, but now that it's behind me I know that it has really helped prepare me for future searches and positions. I'm still certainly in the middle of my transition from graduate student to professional, but I'm ecstatic for this first year and timidly look forward to the future hurdles that I know are ahead.

As in transition point 4, some participants felt they had completed this transition. Mills wrote, "I view this transition as complete. I am a young professional, not a new professional. I understand my campus and my role and how I play an integral part in the larger campus community."

Laurie added,

[This transition is] nearing completion. I've been here for 4+ months, and I have made it through my first summer in orientation. I feel comfortable navigating the city and the campus. I feel comfortable in my job duties, but I know that they are flexible and will change in the future when we hire another individual to work in our office, so I am prepared for those changes. I know that transitions are always occurring; but for me, the transition to a new place and my first professional career is feeling pretty complete at this point.

Sara felt some of the same feelings about her situation and wrote,

I view this transition as one that is passing, and soon I will no longer feel in transition at all. I think there will come a point when [new city] feels like home and, although it is a slow process, I can see myself getting there. This has made me realize that transition is inevitable. There will always be other moments when we must experience this state again, and although it can be difficult, the grass will be greener on the other side. I view myself as becoming more comfortable in my new place.

The circumstances of and how the participants viewed their respective situations varied throughout the 5 months of journaling:

- At the first transition, most participants' situations were to finish graduate school and work to secure full-time employment.

- During the second transition period, some participants were preparing to leave their graduate schools, some secured full-time employment, and others were concerned about their job search.
- At the third transition, all of the participants had full-time positions. Those participants who secured positions in previous months were beginning to move into their new positions.
- During the fourth transition, some participants felt settled and comfortable with their situation, and one participant indicated the transition was over.
- Finally, at the fifth transition, many participants felt good about their new situations, and some felt their transitions were over.

Table 3

*Participant Perspectives of Situation, Transitions 1 Through 5*

Schlossberg's 4 Ss	Transition 1— April	Transition 2— May	Transition 3— June	Transition 4— July	Transition 5— August
Situation	All were —finishing school —searching for jobs	All were —finishing school —searching for jobs  Some had —secured employment	All had —secured employment  Some were —relocating	Some were —relocating —transitioning to new environments —starting to feel comfortable	Many felt —good about transitions —that transitions were complete  Some were —still transitioning

**The Second S: Self**

Schlossberg (1995) highlighted two categories of self. The first category was *personal*, which includes demographic characteristics such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, health, and ethnicity. The second category was *psychological resources*, such as ego development, outlook, commitment, values, resilience, and spirituality (Schlossberg, 1995). Following is an overview of what participants journaled regarding their selves during each of the five transition

periods. (Note that each participants' personal demographic information is located in the Overview of the Participants section at the beginning of chapter 4.) A summary of the participants' demographic information is also included in the Research Question 1 section later in the chapter.

**Transition 1—April.** At this transition, some participants had mixed feelings about their graduate school coming to an end, and some were concerned about the upcoming job search. For instance, Mills wrote, “Mostly, I do not ask for advice, I just want someone to listen to me while I process the challenge out loud. I am processing out loud a lot lately.”

Laurie added to Mills' concern when she wrote, “I felt challenged or stressed in graduate school; however, not any more as it is winding down. I now feel it in the job search.”

Sara wrote, “My current employment situation (or graduate assistantship) has not been extremely positive, so I am concerned about securing my first job.”

Two participants disclosed during this transition that they were introverts. Jamie wrote, “I am an introvert; to collect my energy, I color, and to decompress, I made a habit out of going to the movies once a week during graduate school.”

Tracy added, “As an introvert, I also value my time alone—reading for pleasure, or just going for a walk to decompress.” Although Sara never mentioned that she was an introvert, she wrote, “I tend to spend quite a bit of time alone when coping with challenges.”

Ella was thankful for her past experiences during this transition, realizing that those experiences would help her secure her first job. She wrote, “It has been an amazing opportunity for me, and I would not have learned many valuable skills if I would not have had the opportunity.”

Some participants expressed their values regarding their new employment. As an example, Shannon wrote, “I am currently searching for entry-level, full-time, hall-director positions. It is very important to me that I find a job that I am happy with, specifically in Residence Life.”

James agreed with Shannon’s perspective and wrote, “My employment situation is extremely important to me.”

Laurie added, “It was important to me that I have a job by graduation because I was eager to start working in the field, and I wanted to ensure that I would have a source of income.”

During this initial transition, the participants journaled about their previous work experience before they started their master’s-degree program. Seven participants worked in some type of student-affairs capacity before they began graduate school. Their respective years of experience inside student affairs ranged from 1 year to 4 years. Two of these seven participants also worked full-time outside of student affairs for 4 years, and two additional participants worked only one year before they began graduate school. Five participants indicated they had “no prior work experience” before they entered their graduate programs.

In addition to discussing their prior work experience, participants also shared their readiness for transition. Many participants indicated that the topic of transition came up with faculty and supervisors. In particular, Ella wrote, “I also feel lucky to have weekly conversations with my supervisor about what this transition will look like.”

Shannon added, “I have regular class discussions about the job search, ‘life after graduate school,’ and my professor has also made herself available for individual conversations.”

Jade also wrote, “In class we would talk about what to look for when looking for a job. Also, we have had different panels and guest speakers who would talk about their transition.”

Laurie wrote that she too spoke about transition in one of her classes:

...we briefly discussed what it would look like to transition from a graduate assistant to a professional in student affairs. We talked about ethics in a professional position and how we will maintain a good work-life balance, amongst a few other topics.

Tracy added,

We talk about it a lot! The majority of us do not want to be where we attended graduate school for the rest of our lives, and so we talk often about what our next steps will be. A lot of us want to head closer to home, or to some area of the country that we are unfamiliar with.

Other participants indicated that the topic of transition was not discussed in their classes or in their workplaces. Raven wrote, “They [faculty] discussed the job search process with us, but not really about what that transition would be.”

Mills added, “We have had a few student-led presentations on transition; however, they have focused on the transition from high school to undergrad. There has been no formal presentation or discussion regarding transition from graduate school to professional employment.”

Jamie also indicated that the faculty were not having discussions about transition, and the cohort members were not discussing it either. She wrote, “Everyone is in the same transition as me; we are waiting patiently. I noticed we are not inclined to share which schools we are interviewing. I think it has to do with fear of rejection and having everyone know.”

**Transition 2—May.** During this second transition, similar to what was mentioned in the Situation section, the participants were dealing with finishing their graduate programs and looking for new jobs; a couple participants also secured their new employment at this time. For instance, Raven wrote, “but now I'm worried about receiving an offer or not.”

Lisa wrote about her needs during her job search: “Location is key for me, and I'm not willing to give up on that.”

Nikki added that she was unsure of herself, writing, “I never really know what the best journey or decision is, and this is what ultimately makes me more hesitant when thinking about transitioning to something new.”

Ella added to these feelings as she wrote,

Everyone keeps saying, “It will all work out,” “It will all fall into place,” etc. Honestly, I believe it, but I am so sick of hearing it. No one has been able to be like, “Yep, that sucks,” and let me feel upset about having an unsuccessful job search to this point.

Unlike Raven, Lisa, Ella, and Nikki, Sara seemed to be positive about the unknown, saying, “I think my ability to manage the change may become a lot harder. I am extremely excited for the opportunity that lies ahead and am confident in my ability to manage it.”

During May Jamie wrote about having faith in the process: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” She also added that taking time off before starting her new job was important: “Taking time off to prepare for the transition is what I need. It is important that I use this time for myself to mentally prepare for my transition.”

**Transition 3—June.** The participants seemed to have different outlooks regarding this transition period. Ella wrote, “Getting turned down in the job market can really make you second-guess your purpose and it’s been helpful to have positive thoughts around me.” She also wrote about how much she looked forward to providing support for others who followed after her: “It will be interesting to look back on this transition in a year from now and help to be an encourager of my peers that [*sic*] are finishing graduate school.”

From another perspective, Shannon wrote, “It’s been a busy couple weeks saying ‘good-bye’ to people. This can be more difficult than I imagined.”

Nikki was having a difficult time with some of her advisors and wrote,

Some advisers I run into who I think fake the funk just to seem as though they are truly interested in my path and my concerns about my professional career. I would prefer for people to not comment at all than to be insincere about it.

Sara used her journaling for this transition as a way to reflect on the past month. She wrote,

I find myself reminiscing a lot on the past. What do I miss about my previous institution or location? What relationships have come and gone that I wish didn't end? I feel like I am moving backward on the progress I had made this past semester in terms of personal and emotional growth. I also find myself critiquing my own behavior or personality traits. At work, I want to be someone who is liked and doesn't rock the boat right away, so I pay close attention to what I say and how I say it. Outside of the office, if I go somewhere and don't meet anyone, I spend time thinking about what I did wrong or how my personality prevented me from having a successful interaction. I think it is a combination of having more time on my hands, while also being in a new and much larger location.

Raven seemed to feel more comfortable with her career path as she wrote,

I feel like I am capable, which is helping me get through this transition. Throughout my graduate program (2 years), I sometimes questioned if this was the right career path for me. I had the passion, but I felt different and disconnected compared to the rest of my cohort. Towards the end of my program though, I gained strong relationships...

Tracy had similar feelings to the previous participants. He had begun to gain some confidence about what he knew, writing, "Having just received my MEd, I know that my voice is an important one."

**Transition 4—July.** During this transition, participants began to write about their self-confidence. Ella was feeling good about her placement, and her self-esteem was high. She wrote, "Everyone that I've met has said they've heard such great things about me and think I'm perfect for the position. That is very encouraging after a pretty significant and disheartening job search."

Lisa also felt a boost to her ego and wrote, "I was receiving emails from higher administration with reasons to choose their institution; when I made the decision, I was



embraced with such excitement. This definitely boosted my confidence in my ability to perform the duties and job responsibilities.”

Mills added to this conversation as she wrote, “Thankfully, this role suits me well. I have not encountered too many challenges thus far; however, when I do face challenges, I know they [colleagues] will be there. I know I am really good at what I do.”

Similarly, Jade noted, “Overall this is a positive experience throughout the first month of work; I am impressing everyone on staff. They reaffirmed I was the perfect candidate, and that continues to give me motivation to continuously do the best I can.”

Laurie also wrote, “They [students] are great to work with, [and] provide me positive feedback and encouragement during my first summer as Orientation Coordinator. My parents continue to support me, and they let me know how proud of me they are.”

Nikki added to this conversation, writing that

[I have received] confirmation that I have not only impressed my superiors with my work ethic and performance, but confirmation that I am continuing to grow and am appreciated for all of the work I have done thus far in my career. There are so many working parts, and you get shut down or out of things, which tend[s] to discourage you. Nevertheless, receiving this promotion to an Assistant Director has me ecstatic.

Raven was feeling good about her personal life and wrote,

I’m very happy in my personal life too, which of course affects my work life. I’m dating a great guy, which [*sic*] I haven’t dated in over 5 years. I also found a great apartment through my work, and I’ll be moving in next month. I’m also still close to friends I made while at graduate school. Everything seems to be working out great right now!

Lisa seemed to be giving herself a pep talk as she wrote:

But in all honesty, it was amazing to have my phone with no service. It was me, myself, and the view. Overall, I think it is important that when we are going through a new transition, to embrace it (eager), expect some challenges (patient), and to remember to take care of ourselves (healthy). Our work is not our ENTIRE lives, so we need to enjoy the small things and be okay when something goes wrong or takes forever to process.

In contrast, Sara was feeling judged by her parents because of her new life; she wrote, “My parents were also very supportive at the beginning, and they have become more judgmental in the way I choose to live my life. They can’t seem to accept or understand [my new location] is different than [my home].”

**Transition 5—August.** During this final transition, the participants’ concept of self was similar to what it was in the previous transition because some students were feeling important in their workplace, which was helping provide a smoother transition. For example, Raven wrote, “They [administrators at my institution] trust me to do my job, and I’m an independent worker too; so it’s been a boastful environment for me. I’ve grown a lot during my few months here.”

Ella wrote about her need to feel important: “I hope that I start to feel more of a sense of importance of my role and what I’m hoping to achieve.”

James wrote about his knowledge and skills: “I’m happy knowing that I have the tools to handle issues as they arise.”

Sara too felt those in her workplace were happy with her performance; she wrote, “I felt like that opportunity [more work responsibility] and the faith they put in me as a new employee made me feel like I am no longer transitioning into this job, but am fully trusted in my new role.”

Jade also wrote, “They make me feel valued at work because they are impressed with what I’ve done so far, which makes me want to continuously do more and support the efforts of the office.”

Nikki felt that overall this had been a good experience for her; she wrote,

I am very hesitant of change, but I am now realizing that this step has been perfect for me to explore new adventures, meet new people, and spread my wings in my career while making connections with the right people to continue to excel.

Whereas some participants were feeling good about their performance and environment, a couple of others were still struggling with this transition. Jamie, for instance, expressed some discomfort with her support systems: “I believe people are supportive of the fact that I moved away from home to pursue a job, [but] not all of the things encompassing of this experience. This is tough for me and makes me question my decisions.” She also indicated, “I still feel like this is a huge learning curve, and I am experiencing culture shock.”

As with the *situation* topic, how the participants journaled about themselves during the 5 months varied. During transition 1, some participants laid out their thoughts and values regarding their first job. Some participants mentioned that their personality type was introverted and what this meant to them during that transition. All of the participants commented on their previous work experience before they had begun graduate school. The participants also commented on their experiences by discussing transitions in their graduate classes or in their graduate assistantships.

During transition 2, the participants were nervous about ending school and then finding a job. One participant was confident about this transition. Another participant spoke about her faith, and that having this faith would get her through. Also recall that at transition 3, all participants had secured employment; however, they had very different outlooks on where they were with that transition. Some participants were beginning to feel valued and were gaining self-confidence, while one participant felt judged by her family members.

During transitions 4 and 5, participants were beginning to find their new voices and confidence in their new roles, and they experienced praise for their performance. Still, some participants were questioning their decisions and still working through their transition.

Table 4

*Participant Perspectives of Self, Transitions 1 Through 5*

Schlossberg's 4 Ss	Transition 1— April	Transition 2— May	Transition 3— June	Transition 4— July	Transition 5— August
Self	Many —valued jobs —had worked before graduate school Some —had exposure to planning for transition	Many were —nervous about school ending —nervous about finding employment —relying on faith	All —had secured positions —were beginning to feel valued by new work environment	All —began to find their voice in new work environment —were confident in new work environment —felt praised for performance	All —continued to find their voice in new work environment —were confident in new work environment —felt praised for performance

**The Third S: Support**

As mentioned previously, Schlossberg described the safety net in place to help one's transition was described as *support*, the third factor in her transition theory (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995 and Goodman, 2006). Similarly to the descriptions in the Situation section previously, the participants' support systems varied between individuals and over the five transition periods.

**Transition 1—April.** During the first month of journaling, many participants were finishing up their graduate-school course work and searching for their full-time employment. During this transition, the support seemed to be coming from many different areas. Some participants wrote about their families providing the most support. For example, Nikki noted, "My current support system consists of my family, which includes my husband, two sons, mother, and younger brother."

Raven wrote, “My family provides support; I talk about potential Plan Bs, Cs, Ds, etc. in case I do not find a job before graduation, and what to do when I do find a job, especially if it’s far away.”

Jade wrote about her family; however, she also relied on friends from her undergraduate period:

My mother and younger brother are here to help financially; however, that does not help much because I come from a lower socioeconomic background. However, my culture is about helping those around you. As they help me succeed, then I help them back. My closest friends from undergrad have been helping me to process the waiting game and give encouraging words, which have been helpful. My supervisors also have been helpful in terms of what to expect, and help to prepare for interviews. All of this would be somewhat important to me.

Some participants wrote about their colleagues and cohorts providing support for them during this first transition period. As Ella wrote,

Usually it would be my partner; however, ... my cohort of Assistant Residence Coordinators (7 others) are my biggest support system right now. My partner does not understand some struggles that are associated with the job search and a geographically bound search, and the ARCs are the people I spend most of my time with while working, and we have formed a great relationship.

Rory echoed Ella’s thoughts:

My supervisors at my graduate institution and at my internship are currently one of my support systems. They have provided a lot of advice throughout my 2 years in graduate school. Currently, I am in the middle of my job search, and they have assisted me with interview practice and other aspects. I [am] also part of a cohort graduate-program model. The individuals in the cohort have been extremely helpful in supporting me with getting my current thesis and also assisting me with my job hunt. It is great to have them as support because they are going through the same process.

Other participants had different support systems. Shannon wrote, “My family—extremely important; parents and siblings are very supportive. Residence Life Staff—coworkers are great support systems, both professionally and personally; cohort and faculty members.”

Sara agreed with Shannon, adding,

Friends within my graduate program and outside, my current supervisor as well as my family, are my greatest support systems. They are all important to me in different ways and provide a varying degree of support. I would say the greatest support over the past 2 years has been my friends in the SAA program with me.

Laurie added,

I rely on my close friends and family as a support system. I am in communication more often with my friends than family, often because they are physically/geographically closer to me. I stay in close touch with my family when making big decisions, though.

Lisa indicated she had different support systems for different perspectives. She wrote,

My current support systems consist of my family, my supervisor, and members of my cohort in my master's program. These groups of people are so important to me because they give me different perspectives of what is going on in my life. My parents have known me the longest and can tell me the truth. My supervisor has seen me develop since I started college and can attest to how I have grown and developed in the past 6 years. And my friends are going through similar search processes, so it's nice to know I am not alone. In graduate school, I definitely appreciate having the support from my friends and my faculty. I love that my faculty here truly care about my success and give me challenges they know I can complete. I also appreciate that they care about you further than student affairs. They want to know how our lives are going and how we are doing in other classes. Home is where I feel supported. Since my parents moved away last year, I don't really have a place to go to on the weekends since they are so far away. So I spend all of my time here in IL with my boyfriend and my friends.

Agreeing with Lisa, Tracy wrote about his support systems, saying,

I currently use my direct supervisor, and her peers, as well as my colleagues, friends, and family. For work-related issues, my supervisors and colleagues are the ones that I rely on the most. For personal issues that may stem from work, I turn to my friends and family. All of these support systems are very important to me. I am of the mindset that work in student affairs is not an island.

Mills echoed Lisa and Tracy by writing,

My biggest support system is my family. Specifically, my mom and my fiancé are who I rely on the most. My family is the most important aspect of my life. Throughout my job search I have looked to both my mom and my fiancé for guidance. I have always been one who needs to talk through challenges with family or friends. Depending on the challenge, I would communicate with a different individual.

Jamie wrote this about her experience:

My partner, best friends, and colleagues is [*sic*] my current support system. My family is also present; however, it is mostly because I'm graduating with a master's, not because they understand what I do. I value support; it is extremely important to me.

James had support from many as well; however, he relied on faculty and past mentors for support:

My current support system consists of mentors from both South Carolina and Tampa (faculty and past advisors) who are instrumental in providing advice during the job search. This is especially important in finding new connections since I will be relocating to a new area to work. My family has also been crucial in supporting my decisions and I'm sure will only become more essential during the moving process and transitioning into a new life.

**Transition 2—May.** During this second transition, the participants seemed to echo their views about the previous month's support systems of family, friends, classmates, supervisors and faculty members. Raven wrote, "Thankfully, I have had some luck with getting interviews, so my family, friends, and peers are happy for my experiences thus far. I also know they would be supportive if I wasn't getting interviews either."

Shannon added, "My family and friends are nothing but supportive of me and my professional goals. They have been supportive throughout my job search and allowed me to make the best decision for me."

James also wrote, "I strongly agree I can count on the support of my family and friends. Particularly in the transition before I find my next job, I know that my family will support me while I search for my new job."

Likewise, Laurie wrote, "I am fortunate to have been blessed with a very supportive family and group of friends. I have moved extremely far from home and my family, [yet] they were excited and supported [*sic*] for me to start my first full-time position."

Sara added,

I am definitely a privileged person in that I have a very large family and friend support group. They embrace my interest in going new places and trying new things. My family

consistently offers to help me in my transition to a new location and new lifestyle. They have supported all of my decisions, even if they were not their favorite. I also have many friends who encourage me to take risks, who visit me in new places and who maintain contact even from far distances.

Some participants felt support from family members but made it clear their families did not understand their transition or the field of higher education. As an example, Jade wrote, “I’m treading on a path that my family is unfamiliar with.”

Ella agreed, writing,

I have a support system, some more supportive than others. My partner is a significant support system, along with my friend who is my grad cohort. My family and friends are supportive, but I don’t think they quite understand the field of higher education and how tough the job search can be.

Similarly, Jamie wrote,

I can rely on family, friends, and peers to support that I am making the best decision for myself. I am not too sure if they understand the transition and how impactful this is for my work and progression in this field.

Likewise, Nikki wrote,

I can definitely count on my family and the few friends I have for support, but there is no one in my position or shoes to be able to appropriately and knowingly advise me as to certain things and directions to go in. I end up speaking to my colleagues and other mentors more than my family and friends because at least they get what is going on and what will ultimately help me to continue to market myself.

Mills wrote about this topic of not understanding when she said,

I am fortunate enough to have a very supportive family. Though they may not be physically around, or understand this transition, there during my transitions they have been supportive in all aspects of it. I am in constant communication with my family, and they are a great support network to me.

One participant, Lisa, still felt support even though her classmates were starting to secure jobs:

I know that my family prefers I go to a certain region of the United States, but they will support me in wherever I end up going. My partner is also very supportive and willing to move anywhere across the country with me, which relieves me of some stress in the job-



search process. My friends are also extremely supportive. Even though a few of them have received job offers, they are still interested in my process and offer encouraging words when I get stressed. It's also nice to be in a cohort of graduate students because I don't feel alone in this process.

One participant was using technology to stay close to her support systems. Jade wrote,

I know that I can always count on my family and friends to support me. Physically, I have moved on my own overseas and to the Midwest for graduate school. As I prepare to move to [the] East Coast, I am not finding the transition too difficult since I've done it on my own before. My friends and family usually give me support through Skype or phone.

**Transition 3—June.** At this third transition, all the participants had secured jobs.

During this transition period, the participants wrote about the same types of support from their families, friends, and classmates as they wrote about in the first two transitions. Shannon wrote, “My family has been a great support system during this ‘holding period.’ It’s been a busy couple weeks saying ‘good-bye’ to people at my old institution and preparing to move across the country.”

Mills wrote, “My family members have been incredibly supportive, and I am grateful that I have found a position that is near them.”

Laurie agreed and added, “My family continues to be supportive of my choice to move far from home for my first job. They have even chipped in to help cover the cost of flight home during the summer for a long weekend visit.”

Some participants also wrote about their new support systems such as supervisors or new colleagues. Raven wrote, “The person I replaced was very supportive and was hopeful that I would get his role, along with the administrative assistant. My supervisor is supportive.”

Rory wrote about his new support system, saying, “I believe I am receiving tremendous support from multiple groups of people. As I made the transition, my new colleagues have been fantastic. They have helped me get adjusted to the campus and my community.”

Tracy wrote, “I have great support right now. I have a wonderful direct supervisor.”

Laurie added, “I feel supported by my colleagues on campus. They know this is my first professional job and that I am new to the campus and the area, so they are always willing to help me out in any way.”

Further, Mills added,

I feel very supported. I believe I fit in very well into my new office. I am making friends easily, and they are showing me the ropes. They are providing praise when necessary, but also helpful hints and tips along the way. My boss is also very supportive. She believes in me and allows me to take steps, knowing that she will back me up.

Sara also felt this new support as she wrote,

My new office and colleagues have also been extremely supportive in inviting me to join activities. They have been very thoughtful in welcoming me to the city and introducing me to the culture. I am actually surprised by how supported I feel from my new staff. It is comforting to have support come from a new source because it was unexpected.

Similar to their responses during transition 2, participants wrote about some individuals in their support systems not understanding their new profession. Jamie wrote, “my family doesn't understand what I do and how to support me, but they are proud that I am making 'moves.'”

Nikki added, “My family is supportive, but they don't know how to show their support.”

One participant, Lisa, shared her concerns about how her current supervisor felt about her new employment:

Right now I feel like my current supervisor is holding me back. She asks a lot of questions about the new position in ways that makes me think she is being negative about it. I understand that each institution is different and has different processes, but I think she sees that as odd or not as good as the programs and services we offer here. So maybe she doesn't like me going there because it won't be 'as good' as where I am at. So I am finding that I cannot talk to her about my transition as much as I can with others, like my family and friends.

One participant, James, started to feel some of the support from friends drifting because members of their group were experiencing their own transitions. He wrote,

I definitely still feel like I have support, particularly from my friends and family; but having left school, I have definitely lost a significant portion of that support. With many friends starting new jobs of their own, I no longer have the daily support from them.

Again, as in the previous transition, one participant felt supported through technology. Rory wrote, “I have also received tremendous support from my fellow graduates from my class via social media and from visits. I am officially the first graduate to start their [*sic*] professional career, so this has been helpful.”

**Transition 4—July.** During this transition, the participants had varied support systems; some were still relying on their family members. Mill wrote, “I have a fantastic new husband and close family who support me in all my endeavors. They celebrate my successes and pick me up when I am down. I look forward to sharing my day with them.”

James added, “My family has truly been amazing helping me, not only while I was searching, but also during the move and helping me get settled before my job began.”

Lisa also wrote about her family support and how amazing it was:

My parents have also been very supportive of my decision. They have always been there throughout my educational journey and are very involved in my life in a healthy way. I know, with helicopter parents and now the “snow plow” parents that we have out there, it is nice to know that my parents recognize that I am an independent individual and know that I need to learn things on my own sometimes. So I appreciate the independence they give me, but also the support and guidance when I need it. My mom has been an amazing soundboard.

Other participants felt supported by their new work environments. For instance, Nikki wrote, “Right now, I would say my support is coming from my colleagues and various supporters around campus who know my personality and continue to encourage me regarding my new adventures.”

James also wrote, “I believe my colleagues are offering me tremendous support, though just recently some of them have announced they will be moving on to another institution after obtaining their next phase in their career path.”

And Jade wrote,

I feel supported by everyone on my staff. They have been helpful with the transition both with work and outside of work. They are always willing to provide resources or places that I can go to. In addition, the people with whom I interact with are very genuine, and the office is a positive work environment.

Laurie, too, felt supported by her new work environment, including her students. She wrote,

I feel supported by all the coworkers in my office, especially my boss. She strives to ensure that I understand how to do everything, and she knows when she needs to give me more context or more information. I also feel supported by my student-orientation leaders. They are great to work with and provide me positive feedback and encouragement ... during my first summer as Orientation Coordinator.

Tracy agreed with the office support; however, he was missing his cohort’s support. He wrote,

My coworkers have been wonderful. The ones that are not new have been great to help me adjust to this newly found senior role on staff, and I am excited to see what the future brings for our team. I do however miss my cohort peers who took jobs in other places.

Shannon wrote about her support, saying,

I feel like I am getting support from my new colleagues ... they have been very supportive and willing to help with or talk about my transition. I have also been in contact with some of my former colleagues who have called to check in and process the new job with me.

Some participants felt their support was dwindling. As an example, Ella wrote,

My family and friends are supportive, as well. I feel supported at work, [but] not as much as I am used to. I can't tell if that's because it's still summer and everyone is kind of doing their own thing.

James wrote, “I certainly feel like I have support, although at times it seems like they’re harder to get in touch with.”

And Sara wrote,

I feel like I have much less support than I did when I first moved. My family and friends no longer see this as something new. It seems like they have accepted that I live elsewhere and have moved on. Friends don’t ask as often how I am feeling or what new things are happening. It is kind of like the transition of me moving away is over for them, but it feels very much alive for me. My parents were also very supportive at the beginning, and they have become more judgmental in the way I choose to live my life. They can’t seem to accept or understand that where I am now is different than where I grew up.

**Transition 5—August.** During the last month of journaling, the participants expressed that they again had varying degrees of support. Some participants still were feeling support from their families. Laurie wrote, “I have always felt supported by my family and friends who encouraged me to accept this job and make the journey across the entire country to move here.”

Raven wrote about her continued support: “I still get support through family members, friends, and past colleagues from my previous institution.”

Mills wrote about her new husband and his support, saying,

My biggest support is my husband. He now lives with me, and it is nice to have someone to come home to at the end of the day and debrief. I enjoy telling him about my successes, and he lends an ear to my challenges, as well. I know at the end of the day he will support me, no matter what.

Other participants were relying on their new colleagues and work environments to provide support to them. Nikki wrote, “I feel like my new supervisor has tremendous support for my journey and our opportunities to work together collectively to meet the expectations held of us.”

Rory added, “I believe I am getting proper support. My colleagues are fantastic and have been nothing but supportive to me during these changes.”

James also added to this conversation, writing, “Everyone in my office has been great at having an open door for any and all questions I have, and I don't see that changing anytime soon.”

Laurie felt the support from her boss as well, writing,

I also feel supported by my coworkers in my office, especially my boss. She trusts me and empowers me to make decisions in my position. I feel supported by other colleagues on campus who I work with, because now that my boss has left the office for 3 months for family leave, there are a lot of things I’m taking over for her and I don’t know about; but my colleagues around campus are always happy to help and provide me with historical knowledge of things I’m working on.

Sara agreed, writing,

I feel like the office where I work has become a new area of support for me. Everyone has included me into the team seamlessly, and I’m very grateful for all the support they provide. This includes being invited out to dinner or to special events, [and] being given suggestions of new places to hike, eat, or drink. I would say they have become my greatest support system here and treat me as a member of their closely knit team.

Jade continued to feel connected to and supported by her new community; she wrote,

Now that I have established a group of friends locally, it is easier to feel that I am a part of my new community. My coworkers and boss are more than happy to help me. They make me feel valued at work because they are impressed with what I’ve done so far, which makes me want to continuously do more and support the efforts of the office.

Tracy agreed with these comments, but also felt like he was providing support to others in his new work environment. He wrote, “I have tons of support, but I am also one of the ones giving support to lots of new folks around the table.”

As in the previous transition period, some participants felt like their support was decreasing. Sara, for example, wrote,

Although I have a lot of close friends and they have provided me support in weeks’ past, I think many of them are going through their own transition struggles or the stress of a new school year. Therefore, I wouldn’t say I still have that much support coming from them right now.

Another participant, Jamie, still felt her support systems just did not understand what this transition was all about:

Outside of what they see on social media, I don't believe anyone understands/knows what this transition is like. I believe people are supportive of the fact that I moved away, [but] not all of the things encompassing of this experience.

In a response that was different from that during the previous two transitions, one participant, Jamie, felt support through using social media. She wrote, "Most of my support is from friends and family on social media, excited about the pictures I post."

During these five transition periods, the participants seemed have some type of support. The support systems changed from month to month and varied by participant. Family, friends, partners, new work environments, and classmates were some of the many support systems the participants used.

The participants felt a great deal of support at each of the transitions. At transition 1, participants were feeling supported by many different people. Some participants felt supported by their families and friends. Others felt supported by their current classmates, faculty, and supervisors.

Then, during the second transition period, the participants had the same support systems; however, some participants mentioned that their support systems did not understand the field of higher education. And one participant used technology to stay close to his support systems.

Because at the third transition all participants had full-time positions, many of them felt support from their new colleagues and supervisors. Many participants also were still using friends and family for support. Some of the support from classmates was beginning to fade because classmates were securing their own positions.

During the fourth transition period, more participants felt supported by their new work environments. Others felt some of their support was dwindling now that others felt they were settled.

Finally, at the fifth transition, many participants still felt supported by family members. Others continued to use technology and social media to get support. Some participants again mentioned that their support systems did not understand the field of higher education.

Table 5

*Participant Perspectives of Support, Transitions 1 Through 5*

Support	Most felt support from	Most felt support from	Many felt support from	Many felt continued support from	Most felt continued support from
	—families and friends	—families and friends	—families and friends starting to fade	—families and friends	—families and friends, who “still do not understand my job”
	—classmates		—classmates fading as participants secured jobs	—new work environments	—new work environments
	—current faculty and supervisor	But they did not understand	—new work environments increasing		Some used
		—participants’ jobs			—social media to continue getting support
		—classmates			

## The Fourth S: Strategies

The final factor in Schlossberg’s 4 Ss, *strategies*, focuses on the individual’s current coping mechanisms that will help them positively navigate through transitions (Goodman, 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Participants used a number of different strategies during the five months they journaled about their transition.

**Transition 1—April.** At this first transition, the researcher asked participants to think about what coping mechanisms they might use when transitioning into their new career. Some participants wrote about connecting with those who would listen to them. Raven wrote, “I



mainly talk to my ‘entourage’ to gain their insight. I also talk about challenges with my cohort to see if they’re facing or [have] faced a similar challenge.”

Tracy also seemed to have a support group with his cohort: “I relied heavily on my cohort (students who were enrolled with me) to debrief some of the challenges of graduate school as well as work/life balance.”

Ella added, “Venting—talking about issues and concerns and having people that are going through the same thing.”

Lisa wrote about how her faculty support was a coping mechanism for her:

I definitely appreciate having the support from my faculty. I love that my faculty here truly care about my success and give me challenges they know I can complete. I also appreciate that they care about you further than student affairs. They want to know how our lives are going and how we are doing in other classes.

Shannon wrote about her coping strategies, saying, “Talking with professors, advocating for myself, and advocating for myself in terms of extra help, developmental conversations, project extensions, etc.—Yes, I would use this again. Talk with peers about experiences; ‘we’re in this together’ mentality.”

James wrote about his roommates: “In graduate school, my primary strategy for coping with challenges was the support of my friends, particularly my roommates. Living with three other students in the same program helped all of us to remain calm during stressful situations.”

Mills also looked for those who could listen to her:

I have always been one who needs to talk through challenges with family or friends. Depending on the challenge, I would communicate with a different individual. Mostly, I do not ask for advice; I just want someone to listen to me while I process the challenge out loud. At one point this semester I attempted to visit the university Counseling Center; however, I did not have a positive experience there, and I did not return. In general, I just need someone to listen. I also make lists so that I can visually see how I will overcome the challenge.

Other participants wrote about putting exercise back into their daily routines. For instance, Laurie wrote, “I often turned to running to help me unwind and have time to think alone.”

Likewise, James wrote,

Aside from the support of my peers, just getting outside was a frequent strategy to deal with stress. Whether that be a run, a hike, or a round of disc golf, taking my mind off of an issue helps give me some distance so that I can revisit it with a clearer head later.

Other participants also mentioned how they needed to take a break from school or work. Ella wrote, “Taking time away from campus and spend some weekends not doing any homework...”

Laurie wrote about her need to journal: “I also write/journal when I am challenged because it allows me to process my thoughts away, logically, and in an organized fashion.”

Jade added her thoughts about taking a break: “Coping strategies would include taking a day off to unwind, whether that includes watching some Netflix or enjoying a glass of wine.”

Other participants stated that staying ahead of school and work assignments was a way to cope with transitions. Ella wrote, “I also try to stay ahead on assignments.”

Shannon added, “To cope with challenges, I try to stay ahead of the game, not procrastinating, and asking questions. It has helped me, and I would do it again.”

Three participants wrote about being introverts and needing to find other ways to regain their energy. For example, Jamie noted,

Because grad school is challenging and stressful, to decompress I made a habit out of going to the movies once a week. Also, I am an introvert; to collect my energy, I color. There are coloring books in my office I use frequently.

Tracy added, “As an introvert I also valued my time alone—reading for pleasure, going for a run, or just going for a walk to decompress.”

Sara also added to this conversation by writing, “I tend to spend quite a bit of time alone when coping with challenges, and that often includes reading a book or going for a walk/run outside.”

**Transition 2—May.** During the second transition, the participants were using the same types of strategies. This month more participants seemed to be using exercise as a coping strategy. Raven had added jogging to her day, writing, “I’ve started jogging again now that the weather is finally getting warmer. It helps clear my mind and focus on other aspects of my life I need to focus on, such as my health.”

Ella added, “Exercising will be one of those things. I’ve totally neglected it this entire semester due to thesis writing and traveling to conferences. I feel much better when I am regularly working out and have an outlet.”

In the same vein, Laurie wrote,

Now that I have gotten settled into my new home and have gotten accustomed to my schedule with my full-time job, I am finally getting back into running. I used to run four to five times per week in graduate school once I had adjusted to my schedule. When I started to pack up and move to my new full-time job, I was too busy to incorporate my normal running routine in amongst all the other things I had to complete. Now that I have moved and settled, I have been able to reestablish my running schedule. Running clears my mind and relieves stress, which is why it is useful for me during periods of transition.

Jade wrote about how important dancing was to her, saying,

Dance is one of my hobbies, so that is one of my goals to enjoy when I go home for about a month to enjoy time with family and friends before starting my new job. In addition, I hope to continue to do hip-hop and ballroom dancing in my new city to relieve stress in the future.

In addition to being active, some participants began to explore their new surroundings.

As Jade wrote,

I love traveling and trying new things. Therefore I started doing research on things I know that I will enjoy and [that] make me happy that are located in the surrounding areas. I already have a few places that I would like to check out.

Sara wrote about how important it was for her to explore her new community alone. She journaled,

...because part of getting me through this transition is that I want to be able to simply be myself. There are a few activities I do that help me to just be me, and I think they will allow me to both be comfortable in my new space, but also meet individuals. First, I love going for walks. That can be on a sidewalk, in a park, a busy city, or the wilderness on a hiking trail. I absolutely love the opportunity to be moving and see new things. Doing this in a new city will help me get acquainted to [sic] my surroundings, keep my stress levels down, and hopefully allow me meet people along the way.

Rory agreed, writing,

One aspect that has always helped me through transitions is just exploring my new surroundings by myself. Whether it is by walking, bicycling, or driving around my new environment, it has always helped me. It may seem odd, but it allows me to get familiar with the environment and also gives me a chance to be alone with my thoughts.

One participant, Sara, wrote about her love for drinking beer and hoped she would find others in her new environment who enjoyed this, as well:

My second favorite activity is drinking beer. I am definitely not someone who needs alcohol to get through the day; but trying new beers, talking about the ingredients and how it's made, and embracing the company that comes with a night out at a local brewery is really something that makes me happy. Visiting local breweries (and hopefully finding a group of people who share this interest) will definitely help with the transition.

Similar to her response at transition 1, one participant felt that staying organized was helping her. Lisa wrote, "There are certain tasks I do in order to help me with transition, like staying organized and keeping track of all of my applications. Staying organized has kept me less stressed than having all of my information stored haphazardly."

Jamie wrote about taking time for herself, saying, "I need to take time off to prepare for the transition. I can pick up another job, volunteer—anything to stay busy; but it is important that I use this time for myself to mentally prepare for my transition."

**Transition 3—June.** As a reminder, all the participants had secured jobs by this third transition period. During transitions 3 through 5, the researcher asked the participants to complete the following statement regarding their strategies during this transition: “I feel like I am ... which is helping me get through this transition.” As one can expect, the participants answered this question in different ways. Some participants felt confident, which was helping them through their transition. As an example, Mills wrote, “I feel like I am thriving, which is helping me get through this transition. I look forward to coming to work each day and putting my best foot forward.”

Rory added to that feeling of confidence and support as he wrote,

I feel like I am confident, which is helping me get through this transition. My confidence derives from my knowledge that I chose the right place to work out of the offers I had received. I also feel well supported by the institution and the department I work for.

Laurie agreed, writing,

I feel like I am confident in my abilities, which is helping me get through this transition. At first I questioned if I was prepared for this job, but after 2 years in my master’s program in higher education, I knew I had the skillset.

Along with feeling confident, one participant felt at peace with this transition, and this peace was allowing her to transition. Sara wrote,

I feel like I have finally found that job, and I am exactly where I need to be in my career, which is helping me get through this transition. I also feel like I am in a city where I can embrace my hobbies and interests with people who enjoy similar activities. For example, this past weekend I did a 4.5 hour hike by myself; and although it was lonely at times, I felt at peace with the world and in my own element.

Nikki agreed with Sara and wrote about her experience this way:

I feel like I am an ambitious, outgoing, hard-working, people person, which is helping me get through this transition. I am satisfied where I am now in my career, but I definitely know I can do a lot more because of the commitment, skill, and drive I give to my professional career.

Other participants felt prepared for this transition, which was helping them cope with the changes. For example, Lisa wrote,

I feel prepared. There are a lot of logistics that I have to consider, so I am glad that I have thought about these things prior to actually moving. Since my position requires me to move next week, it is moving quickly. So I am thankful to have my ducks in a row. Similar to what they had expressed during previous transition periods, participants were

relying on their organization to help with the transition. James wrote, “I feel like I am successful at separating the search process into manageable tasks, which has been extremely successful during this transition. By establishing clear/manageable goals, I avoid becoming overwhelmed and remain much clearer-headed about the search.”

**Transition 4—July.** The themes from transition 3 carried over to this month, as well.

Many participants felt confident this month about how their transitions were going. Ella wrote,

I feel confident in my ability and [am] feeling very welcomed at my new position. Everyone that I've met has said they've heard such great things about me and think I'm perfect for the position. That is very encouraging after a pretty significant and disheartening job search.

Laurie also felt confident, writing,

I feel like I am confident, which is helping me get through this transition. Now that I have established myself here and have a good working knowledge of my network on campus, I am not stressed about messing up or about not knowing how to do something. Even if I don't know the answers, I am confident that I can ask my colleagues and they will understand and be able to help me without being angry or frustrated.

Some participants wrote about being happy and settled in their new environment, and how this was helping with their transitions. As Nikki noted, “I feel like I am ready to move on and experience new things in my career, which is helping me get through this transition.”

Similarly, Sara wrote:

I feel like I am becoming more comfortable at work, which is really helping me get through this transition. Ultimately, I moved here for the job, and it is the one thing that feels the most real to me. I've met the most people; I'm doing what I love.

Raven also wrote,

I feel happy, which is definitely helping me through this transition. I love the work I do. I'm very happy in my personal life too, which of course affects my work life. I'm dating a great guy, which I haven't dated in over 5 years. I also found a great apartment through my work, and I'll be moving in next month.

Mills added to the being-settled conversation, writing,

I feel like I am settled, which has helped in this transition. My apartment feels lived in. I am still able to see my family and friends. And I still get to do all of my favorite things. This transition has not hurt me. It has been a very positive experience.

Again, some participants wrote about being focused and prepared. Rory wrote about his preparation: "I feel that where I have come from has given me a tremendous amount of experience, which has allowed me to get through this transition successfully."

Jade felt similarly and wrote about how her new knowledge had helped her: "...becoming more knowledgeable about my role. It was very vague in the beginning, but as we progress with our new industry model, I am able to create more specific events in my industry."

Tracy agreed, writing,

Focused and prepared. I know what needs to be done to get through a school year and am happy to start showing people that way. I also know that I need to cross everything off of my to-do list in July because August is the biggest blur.

During this transition, James wrote about how he was coping with transition by learning to be flexible:

I feel like I am flexible and positive, which has been extremely helpful with this transition. If I've learned one thing through this whole process, it's that plans change frequently and you have to be willing to go with the flow a bit and adapt to changes as they come up. Although my particular situation is slightly different than most, I think everyone has an idea in their head of where they'd like to end up and how they foresee the process unfolding. Although it's good to have goals and aspirations, it's also important to keep an open mind so that you don't miss out on other possible opportunities.

**Transition 5—August.** During this last month of journaling, the participants felt similar to how they had felt during the previous transitions. Many participants were feeling confident and calm. As Rory wrote, “I feel like I am confident in my own abilities. This has allowed me to complete tasks for not only my direct responsibilities, but also for others.”

Tracy wrote he felt calm, as well: “I am calm (for the most part). I have been through this before, and now I am just anxious about answering questions that new folks will have.”

Along the same lines, Raven wrote,

I feel more confident, which is definitely helping me through this transition. Support has definitely helped me as well, which in turn has boosted my confidence. However, they trust me to do my job, and I’m an independent worker too, so it’s been a boastful environment for me. I’ve grown a lot during my few months here.

Others were happy with where they were, and feeling this way was helping with the transition. James wrote, “I feel like I am an excellent adapter and am flexible, which has helped me with the many unknowns that I’ve faced thus far in the transition. I’m happy to have settled into a weekly routine.”

Laurie echoed these thoughts, writing, “I feel like I am still loving my job, which is helping me get through this transition. I really love the work I do, and I enjoy coming to work each day.”

Jade added,

I’m happy that my life is fulfilling both at work and in my personal life. I’ve been pursuing my personal interest of dance and finding a West Coast Swing community for me to pursue this hobby more. Having a healthy lifestyle outside of work has kept me focused.

Other participants felt like they were taking life one day at a time. Laurie wrote, “...rolling with the punches. I think that when you are getting hung up on small details/small



speed bumps, you can easily get overwhelmed. But if you take it one day at a time, you can get through the transition.”

Ella added, “...getting close to school starting, so things will be forced to pick up. I will just have to do one thing at a time.”

Jamie felt overwhelmed with this transition and wrote how she was “saying ‘yes’ to many new opportunities.”

Nikki also felt like she was “jumping in head first with no plan.”

Just as with their support systems, the strategies the participants used varied throughout the 5 months of journaling. At the first transition, participants were relying on coping mechanisms that had worked in their past. Then, during the second transition, participants seemed to be focused on activity (running, walking, biking, etc.) to help with their transition. During the third and fourth transitions, most participants felt confident and organized. Finally, the fifth transition was when the participants really began to feel more settled.

Table 6

*Participant Perspectives of Strategies, Transitions 1 Through 5*

Strategies	All were —preparing for transition —reflecting on what worked in the past	All were —starting or reestablishing physical activity (e.g., running, walking, hiking, dance)	All were feeling —confident and organized —prepared	All were feeling —confident and organized	All were feeling —settled —joyous/happy about new job
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**Emergent Themes**

After the template analysis was completed, the researcher read all of the journals again to look for themes outside of the template hierarchy (King, 1998). Journals were analyzed again for themes not within Schlossberg’s constructs. The researcher again reviewed the emergent

themes over the five transition periods. Three themes emerged through the use of this type of analysis. The participants indicated that communication was a must during this transition, and that the process of transition takes some time, and they were excited to make a difference with students. Following are the themes identified in the participants' 5 months of online journaling.

### **Communication Is a Must During Transition**

When the researcher looked at the participants' journals, she noted that communication was a theme during all five transitions. Communicating, talking, venting, texting, and writing were all methods these participants used to help in their transitions. When journaling about their prior experiences with transition, many participants indicated they relied on conversations with others to help them. These conversations could be with their supervisors, or with colleagues or friends. Creating a dialogue with others provided participants an outlet and also offered affirmation about their recent choices. As James wrote,

The one thing that I'm confident will be helpful will be to rely on my vast network of professionals. Having made connections with individuals from all different functional areas, it will certainly be essential to seek help and ask questions to ensure as smooth a transition as possible.

Similarly, as noted earlier, Raven said, "I mainly talk to my 'entourage' to gain their insight. I also talk about challenges with my cohort to see if they're facing or faced a similar challenge."

Ella also suggested that talking with others going through the same experience was a way of normalizing one's feelings: "...venting—talking about issues and concerns and having people that are going through the same thing helps me cope with change. I think this worked well for me."

Shannon echoed both Ella and Raven's statements by writing, "...talking with professors, advocating for myself and advocating for myself in terms of extra help, developmental

conversations, project extensions, etc.— Talk with peers about experiences. ‘We’re in this together’ mentality has really helped me.”

And again as noted earlier, Mills explained in more detail the communication she needed during transition:

I have always been one who needs to talk through challenges with family or friends. Depending on the challenge, I would communicate with a different individual. Mostly, I do not ask for advice; I just want someone to listen to me while I process the challenge out loud. At one point this semester I attempted to visit the university Counseling Center; however, I did not have a positive experience there, and I did not return. In general, I just need someone to listen.

Jade indicated she needed time to process; however, she ultimately communicated with others for support; “The way that I cope with challenges is primarily processing it internally first, then I talk to my closest peers or supervisors. I think this is how I usually process information.”

Throughout the study, participants echoed how important communication was to their transitions. Shannon also wrote, “I don’t know if there is one activity specifically that will get me through the transition. It will be a combination of communicating with family and friends.”

James added, “Having made connections with individuals from all different functional areas, it will certainly be essential to have conversations, seek help, and ask questions to ensure as smooth a transition as possible.”

Tracy agreed, writing, “The structured and unstructured meetings with my supervisor really help, as do conversations with my colleagues.”

Nikki felt that communication was important; however, she had not mastered this skill: “I will begin to meet and network with higher administrators in areas in which I am interested in gaining skills. Not something I am completely comfortable with...”

Engaging in conversations with others or having someone who can actively listen are the different parts of communication. Some who participated in the study relied on these different types of communication to help them move through their transitions.

### **Transition Takes Time**

A definition of *process* is “a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end or a series of changes that happen naturally” (*Merriam-Webster* online, n.d.). The new professionals in this study did not like “the process” and were not patient with themselves or the process. This perspective was evident across transitions 2 through 5.

In this context, Ella wrote, “...one that has taken time to get used to and one that will continue to evolve. I have to remember that you typically don’t jump into work on day 1 and get started; there is a learning curve.”

Jamie echoed these feelings, writing, “...understanding that I am not going to get this in the first week. I am new, it is going to feel uncomfortable and I am going to get frustrated; that’s okay.

James added, “Although I will be happy when settled into a weekly routine, I know there are still going to be plenty of times when a wrench gets thrown into the system.”

During transition 2, Lisa wrote, “Patient—being a new employee comes with a lot of paperwork and processes. I-9 forms, criminal-background checks, key authorization, etc.

Then the next month, Lisa wrote, “I think to get through it, you have to be patient.”

Finally, in the last month of online journaling, Lisa said,

...rolling with the punches. I think that when you are getting hung up on small details or small speed bumps, you can easily get overwhelmed. But if you take it one day at a time, you can get through the transition. I want this to be over.

Laurie wrote about how this transition was taking longer because she was in a new setting. She was concerned about the length of time the transition would take, saying,

However, I learned that it just takes a bit more time when you're not in a setting where your friends are easily built in (ex: student organizations in undergrad, a cohort in grad school, etc.). I hope it does not take too long.

Sara added,

I view my new home and position as very permanent, but the feelings of transition as very much temporary. I keep hoping that this light switch will turn, and I will realize how happy I really am here. I definitely see that as a possibility, but I am just not there yet. I've also been thinking a lot about how this transition is unique to me now, but I see it as something that will happen to me again in the future.

The process of transition and the time it took was a theme for these new professionals. In addition to the participants' comments noted above, one participant during the last month of journaling mentioned he felt his transition to his new institution and new surrounding was complete. However, he recognized this process was going to start all over again when the students arrived on campus. In general, the transition time for these new professionals seemed to be challenging, even during the fifth transition period of data collection.

### **Making a Difference Is Exciting**

As discussed earlier relative to the template analysis, these new professionals were excited about their new positions. This emergent theme did not present itself until transitions 4 and 5 in July and August. During these last 2 months, many participants were excited to put their new knowledge and practical experience "into practice" with the students on their campuses. These new professionals wanted to make an impact in their first job, and many indicated that all of their work was about to pay off in this first new job. For instance, Raven wrote, "I love the work I do, especially when I'm helping students and alumni."

During the fourth month, Ella wrote, “I cannot wait to get back into a daily routine and feel like I am making a difference for students again.

And during the final transition period, Ella wrote, “I am happy to be in a full-time position and feeling like the work I am/will do will make a difference.”

Mills felt a little differently, writing, “I enjoy challenging myself in this new role to find ways to better serve my students and my community... I believe in the university and its mission. I believe in the program and the students I will serve.” Toward the end of the journaling process, Mills added, “I look forward to the impact I can make.”

Rory added, “I find myself excited and energized about the work that I will be conducting on campus, especially with the students.”

Jade was also excited about the difference she could make; she wrote, “I’m allowed autonomy with my position, and I am proactive with my research to ensure I provide current and relevant information for faculty, staff, alumni, and students in the fine and performing arts, media, and entertainment industries.”

Lisa added,

I know that when the students arrive in August, I will be asking them a lot of questions about their experience. I think I am finally getting the hang of the position and the institution. I just need the students to move in.

Laurie was also excited about working with her new student populations. She wrote,

I learned so much about student development in the classroom, and I also had multiple opportunities to practice in different offices around campus, so I felt confident coming into my first professional position. I look forward to working with my new students.

Sara journaled about how this new job was exactly what she wanted to do:

Several years ago as I was completing my bachelor’s degree, I realized that I wanted to work with students... Since then, I have slowly worked toward checking off the required qualifications needed for a job in this field in order to one day be qualified to do what I

know my heart is set out to do. I feel like I have finally found that job, and I am exactly where I need to be in my career...

The next month, Sara added,

I'm also greatly looking forward to the start of the school year and students coming back. When I can begin interacting with and helping students again, have regular meetings, I think that will be a turning point in my transition.

The participants were excited to use their newly acquired academic and practical knowledge in their first professional job. In one case, the participant indicated this excitement and new student-development knowledge helped her move through her transition.

### **Research Questions**

This study using phenomenological methodology included five main research questions. These questions were developed around Schlossberg's (1995) 4 S transition theory (situation, self, support, strategies). As discussed in chapter 3 and in the current chapter, the researcher used template analysis to identify themes. She summarized and reported the findings from research questions 2 through 5 over each of the five transition periods.

#### **Research Question 1**

The summary of responses to research question 1 reflects the participants' personal and demographic attributes: "What are the personal and demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity, religion, relationship status, undergraduate degree, location and size of master's-degree program's institution, functional area, and location of professional job) of the study participants?" As a recap to the Overview of the Participants section, the study sample included 10 female and three male participants. Two participants identified as African American, one as Hispanic-Mexican, and one Filipino, with the rest of the participants (nine) identified as Caucasian. Two participants attended a midsize state institution in the Midwest. One participant attended a midsize institution in the East. Two participants attended a midsize state institution in

the Southeast. Five participants attended graduate school at the same place they had completed their undergraduate degrees. Three participants attended private institutions for their graduate schools. In regard to religious preference, eight participants were Christian, one participant identified as agnostic, and four participants marked “no religious preference” when answering the questionnaire. The selected participants represented all NASPA regions (Appendix C).

When the third survey was sent out in June, all participants reported they had secured employment. These participants were employed in many different student-affairs functional areas, including academic advising (three), admissions (one), career development (two), orientation programs (one), residence life (five), and study abroad (one).

## **Research Question 2**

To review, research question 2 was “How do participants view their transition situation?” As discussed earlier regarding the template analysis, the participants felt differently about their situation as it related to their transition. There seemed to be some common themes across the participants and across the transition periods relative to this research question, as summarized in the following subsections.

**Transition 1—April.** The participants were finishing up graduate school and involved in job searching. During this period, a couple of participants viewed their situation with a “matter of fact attitude,” meaning they understood that their situation was something that needed to happen. For instance, Jamie wrote, “This is what I need to do to progress in this field.”

Tracy agreed with Jamie, writing that the process was

...a healthy and necessary next step in my career path. This is the time where I can really start to shine and shape my own experience. I feel that my first year I was a graduate student full time and an RD on the side.

Lisa wrote about the unknown and how she felt about her situation:



I am going into the unknown, so I honestly have no idea how things are going to happen, but right now, I feel confident in managing my transition. I know there will be hiccups and unexpected events, but I am confident that I can overcome them.

James indicated the same in his writings:

I view this transition as a continued part of my education as a student-affairs professional. The search process was daunting and intimidating, but now that it's behind me I know that it has really helped prepare me for future searches and positions. I'm still certainly in the middle of my transition from graduate student to professional, but I'm ecstatic for this first year and timidly look forward to the future hurdles that I know are ahead.

**Transition 2—May and transition 3—June.** During these two transition periods, some participants viewed their situations as both exciting and manageable. Tracy wrote the following:

Exciting! I know that I am going to be getting great experiences helping to lead this team and shape what our department will become; I feel so excited! The summer is proving to be a nice time to catch up and get acquainted and reoriented. It's nice to be able to figure everything out without the students here because I know once they get here, it will be tough to keep pace.

Similarly, Ella said,

The transition will be manageable. I need to keep in mind that my search is so narrow because my partner and I want to continue our life together and move toward the next step. I will figure it out. I will find a job; it may not be my dream job, but your first one doesn't have to be. I am confident in my ability and the past experiences I've had—but the uncertainty just really gets to me.

Shannon agreed, saying,

I do believe this transition will be manageable. Being that I'll be moving across the country, I am not denying that it will be a difficult transition. But I do know I have the right support systems and professional goals in place to manage it.

Finally, Jade indicated that

The situation is very manageable. It makes things a lot easier to know exactly where I am going before I graduate. Since I know where I am going, it makes it easier to create tasks of what needs to be given away, things to be sold, clothes to be packed, or items to be mailed to my new office. In addition, the staff at the new institution is very helpful and willing to give advice on housing to make my transition easier.

One participant, Sara, mentioned her situation as difficult and seemed to be unsure about it. As quoted earlier, she mentioned that

I view my new home and position as very permanent, but the feelings of transition as very much temporary. I keep hoping that this light switch will turn, and I will realize how happy I really am here. I definitely see that as a possibility, but I am just not there yet. I've also been thinking a lot about how this transition is unique to me now, but I see it as something that will happen to me again in the future. I've thought about staying in this position for 3 to 5 years.

**Transition 4—July and transition 5—August.** During both transitions, most participants were settling into their new employment and surroundings. One participant, Sara, was looking back critically at her transition:

I find myself reminiscing a lot on the past. What do I miss about my previous institution or location? What relationships have come and gone that I wish didn't end? I feel like I am moving backward on the progress I had made this past semester in terms of personal and emotional growth. I also find myself critiquing my own behavior or personality traits...

Other participants viewed their transition situation as over and simple. For example, Mills expressed the following:

I view this transition as over. I know exactly what time I have to get up in the morning to be ready on time, I know when to leave my apartment and the quickest way to drive to work, I park in the same spot every day, and I say good morning to the same people. At work, I know what to get done and how to do it. If I don't know how to do it, I know who to ask to assist me. I feel that I have been here longer than I have. This is my eighth week in my role. I am very happy with my choice. I view this transition as complete. I am a young professional, not a new professional. I understand my campus and my role and how I play an integral part in the larger campus community.

Rory felt similar to Mills, saying, "now that the initial excitement of moving in and everything [is in place], I view the transition as simple."

Laurie echoed others' thoughts as she wrote,

Nearing completion. I've been here for 4+ months and I have made it through my first summer in orientation. I feel comfortable navigating the city and the campus. I feel comfortable in my job duties, but I know that they are flexible and will change in the future when we hire another individual to work in our office, so I am prepared for those

changes. I know that transitions are always occurring; but for me, the transition to a new place and my first professional career is feeling pretty complete at this point.

### **Research Question 3**

As mentioned in the template analysis relative to research question 3, “What support systems do the study participants perceive to be available to them in the transition process,” the participants felt supported from many different people over the course of the 5 months of their online journaling. Specific examples of participants’ responses through their journaling follow.

**Transition 1—April.** During this transition, some participants felt their families and friends were their primary support system as the participants were finishing graduate school and working to secure their first full-time professional job. For instance, James wrote, “I can count on the support of my family and friends. Particularly in the transition before I find my next job, I know that my family will support me while I search for my new job.”

Rory mentioned,

I am fortunate enough to have a very supportive family. Though they may not be physically there during my transitions, they have been supportive in all aspects of it. I am in constant communication with my family, and they are a great support network to me.

Laurie agreed, writing,

I am fortunate to have been blessed with a very supportive family and group of friends. I have moved extremely far from home and my family, yet they were excited and supportive for me to start my first full-time position.

Sara wrote in more detail how she, too, had family support:

I am definitely a privileged person in that I have a very large family and friend support group. They embrace my interest in going new places and trying new things. My family consistently offers to help me in my transition to a new location and new lifestyle. They have supported all of my decisions, even if they were not their favorite.

Ella mentioned her significant other as a huge support, saying, “My boyfriend has been by far the most supportive and understanding of the challenges I’ve faced when job searching.”

In addition, to their families, the participants mentioned they felt support from their graduate classmates (cohort) from their master's programs. Many indicated that it was nice to experience this transition with others who were transitioning, as well.

James said,

First and foremost, my closest friends from grad school have been great at keeping in touch and are a fantastic support system for any answers or words of encouragement that I may need. Our program director has also been quick to provide any professional advice that I've needed...

Similar to what James wrote, Lisa added,

My friends are also extremely supportive. Even though a few of them have received job offers, they are still interested in my process and offer encouraging words when I get stressed. It's also nice to be in a cohort of graduate students because I don't feel alone in this process.

Rory added, "I have also received tremendous support from my fellow graduates from my class via social media and from visits."

Shannon echoed what the other were saying and wrote, "I have also been in contact with some of my former colleagues and classmates who have called to check in and process the new job with me."

Tracy also added, "I relied heavily on my cohort (students who were enrolled with me) to debrief some of the challenges... as well as work/life balance."

**Transition 2—May.** During this transition, the participants indicated that their families and friends were still supportive. Some participants indicated their family and friends were supportive; however, members of these support systems did not understand the field of higher education. Laurie continued to feel the support from her family, writing,

My family continues to be supportive of my choice to move far from home for my first job. They have even chipped in to help cover the cost of a flight home during the summer for a long weekend to visit.

Lisa echoed what the others had said:

My parents have also been very supportive of my decision. They have always been there throughout my educational journey and are very involved in my life in a healthy way. I know with helicopter parents, and now the “snow plow” parents that we have out there, it is nice to know that my parents recognize that I am an independent individual, and know that I need to learn things on my own sometimes. So I appreciate the independence they give me, but also the support and guidance when I need it. My mom has been an amazing soundboard...

Jade mentioned her previous experience with transition, and family support helped. She wrote,

I know that I can always count on my family and friends to support me. Physically I have moved on my own to Italy and to the Midwest for graduate school. As I prepare to move to New York, I am not finding the transition too difficult since I’ve done it on my own before. My friends and family usually give me support through Skype or phone.

Ella wrote about how her family and friends’ support helped, especially when she had a hard time finding her first job:

My family and friends are very excited about my new position, and I am thankful for their support throughout the process. Getting turned down in the job market can really make you second-guess your purpose, and it’s been helpful to have positive thoughts around me.

Those participants who mentioned that their family did not understand their career path also wrote about their experiences. Jamie commented about the lack of understanding:

Most of my support is from friends and family on social media excited about the pictures I post. Outside of what they see on social media, I don’t believe anyone understands or knows what this transition or my new job is like. I can rely on family, friends, and peers to support that I am making the best decision for myself, I am not too sure if they understand the transition and how impactful this is for my work and progression in this field. My family doesn’t understand what I do and how to support me, but they are proud that I am making “moves.”

Nikki also mentioned this lack of understanding:

I can definitely count on my family and the few friends I have for support, but there is no one in my position or shoes to be able to appropriately and knowingly advise me as to certain things and directions to go in.

**Transition 3—June.** In this transition period, all participants had secured positions, and some were beginning to feel support from their new work environments. Laurie said, “I also feel supported by my coworkers in my office, especially my boss. She trusts me and empowers me to make decisions in my position.”

Rory agreed, saying, “my colleagues are fantastic and have been nothing, but supportive to me during these changes.”

Tracy added, “My coworkers have been wonderful. The ones that are not new have been great to help me adjust to this newly found senior role on staff, and I am excited to see what the future brings for our team.”

Similarly, Mill said,

I feel very supported. I believe I fit in very well into my new office. I am making friends easily and they are showing me the ropes. They are providing praise when necessary but also helpful hints and tips along the way. My boss is also very supportive. She believes in me and allows me to take steps, knowing that she will back me up.

Sara explained in detail how her support had changed:

I feel like I have much less support than I did when I first moved. My family and friends no longer see this as something new. It seems like they have accepted that I live elsewhere and have moved on. Friends don’t ask as often how I am feeling or what new things are happening. It is kind of like the transition of me moving away is over for them, but it feels very much alive for me. My parents were also very supportive at the beginning, and they have become more judgmental in the way I choose to live my life. I feel like the office where I work has become a new area of support for me. Everyone has included me into the team seamlessly, and I’ve very grateful for all the support they provide. This includes being invited out to dinner or to special events, being given suggestions of new places to hike, eat or drink. I would say they have become my greatest support system here and treat me as a member of their closely-knit team.

While the new work environments provided support, previous support systems were beginning to fade. As James wrote,

I definitely still feel like I have support, particularly from my friends and family; but having left school, I have definitely lost a significant portion of that support. With many friends starting new jobs of their own, I no longer have the daily support from them.

**Transition 4—July and transition 5—August.** During these transitions, the participants felt support from their new work environments. Shannon wrote, “I feel like I am getting support from my new colleagues... they have been very supportive and willing to help with or talk about my transition.”

Tracy added, “My coworkers have been wonderful. The ones that are not new have been great to help me adjust to this newly found senior role on staff, and I am excited to see what the future brings for our team.”

Likewise, Laurie added, “I feel supported by all the coworkers in my office, especially my boss. She strives to ensure that I understand how to do everything, and she knows when she needs to give me more context or more information.”

The participants still felt support from family and friends; however, some participants still commented that people in their support systems did not understand their new work environments. As Nikki said, “My family is supportive as far as being happy with me being happy in my new role, but [they] do not really, fully understand the extent of the new job and the level of work it will bring. My family is supportive, but they don't know how to show their support.”

Raven added, “my family and friends are still supportive, but I don't think they quite understand the field of higher education.”

Finally, some participants mentioned how important significant others were to their transition. James wrote, “I definitely feel supported by many different groups of people in my life right now. First and foremost, my wife has been great at helping me to adjust.”

The next month, Ella continued to share, “I feel supported by my boyfriend, who has always served as a huge support.”

And Mills indicated,

My biggest support is my husband. He now lives with me, and it is nice to have someone to come home to at the end of the day and debrief. I enjoy telling him about my successes and he lends an ear to my challenges, as well. I know at the end of the day he will support me no matter what.

#### **Research Question 4**

Relative to research question 4, “What strategies do the study participants use to manage their transitions?,” they in fact used a number of different strategies over the 5 months of journaling. Once again, the participants’ journal entries reflect their respective experiences.

**Transition 1—April.** During this period, some participants wrote about their previous coping mechanisms and how these strategies would help them through this new transition. As Rory wrote,

Some strategies that I have used before to cope with the challenges was [*sic*] to reach out to fellow members of my cohort. Due to the type of program that the College Student Personnel Program (CSPA) program has, it is very easy to ask for help from your colleagues.

James also wrote on this topic:

In graduate school, my primary strategy for coping with challenges was the support of my friends, particularly my roommates. Living with three other students in the same program helped all of us to remain calm during stressful situations.

Jade wrote about how her previous coping strategies had helped her in the past:

The way that I cope with challenges is primarily processing it internally first, then, if needed, I talk to my closest peers or supervisors. I think this is how I usually process information. Additional coping strategies would include taking a day off to unwind, whether that includes watching some Netflix or enjoying a glass of wine.

One participant, Lisa, said that reverting to “elementary” coping mechanisms helped her in the past:

My friend and I purchased adult coloring books, which are full of intricate designs and patterns. So what we do is turn off all our electronics, maybe put on some calm music, and start coloring. Sometimes we color for 20 minutes, sometimes we color for a few



hours. But it's nice to get away mentally and just color away. It is very relaxing and soothing to me. I also love jigsaw puzzles, but only the really difficult ones. Because those will take you away, too. It's nice to put your mind at ease for a while.

**Transition 2—May.** At this point, many of the participants wrote about physical activity and how important it was to their transitions. In addition, some participants commented on how this activity was providing much-needed balance in their lives. Raven wrote, "I've started jogging again now that the weather is finally getting warmer. It helps clear my mind and focus on other aspects of my life I need to focus on, such as my health."

Ella added, "...exercising will be one of those things. I've totally neglected it this entire semester due to thesis writing and traveling to conferences. I feel much better when I am regularly working out and have an outlet."

Rory agreed, writing,

One aspect that has always helped me through transitions is just exploring my new surroundings by myself. Whether it is by walking, bicycling, or driving around my new environment, it has always helped me. It may seem odd, but it allows me to get familiar with the environment and also gives me a chance to be alone with my thoughts.

Jade wrote about her activity before she began her new position, and also what she hoped to do when she was in her new job:

I love traveling and trying new things. Therefore, I started doing research on things I know that I will enjoy and make me happy that are located in the surrounding areas. I've already have a few places that I would like to check out in Central NY. Dance is one of my hobbies, so that is one of my goals to enjoy when I go home for about a month to enjoy time with family and friends before starting my new job. In addition, I hope to continue to do hip-hop and ballroom dancing in Central New York to relieve stress in the future.

Sara added,

First, I love going for walks. That can be on a sidewalk, in a park, a busy city, or the wilderness on a hiking trail. I absolutely love the opportunity to be moving and see new things. Doing this in a new city will help me get acquainted to my surroundings, keep my stress levels down, and hopefully allow me meet people along the way...

Lisa shared times in graduate school where she was not as active as she wanted. She was excited about this transition so she could start over with her exercise routine:

My hike yesterday was amazing, and I want to continue doing it. It was something that was of course very active, but it also took me away, not only physically, but mentally. I was focused on the wildlife I saw, and the amazing, breathtaking views. Side note—I realized that breathtaking views may actually come from the physical activity you have to do before you can see the view... get it? Haha.

**Transition 3—June and transition 4—July.** Many participants felt confident, which helped them during these transitions. James and Laurie both mentioned that they felt their confidence was helping them get through the transition.

Ella added, “I am in a good place, confident in my ability, and feeling very welcomed at my new position.”

Similarly, Raven added, “I feel more confident, which is definitely helping me through this transition. Support has definitely helped me as well, which in turn has boosted my confidence.”

Rory said, “I feel like I am confident in my own abilities.”

Tracy indicated, “...I have been through this before, and feel fine.”

Jade also echoed others when she said, “I’m gaining more confidence in my position. I’m happy that my life is fulfilling both at work and in my personal life.”

**Transition 5—August.** During the final transition, the participants felt settled with their transitions. Laurie wrote, “Now that I have gotten settled into my new home and have gotten accustomed to my schedule with my full-time job, I am finally feeling good about this transition.”

Mills added to this feeling and wrote, “I feel like I am settled, which has helped in this transition. My apartment feels lived in. I am still able to see my family and friends. And I still get to do all of my favorite things.”

In addition to feeling settled, some participants mentioned how their new positions gave them joy. Having this type of feeling helped them move through this transition in a positive way. Laurie mentioned, “I feel like I am still loving my job, which is helping me get through this transition. I really love the work I do, and I enjoy coming to work each day.”

Mills added to this conversation by writing, “I feel like I am making others proud. I feel that my supervisor is satisfied with my work and is happy that she hired me. I believe that my team members can rely on me for assistance when necessary.”

And Sara commented,

I feel like I have been given a lot of opportunities recently at work that is [*sic*] helping me get through this transition. For example, when I started I was told that it would probably be months if not a year before they would send me internationally. Part of why I wanted to work in the field of study abroad was to experience new places where we can create programs. However, last week I was told that they needed me to go to Mexico with a delegation of people to investigate a new program. I felt like that opportunity and the faith they put in me as a new employee made me feel like I am no longer transitioning into this job, but am fully trusted in my new role.

### **Research Question 5**

Finally, the fifth research question, “How do the identified support groups and the transition strategies change over the 5-month time period?,” was answered in the template-analysis discussion and then again in reference to research questions 3 and 4. In addition, Table 7 provides an overview of how the participants’ support systems and coping strategies changed over the five transition periods. Regarding participants’ support structures, the support groups for the participants during the first three transition periods were a combination of their families, friends, significant others, and cohort members. This configuration changed during transitions 4

Table 7

*Summary of Dissertation Findings: Participant Perspectives at Transitions 1 Through 5*

Schlossberg's 4 Ss	Transition 1—April	Transition 2—May	Transition 3—June	Transition 4—July	Transition 5—August
Situation	All were —finishing school —searching for jobs	All were —finishing school —searching for jobs  Some had —secured employment	All had —secured employment  Some were —relocating	Some were —relocating —transitioning to new environments —starting to feel comfortable	Many felt —good about transitions —that transitions were complete  Some were —still transitioning
Self	Many —valued jobs —had worked before graduate school Some —had exposure to planning for transition	Many were —nervous about school ending —nervous about finding employment —relying on faith	All had —secured positions  All —were beginning to feel valued by new work environment	All —began to find their voice in new work environment —were confident in new work environment —felt praised for performance	All continued to —find their voice in new work environment —were confident in new work environment —felt praised for performance
Support	Most felt support from —families and friends —classmates —current faculty and supervisor	Most felt support from —families and friends, but they did not understand participants' jobs —classmates	Many felt —support from families and friends starting to fade —support from classmates fading as participants secured jobs —increasing support from new work environments	Many felt continued support —from families and friends —new work environments	Most felt continued support from —families and friends, who “still do not understand my job” —new work environments  Some used —social media to continue getting support
Strategies	All were —preparing for transition —reflecting on what worked in the past	All were —starting or reestablishing physical activity (e.g., running, walking, hiking, dance)	All were feeling —confident and organized —prepared	All were feeling —confident and organized	All were feeling —settled —joyous/happy about new job

and 5. Some participants still felt the support from family and friends; however, some participants felt more support coming from their new supervisors and colleagues.

The strategies for coping also changed over the five transition periods. During transition 1, the participants were reflecting on the past and beginning to think about transition strategies. In transition 2, participants were focused on physical activity as a way to cope with their transition. During transitions 3 and 4, participants were feeling confident about their decisions and about their new environment. Finally, in transition 5, many participants felt settled, and the transition for them was over.

### **Focus-Group Efforts and Outcome**

A focus group provides an opportunity for participants to ask open-ended and nondirective questions (Creswell, 2009). The participants in the pilot study indicated that a focus group would be a great way to meet others and “normalize” what the participants were feeling during their transitions. The researcher also thought a focus group would be a good way to verify the findings of the data and themes and also provide a way to accomplish member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln 2009). The researcher invited the 13 participants who journaled in the dissertation study to join a focus group after the 5 months of journaling. Six participants had confirmed attendance, but only one showed up during the time. The researcher did meet with the one person and used the questions outline in Appendix (K). The feedback from that one participant was helpful should another study be conducted. For instance, the participant indicated that there were times when she forgot whether she had submitted her journal entries to the researcher during the study, and she felt a confirmation note to all participants when they submitted their monthly reports would be helpful. The participant was very interested in the study and seemed to think the emergent themes were on target for her.

After this interaction, the researcher set up two other times to bring other participants together; however, time conflicts prevented this meeting from happening.

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to use the constructs of Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, 1995) to explore the experiences of new student-affairs professionals who had recently graduated from a college student-development master's program, and the transitions of those new professionals to full-time professional jobs. The results of this study offer insights on new student-affairs professionals' experiences during the transition from graduate school to work and through the first 6 months of their new employment. Each study participant provided a rich data set for the researcher to analyze. The template analysis suggested that, overall, students felt their situations were manageable, they relied on their previous transition experiences in the ensuing transition periods, their families and friends were their primary support systems, and physical exercise was the main strategy they used during this time of transition. The data from the study also suggests three emergent themes: (a) communication was a must during transition, (b) the process of transition takes time, and (c) the new professionals were excited to make a difference with students, using the knowledge attained from their graduate school work.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The content of this chapter is focused on a discussion of the findings presented in chapter 4, how the findings connect to the literature, and important conclusions about the findings. The chapter also includes recommendations for practice in higher education, and finally, suggestions for future research.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The participants in this study were excited to complete their graduate program and to secure their first professional job. However, all participants had different views of their situations and different support systems, and they implemented different coping strategies that reflect varying approaches and resulted in diverse transition experiences. Participant experiences resonated with the 4 S system of transition from Schlossberg (1995), which comprises one's situation, self, support, and strategies during a transition. The Schlossberg transition theory demonstrates how one tends to find a balance between one's deficits and assets within each of the Ss during transition. The balancing of the 4 S constructs was evident in this study. At times over the 5-month period, for example, some participants used strategies to manage their transitions directly, while others relied on their external support systems. In this section, the researcher discusses the study findings in relation to their meaning and to the literature.

### **Personal and Demographic Characteristics**

The researcher collected personal and demographic information from the participants in the study. However, not all of this information had an impact on the participants' transitions. The influences of gender, religious preference, ego, commitments, and self-efficacy appeared to influence how some, but not all, participants transitioned in this study.

**Gender.** This research study included three male participants. These male participants appeared to move through their transition smoothly. They did not comment on their doubts, concerns, fears, or challenges, and they seemed to complete their transitions during transitions 3 and 4. There could be various reasons the men did not comment on their fears. For instance, they might have felt uncomfortable journaling about their fears or doubts, they might have had the feelings but did not express them, or they might not have experienced these feelings. This study supports the work of Simon and Nath (2004), who suggest that some men do not express their feelings about life events.

In contrast to the male participants, 10 female participants in the study all actively expressed their feelings throughout the journaling process. Some women were very worried about their future. These participants were feeling discomfort over their lack of control with planning their next steps. The outcomes of this study support the work of Lowenthal, Thurnher, and Chiribora (1975), which yielded similar results, indicating that women were generally less positive regarding their life changes and did not feel they could control their situations. These attitudes caused the females to transition more slowly than the males.

**Religious Preference.** Religious preference was another demographic identifier that characterized one participant. Specifically, one participant during transition 2 indicated, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” This was the only spiritual reference from this participant, and no other participants in the study made mention of any spiritual indicators such as rituals, prayer, meditation, or reflection over the five transition periods. In a 2002 study, in contrast, Thomas explored female welfare recipients in transition and found that more than 86% of the participants used prayer as a way to cope with their transition. The current study did not reveal similar responses from either female or male participants. Over the years, the role of



spirituality in higher education has been studied (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2010; Tisdell, 2003, 2001; Love & Talbot, 2000), and recent research also has been conducted on millennials and their spirituality. A review of all of these studies indicates that the millennials are less spiritual than baby boomers; however, the studies also mention that more research is needed on this topic (Bahan, 2015; Gay & Lynxwiler, 2013; Marmor-Lavie, Bednarski, & Smiley, 2015). The findings from the current study support the above research on millennials and their lack of spirituality.

**Commitments, Ego, and Self-Efficacy.** Schlossberg et al. (1995) suggested that different individuals “approach the same transition from different frames of reference based on their varying psychological resources like ego, self-efficacy, commitments, and values” (p. 62). The findings from this study support the Schlossberg results, in that the participants in this study also had varying commitments and values. Two participants married their partners during this transition process. These participants were searching for employment with their partners’ needs and with both of their agreed-upon locations in mind. This scenario also meant that the participants’ job searches were happening at the same time as they were planning their weddings. Both participants journaled about the stress of their transitions as it related to these combined commitments.

Two other participants in this study were searching for their first employment opportunity close to home. It was very important to these participants that their first professional position was near their support system (family members). During the first two transitions, these participants expressed stress because their classmates were securing positions and they were not. They valued the need to be close to home, but this need proved to be an additional stress for them during the transition.

Some participants in this study were dealing with their ego during their job search. For example, during transition 2, two female participants had experienced being rejected from institutions where they hoped to secure employment. This rejection appeared to shake the two women's confidence. These participants relied on their support systems to help them regroup and gain confidence. In this study, only the female participants discussed job rejections. Again, this is not to say the males did not experience such rejection, but the men did not journal about the topic. The findings in this study support Schlossberg's (1984) work, which suggests that in "our culture men are socialized to hide emotions and deny problems whereas women are given freedom to express their feelings" (p. 80).

During transitions 4 and 5, some study participants had a high level of self-efficacy and were confident about their transitions into their new work environments. In this context, Bandura (1997) suggested that self-efficacy was dependent upon whether individuals perceived their ability to control their behavior and environmental demands. The participants in this study who were confident about their transitions seemed to be those who had previous transition experiences (work or travel abroad). Schlossberg (1984) indicated that an "individual who has successfully weathered a particular kind of transition in the past will probably be successful at assimilating to another position of a similar nature" (p. 76). A number of the current participants had between 2 years and 4 years of previous work experience either inside or outside higher education. One participant spent a semester abroad to complete her undergraduate degree. This study's findings support Schlossberg's findings in that some participants felt they could control their new environments and were confident about their current transitions.

## Transition Situation

How the participants viewed their situations varied throughout the 5 months of journaling. Schlossberg et al. (1995) used the term *situation* as a reference to one's situation during the transition, and proposed that, during similar transitions, "every individual's situation varies..." (p. 53). In addition, Schlossberg, Troll, and Leibowitz (1978) suggested that one can view one's situation as a *crisis* (a sudden and upsetting situation) or a *transition state* (change in one's life that involves a range of emotions). In this study, throughout the five transition points, none of the participants expressly viewed the situation as a crisis.

**Transition 1—April.** At the first transition, all participants were finishing graduate school and working to secure full-time employment. This was a stressful time in their lives. Many of them were studying for comprehensive exams. Some participants were working on a portfolio, and two were working on a final paper that took the place of comprehensive exams. No matter what final project they were completing, all participants except one were looking for a full-time job. The participant not looking for a full-time job had already secured her full-time position while she was enrolled in her graduate program.

During this transition period, the participants expressed a range of emotions. All participants were excited to finish their graduate program, some were sad to leave their classmates, and many were nervous about finding employment. This range of emotions is consistent with Schlossberg's (1984) definition of transition, "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions or roles" (p. 33). In particular, the female participants in the current study experienced these emotions and were beginning to think more about this transition.

Some participants were more comfortable than others with their emotions. They understood that change was coming; however, some participants planned for the change. Those who planned for the change had discussions or workshops with their faculty members before they finished graduate school. These participants reflected on what strategies had worked for them in the past, and they built similar strategies for this transition. These participants also thought about and expressed whom they could count on (support systems) during this transition. They appeared to be moving along through the transition and felt comfortable with their feelings at that time. In contrast, those students who had not thought about the change appeared to be uncomfortable and nervous about the transition.

In addition to experiencing these emotions, three participants were forced to look for positions in specific areas because of personal commitments. As was briefly discussed earlier in reference to research question 1, these participants had personal commitments (weddings, significant others, family) that placed parameters around their job search. These commitments were important to the participants and slowed the transition process for them. The timing of acquiring employment did not matter to them as much as their commitments. The slowing down of the transition process did create stress for them. Graham and McKenzie's study (1995) of new professionals who had personal commitments as they began a new career, and who also experienced additional stress during their transitions, supports these findings.

**Transition 2—May.** In the second transition period, some participants were still completing their graduate work, some had secured full-time employment, and others were concerned about their job search. Specific to a person's situation, Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory focused on two key perceptions. The first was how one views one's transition, and the second was the extent to which individuals can rely on their resources during their

transitions. Those current participants who had secured full-time employment experienced a sense of relief and excitement about this transition period. For these students, their perceptions regarding their transitions were positive. They were packing, selecting new places to live, and learning about their new surroundings. Their expression of these feelings supported the “moving in” component of Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory. To expand on this component, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) suggested that one would “move through” transitions. They introduced the idea of transitions having three phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out. According to Goodman et al. (2006) people moving in to a situation need to acquaint themselves with the guidelines, norms, and expectations of the new environment. Once in a new situation, they need to learn how to balance their activities with other areas of their lives as they move through the transition. Finally, they move out and end the stage of transition and begin thinking about the next steps in their lives.

In addition to the work of Schlossberg (1995) and Goodman et al. (2006), Gullahorn and Gullahorn’s (1963) W-Curve Hypotheses Model reflects the evidence about those participants in the current study who secured employment. Those participants were in the *honeymoon stage*. As Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) suggested, the current participants in this stage were feeling hopeful and were aware of the new experiences ahead.

The Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) theory does not support the evidence of those students in this study who had not secured employment, however, because their perceptions of the transition were not as positive or hopeful. These participants expressed concern about the future and, in some cases, were also using their support systems and strategies to help them through their transition. Many of these participants viewed their situation as daunting and were concerned about securing their first job.

**Transition 3—June.** By the third transition, all study participants had secured full-time positions. Some participants who had just secured employment were feeling the emotions of confusion and chaos as they packed up, moved across the country, and learned about their new environment. Participants who had secured positions in previous months were beginning to move into those positions. They were beginning to feel some of what Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) called *culture shock*, which they defined as the period when the transition experience includes some confusion and is overwhelming.

The current participants who had secured their employment during transition 1 expressed positive feelings and were at ease during transition 3 because they no longer had the stress of searching for employment. Many of these participants could see the new steps in their future, and this evidence provided them with a positive feeling regarding their transition. They were just beginning to move into the next phase of the transition (Schlossberg, 1984). These participants moved to their new cities, found places to live, and were becoming familiar with their new work cultures. They had begun to look forward to meeting the other staff members.

**Transition 4—July.** During the fourth transition, some participants felt settled with their situation in their new jobs. They felt they had a handle on their new surroundings, and they were positive about their transition.

In contrast, some participants were still learning to navigate their new positions and surroundings. For the students who were still transitioning, the expression of their experiences mirrored those participants who had settled in during transition 3. Those who were still moving through the process were viewing their situation as positive; however, they also continued to experience some of the culture shock Gullahorn and Gullahorn, (1963) identified. These findings align with Schlossberg's (1984) theory of moving through a transition. These

participants were still working through their new routines and surroundings. This study's findings also support Black's (1988) work and findings using the Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) U-Curve with employee transitions, in which employees were feeling culture shock as they were learning about their new work environment.

Four participants in the current study felt their transitions were over at this point. They were comfortable and no longer viewed their situations as transitions. Similarly, Schlossberg's (1984) work also suggests that students in that study were moving out of their situation. They were comfortable with the new routines and expectations, and their new experiences were no longer transitional.

**Transition 5—August.** At this final stage, some current participants still felt that each day was getting easier; however, they were not yet feeling settled with their new surroundings. The participants among this small number were still moving through their transitions. They were still adjusting to their new surroundings outside the workplace and learning to make sense of the culture inside their workplace. This study's findings are similar to research on newcomer adjustments, which suggests these transitions can be stressful and feel unsettling (Bauer & Erdogan, 1996; Morrison, 1993; Saks & Ashforth, 1996).

More participants in this study were in Schlossberg's moving-out stage at this point and felt their transition was over. Some participants indicated they could handle their positions, and that was a sign to them that their transition was over. For instance, Mills wrote, "I view this transition as complete. I am a young professional, not a new professional. I understand my campus and my role and how I play an integral part in the larger campus community."

The majority of participants felt good about their new situations and had moved out of their transition. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) called this stage the acceptance and integration

stage, when individuals are readapting to their new settings and feel integrated into their new communities. In this context, this study's results also are consistent with other research related to the Schlossberg transition theory (Fox, 2011; Sperling, 2012; Thomas, 2002).

Some current participants expressed a range of emotions over the course of the 5 months. As the study began, the participants felt stress related to completing their graduate commitments and securing their employment. When they completed their graduate programs, they moved on to securing employment and began to feel nervous about their new environments. Once they secured their positions and were moving through the related transition, they began to feel more comfortable. The participants who had planned for their transitions appeared to move smoothly through those transitions. This study's findings support the work of Kim and Moen (2001), in which adults who planned for retirement found the life-change transition easier to manage. Additional studies involving students with special needs also support this study's findings, in that preparing for transitions helped standardize and provide comfort to those students during the transition process (Lotstein, McPherson, Strickland, & Newacheck, 2005; Reiss, Gibson, & Walker, 2005).

### **Transition Support Systems**

During each of the five transitions, participants indicated they had some type of support. Schlossberg (1984) suggested that "people receive support from four different major sources: intimate relationships, their family units, their network of friends and their institutions or communities of which they are a part" (p. 99). The support systems for participants in this study changed from month to month and varied by participant. Family, friends, partners, new work environments, and classmates were some of the many support systems participants used.



**Transition 1—April.** At this transition, participants were feeling supported by many different people. Most participants expressed feeling support from their families and friends. Further, some participants felt support from current classmates (cohort), faculty, and supervisors. These findings align with the definition of support systems during transition according to Schlossberg's understanding. When life becomes stressful, individuals rely on those they trust and support (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The current study's findings also are consistent with the work of Kahn and Antonucci (1980). Lachman (2002) described the Kahn and Antonucci (1980) model as "a conceptual framework for understanding social relationships across the life span" (p. 572). This model is depicted by three concentric circles, with the individual being in the center. The foundation of this framework is that the group of people surrounding the individual in the smallest circle are those closest to the individual. The larger, second circle contains close friends and extended family, and the roles in this circle are stable. The third, outermost circle is made up of community agencies, coworkers, and distant relatives. And the roles in the outermost circles are changing constantly (Kahn and Antonucci, 1980). In the current study, the smallest circle for the majority of participants contained their family members.

In addition to the research of Schlossberg (1995) and Kahn and Antonucci (1980) regarding support systems, several other research studies also have noted the importance of cohorts (classmates) in graduate-education programs (Groen, Jakubson, Ehrenberg, Condie, & Liu, 2008; Nerad & Miller, 1996; Potthoff, Fredrickson, Batenhorst, & Tracy, 2001). In particular, these studies indicated how important cohorts were to student retention and completion. The studies involving cohorts discussed how students interacting with others who were going through the same experience helped to "normalize" the issues for those involved. Some research focused on the need for cohorts in online programs so that students felt connected

to one another and their academics (Bocchi, Eastman, & Swift, 2004; Pribesh, Dickinson & Bucher, 2006). Most participants in the current study felt very connected to their classmates (cohort) and relied on them for support with their transitions. In addition, many participants spoke about relying on their cohort members to provide norming during this experience. The circumstances for two participants did not provide them with the cohort-model experience. Instead, their support systems were predominately their family members and friends.

**Transition 2—May.** During the second transition period, many participants had the same support systems. Some participants, however, mentioned that people in their support systems did not understand the field of higher education. During this transition, participants expressed that they were frustrated because those in their support systems did not understand what the participants were going through. This issue seemed to be most challenging for the participants who had not secured their full-time employment. The members of their support system were not sure how to help them during this part of their transition.

During this second transition period, one participant used technology (Skype) to visually interact with his support systems. This participant had utilized this technology in a previous transition, and he relied on video communication again to help him in the current transition because it was important for him to stay close to his family members. The literature is lacking around the use of Skype as a way to stay connected to one's support system during a transition. There is, however, literature related to the use of this technology in distant classrooms (Adams, 2011; Blankenship, 2011; Bryant, 2006; Eaton, 2010; Pan & Sullivan, 2005), and using video communication for those receiving palliative (pain-relief) care (Brecher, 2013; Dahlin & Giansiracusa, 2006; Johnston, Kidd, Wengstrom, & Kearney, 2012; Pritchard, Cuvelier, Harlos,

& Barr, 2011). These studies show the importance of using technology to see others face to face, which helps individuals feel supported during a period of change or uncertainty.

**Transition 3—June.** At the third transition, many current participants felt support from their new colleagues and new supervisors. Schlossberg (1984) indicated this experience was common during transitions because individuals could look for support from those physically near them. According to Kahn and Antonucci (1980), this group represented the participants' outer circle of support. As previously discussed, the outermost circle is changeable and consists of community agencies, coworkers, and distant relatives.

Some research suggests that a new professional's supervisor can be the reason a new professional stays in the field of higher education (Creamer & Winston, 2002; Harned & Murphy, 1998; Tull, 2006). During the early transitions (1 and 2), the participants in the current study were nervous about their new positions, including working with new supervisors.

In addition, many participants were still using friends and family for support, and also were receiving some support from classmates. In some cases, participants' cohort support was beginning to fade because the participants were securing their own positions. Some participants felt that, based on their own feelings of being settled in the transition, their need for support was dwindling.

**Transitions 4 and 5—July and August.** The participants were feeling the same support at both transitions 4 and 5. Many participants still felt supported by their family members. Toward the end of these transition periods, participants were feeling good about their new supervisor relationships, findings that support the existing research. The participants were gaining confidence and strength from their supervisors' praise and support. Renn and Hodges (2007) also suggested that supervisors might want to set clear expectations and goals for new

professionals to help them in their transitions. A number of participants in the current study wrote about how good it felt to know what their new supervisors or colleagues expected of them. This knowledge was helping the participants move through their transitions, and with that help they felt they could have some control over their work environment. This study's findings support the research on millennials in the workforce that has found millennials want clear expectations from their supervisors (Bolch, Ehlenfeldt, Lopez, Menzel & Van Essen, 2011; Ito, 2011; Manning, 2011; Schultz & Schwepker, 2012).

At this point in the study, participants were using technology and social media as a way to obtain support. Different from what has been discussed relative to the previous transition, some participants were staying connected with their support systems by posting to Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. These participants used social media to see what others were doing, or to let others know how they were doing. A number of studies include results showing that participants in those studies used technology to stay connected with groups of people (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Vitak, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2011; Yang & Brown, 2013). Outcomes of these studies, like the current one, indicate that using technology to stay in touch with others proves helpful for those who are experiencing transitions.

The current participants felt a great deal of support during each one of their transition periods. In the beginning, they were relying on their close support systems (family, friends, and partners). The participants' cohorts (classmates) were also important. These cohorts were dealing with the same transition issues and so provided a safe place for the participants to talk about their challenges. This support also proved to be helpful because many of those persons in the other support systems did not understand higher education and what the participants were going through. Some participants also were using video communication and social media to feel

supported. Toward the end of the 5-month period, the participants' support began to move beyond family and friends to their new environments.

### **Transition Strategies**

Schlossberg et al. (1995) suggested that the variable of transition strategies reflects how an individual copes with and navigates transitions. Also, like Schlossberg (1984), Lazarus (1980) suggested that one's selection of coping mechanisms is related to one's "personal disposition, situation, and available responses" (p. 95). As mentioned previously regarding participants' support systems, the strategies the current participants used varied throughout the five months of journaling.

**Transition 1—April.** During the first transition period, the participants relied on coping mechanisms that had worked in their past. For some participants, this meant staying connected to their support systems, families, and close friends. For other participants it meant having conversations with family members, faculty members, and current supervisors, or with classmates who were experiencing some of the same feelings about transition.

Also during this transition, the participants began to journal about their personality and how it plays a role in their transition strategies. A couple of participants indicated they were introverts and needed time to themselves during the transition. These participants noted that they would go to movies, color, or put together puzzles to help with their transition. Nakano (1992) suggested that there are differences in how extroverts and introverts use coping mechanisms. Nakano's study found that extroverts seek out social groups for support and are more likely to avoid making changes in their lives. Alternately, introverts do not seek out social groups to process their transition. Evans (1986) also suggested that personality factors play a bigger role in transition than new environmental factors. So all new professionals will not have the same

coping strategies, and their personality traits can play an important role in their transitions. Similarly, this current study's findings suggest that new professionals' personalities may be important to consider as an influence during their transition into new employment.

**Transition 2—May.** During the second transition period, participants were focused on activity (running, walking, biking, dancing, or other physical activities) to help with their transition. Many participants indicated that they missed such activity in graduate school, and it felt good to have the time to add it back into their routine. These activities provided a way for them to relieve some of the stress related to their transitions. The results of studies that have researched activity as a coping strategy indicate that physical activity is a common way to release the stress associated with transition or change (Harris, Cronkite, & Moos, 2006; Wijndaele et al., 2007). Physical activity has been associated with a means to give one control over the stress related to transition (Lazarus 2013; Pearlin, 1980).

**Transitions 3, 4, and 5—June, July, and August.** During these last three transition periods, the participants were journaling about their coping strategies and relying on the approaches they had used during previous transition experiences. The participants seemed to be checking in with how their transitions were going, their feelings around the transitions, and where they were in the process. As discussed earlier, it is common for individuals to rely on their past experiences during the transition process (Schlossberg, 1984).

During these periods, some participants were also relying on their confidence to help them through the transitions. In conjunction with Pearlin (1980), Schlossberg (1984) also suggested that one's coping strategies are related to one's "self-esteem or mastery" (p. 92). Lopez and Gormley (2002) studied adult students and found that those with higher confidence in themselves coped more effectively with their transitions. Additional studies around self-

confidence and students' perception of control of their situations suggest that students with a higher self-esteem and confidence are more adaptable in the work setting (Duffy, 2010; Koen, Klehe, Van Vianen, Zikic, & Nauta, A. 2010; Rottinghaus, Buelow, Matyja, & Schneider, 2012).

In addition to feeling confident about their transitions, some participants in the current study were receiving positive feedback from new supervisors or colleagues about their work. This positive feedback helped give them greater self-confidence, which led to smoother transitions. Most participants were feeling settled in their transitions because they felt confident with their decisions and surroundings.

In addition to their growing self-confidence, some participants felt that their organizational skills were helping them through these transitions. They felt that taking one day at a time was important and, more importantly, that they had a need to "stay on top" of the transitions. Similar to this outcome, Dix and Savickas (1995) conducted research around a person's transition to new employment and found that being organized was a successful coping mechanism.

At transition 5 in this study, only one participant was still feeling a bit overwhelmed by the transition. This participant felt she was agreeing to do everything, and this was causing additional stress on her transition. Although the participant did not elaborate on these feelings, it is not uncommon for new employees to want to impress their colleagues or new supervisor. Results of research conducted by Myers and Oetzel (2003) also revealed this need for individuals to feel important to an organization. Outcomes of this research suggest that new employees are looking for recognition or validity about how important they are to the organization. There are additional studies on fitting in as a new professional that indicate how important it is for a newcomer to gain approval and acceptance into her new work organization (Barge & Schlueter,

2004; Kramer, 2010; Stohl, 1986). The current participant may have been trying to impress new supervisors or colleagues and was finding this strategy overwhelming at this point in her transition.

Many coping strategies participants used varied through the first and second transition periods; however, there seemed to be little change during transitions 3, 4, and 5. In the earlier months, participants relied on physical activities and their previous coping mechanisms to help with their transitions. In addition, the personalities of a couple participants (introverts) began to surface as they were coping with their transitions. During the last three transition periods, participants appeared to be relying on the coping mechanisms that were working or had worked for them in the past. They also were relying on the confidence they were gaining as they progressed through the transition process.

### **Support and Changes in Strategy**

In this study and in previous literature, the data suggest that it is common for participants' support groups to be their families, friends, significant others, and cohort members (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Schlossberg, 1995). During transitions 4 and 5, some current participants felt the support from family and friends; however, other participants felt more support coming from their new supervisors or new colleagues. This outcome supports the work of Kahn and Antonucci (1980), in which the participants' support also began to move beyond family and friends to their new environments. Kahn and Antonucci (1980) would describe the new environments as the participants' outer-circle support.

This study also suggests that the participant's strategies changed over the five transition periods. In the early transition stages, participants were reflecting on the strategies they had used in the past. In addition, some participants used activity, which provided them stress relief during



their transitions. During transition periods 3, 4, and 5, participants were feeling confident about their decisions and about their new environment. Some participants felt organized, which helped them manage their transitions. As discussed previously, the males in the study seemed to feel settled sooner than the females. However, by the final transition period, the majority of participants were feeling settled, and their transitions were over.

### **Communication: A Must During Transition**

Communication appeared as a theme throughout all five transition periods.

*Communicating* was defined as talking, venting, texting, writing, or other communication methods all the participants used to help in their transition. Both the males and the females in this study discussed the need to communicate as an important part of their transitions. The participants relied on talking with their classmates, their faculty members, and their families. All participants were journaling for this study, and some indicated that the process of journaling and reflection was helpful in their transitions. In addition, those who identified as introverts discussed communication, as noted in the Transition Strategies section earlier in this chapter. Participants who identified as introverts also had the need to reflect, journal, and talk about their experiences.

When journaling about their prior experiences with transition, many participants indicated they relied on conversations with others to help them. These conversations could be with their supervisors, with colleagues, or with friends. Creating a dialogue with others offered participants an outlet and provided affirmation about their thinking, their feelings, and their recent choices. This study's findings support those from a study conducted in 2004, in which chief student-affairs officers ranked interpersonal skills (reading, writing, and speaking) as among the most important skills a new professional could possess (Herdlin, 2004).

In addition, the current findings are also encouraging in light of the fact that how one communicates in today's world is different from previous times. For instance, Hutchby (2013) wrote about the use of technology and how it has changed the basic conversation. In a world in which technologies such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have replaced the typical conversation, the fact that these participants needed to engage in conversations with other is encouraging.

### **Transition Takes Time**

Many of the new professionals in this study did not like the process of transition. The participants were not patient with themselves or the process. As discussed previously, Schlossberg (1995) suggested that one's situation is related to how one feels about the change. For example, Schlossberg suggested that individuals view their situation through one of the following lenses: sudden change, change relating to the social clock, their understanding of the source of the change, and the duration of the change.

Schlossberg (1981) indicated that the duration of change (perceived as temporary or permanent) can also have an effect on one's transition. Schlossberg (1984) also suggested that the duration of time is the "individual's time perspective" (p. 63). For the participants in this study, the duration of the change was difficult because the participants felt the transition was taking what felt like forever. Their feelings of frustration with the time it took them to make the transition was evident across four of the five transition periods, from transition 2 through transition 5. Specifically, the data revealed that some participants were frustrated with the time it took them to "get to the other side" of the transition. Participants lacked the patience both with the transition process and with themselves. As Schlossberg (1995) suggested, this frustration can be detrimental to one's ability to successfully make the transition. Their frustration alone did not

seem to significantly affect the participants in this study; however, many mentioned the topic in their journals.

Based on previous research and the outcomes of this study, new professionals need to understand that the transition to becoming a new professional takes time. Magolda and Carnaghi (2004) suggested that every part of the transition process takes time, including understanding self and institutional cultures, or becoming comfortable with networking. In addition, the research on the millennial generation suggests that individuals have a lack of patience with transition in the workplace. Lancaster and Stillman (2010) indicated that this generation of employees has set the bar high for themselves and expects things to happen at a fast pace. This sense of fast pace also was evident for some participants in this study. For example, Lisa mentioned the following in her journal:

Rolling with the punches. I think that when you are getting hung up on small details or small speed bumps, you can easily get overwhelmed. But if you take it one day at a time, you can get through the transition. I want this to be over.

### **Excited to Make a Difference**

Kahn (1990) defined *personal engagement* as “harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Kahn’s (1990) research suggested that those who are engaged in their work are “physically involved in tasks, whether alone or with others, cognitively vigilant and empathically connected to others in the service of the work ... and their personal connection to others” (p. 700).

As discussed in chapter 4, these new professionals were excited about their new positions. This emergent theme did not present itself until transition periods 4 and 5 in July and August. During these last 2 months of the study, many participants were excited to put their new

knowledge and practical experience into practice with the students on their campuses. These new professionals wanted to make an impact in their first job, and many indicated all of their academic work was about to pay off in this first new job.

The participants in this study did care about making, and were excited to make, a positive difference in their students' lives. This theme of graduates wanting to make a difference directly aligns with the literature. In addition to the research on personal engagement, Grant (2007) suggested "a model of relational job design to describe how jobs spark the motivation to make a prosocial difference, and how this motivation affects employees' actions and identities" (p. 393). Other research studies also have indicated that employees want to make a difference in their jobs (Bornstein, 2004; Everett, 1995; May, 2003; Quinn, 2000). Research, both qualitative and quantitative, has revealed that many employees refer to the purpose of their work in terms of making a positive difference in others' lives (Colby, Sippola, & Phelps, 2001; Ruiz-Quintanilla & England, 1996). Research across a variety of disciplines suggests that this motivation to make a prosocial difference is customary in a number of work settings (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Marx, 1980; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Regehr, Goldberg, & Hughes, 2002). Grant (2007) also noted that "a growing body of research suggests that interpersonal relationships play a key role in enabling employees to experience their work as important and meaningful" (Barry & Crant, 2000; Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000; Kahn, 1990, 1998; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). The participants' responses in this study support these findings, as they expressed excitement about playing a role in the lives of their students.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

As noted several times throughout this discussion, the attrition of new professionals in student affairs is concerning. Research indicates that more than half of new professionals in student affairs leave the field before their fifth year (Harned & Murphy, 1998; Hull, 2006; Lorden, 1998; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Saunders et al., 2000). By paying attention to new professionals' transitions, practitioners and faculty have an opportunity to mitigate this attrition issue. Therefore, the findings of this study have implications for student-development faculty, those working with new professionals, professional organizations, and in the context of mentoring and onboarding in the workplace.

## **Student-Development Faculty**

This study's findings suggest that those participants who were asked to reflect on their previous transitions or to plan for the upcoming change in their situations had a smoother transition. They felt confident and knew they could manage their situations. These findings suggest that those who are teaching in student-development master's programs might want to spend time discussing transition with those students who are preparing to graduate. As discussed previously, transition takes time, and this aspect of the process frustrated some participants. Faculty could host workshops or guest lectures could help new professionals discuss ways to transition into new environments. For example, topics such as working within new organizational structures, learning the new politics of a campus, or reflecting on previous transition coping strategies will prepare students for and offer them a smoother transition into their first full-time employment experience.

### **Working With New Professionals**

Those who supervise new professionals might want to take note of these 13 participants' experiences. This study offers supervisors some insights regarding gender, religious preference, and transition. In addition, the findings also reveal how some participants dealt with ego, commitments, and self-efficacy during their transitions. These findings suggest that supervisors should also take into account the outside impacts on new professionals' transitions, such as their hobbies, interests, or commitment.

Based on the results of this study, it may also be important for supervisors to ask new professionals about their support systems. As the months passed, this study's new professionals were looking toward their new work environments for support. Supervisors of new professionals need to understand this perspective and be ready to support their staff members. In addition, findings surfaced regarding new professionals who were introverts and their need to process transition privately, while other participating new professionals needed to communicate (in writing, orally, nonverbally) to confirm they were headed in the right direction as they transitioned. Finally, this study highlights for supervisors the common strategies these new professionals implemented during their transition.

### **Professional Organizations**

Finally, professional organizations might consider developing a strategy for new-professionals' development around transition. Since these new graduates are no longer engaged with a graduate-school curriculum, an important role for professional organizations is to help facilitate their next steps in transition. This support could include professional development around how the graduates view their new situations, recommendations for secure coping strategies, and the provision of support systems (mentoring) during transition.

## **Role of Mentoring and Onboarding**

Noteworthy in this study was the lack of expression of mentoring or onboarding as a component of the participants' transition. The participants did not talk about peer mentoring or mentoring opportunities that helped them acclimate to their new environments. However, in the focus-group setting, the one participant mentioned the importance of finding a mentor within the first year.

Student-development faculty, supervisors, and professional organizations might benefit from reframing mentoring from a process that occurs *after* one has transitioned to one that *is part of* the transition process. As discussed in chapter 2, there are many different types of mentoring, and numerous studies have emphasized mentoring as a way to support new professionals (Chao, 1997; Dansky, 1996; Le Maistre, Boudreau, & Paré, 2006; Mitchell, 1999).

Similar to group mentoring, workshops or focus groups for new professionals might also be helpful. For instance, Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) discussed the importance of offering workshops or focus groups to address important transition topics such as “professionalism, adapting to workplace cultures, [and] creating a new social network within new environments” (p. 162). Opportunity to think about and discuss transitions appears to be a powerful strategy in helping participants' move through successful transitions.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Although this study provided a rich description of how 13 participants felt during their transition from graduate school to their first full-time jobs, suggestions remain for possible future studies. First, conducting a study that compares students who had conversations around transition before their actual transitions with those students who did not have conversations around transitions would be helpful. This research might provide more insight into whether such

conversations allowed the participants to achieve their transition goals more quickly than those participants who did not have such conversations or were not encouraged to have a preliminary plan. Another piece of this proposed study could include a focus on new professionals who had the opportunity to reflect on strategies that worked for them in the past, and whether such reflection resulted in a smoother transition for them.

Second, research could be conducted within each student-affairs functional area. The results of this study indicate the importance of cohorts. Further studies involving training in cohorts could be helpful for the transition of new professionals. One could ask those students who secured positions in residence-life programs, student activities, conduct, or other functional areas to journal about their transition and onboarding experiences. This approach could provide functional-area information regarding the transition process for new employees.

Third, based on the findings of this study, more research is needed regarding new student-affairs professionals' motivation, and their motivation to make a difference. This research study could offer supervisors a better understanding of new student-affairs professionals' plans to make a difference and why making a difference is important to them. In addition, understanding the ways in which new professionals are motivated would provide invaluable insight for supervisors.

Finally, a number of participants in this research study did not secure employment during the 5-month period. These participants were not included in the final outcomes of the study because they did not secure employment. A study on the students who do not successfully gain employment during the "traditional" (April through August) employment season would offer another important source of information for the student-affairs field.



## **Conclusion**

Transition is a normal part of one's life. As Josephine Miles, poet and literary scholar, said, "every age is an age of transition [and]... transition is a part of life with which we do not feel comfortable and which we try to deny" (1974, p. 3). And just like today's college students, new practitioners also have significant transition needs.

The experiences and feelings of 13 attentive and reflective masters' students have resulted in information-rich reflections that add to our understanding of how those students graduating from a college student-development master's-degree program experienced the process of transition to their first full-time position in student affairs. This study highlights the different feelings and thoughts of these graduates within the context of Schlossberg's 4 S theory of transition over five transition periods. In addition, the study results reveal three emergent themes that add to our understanding of the transition process. These themes include the need for new professionals to (a) communicate with many others, (b) understand that transition takes time, and (c) make a difference. Overall, this study provides the basis for academic professionals and others to gain a richer understanding of the experiences of young professionals in transition to their respective roles in student affairs.

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## APPENDIX A: LETTER OF SOLICIATION TO STUDENT-AFFAIRS PROGRAM CHAIRS

Date

Name

Institution

Dear (Name),

My name is Liz Okuma, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership program at Colorado State University's School of Education. In addition to my doctoral work, I currently serve as Vice-President and Dean of Students at Hiram College.

I am embarking on my dissertation research in which I am exploring the transition experiences for students graduating with a student-affairs master's degree into their full-time employment. I would greatly appreciate the participation from students in your master's program. The title of my research is *Transitioning From Student to Professional: The Experiences of New Professionals in Student Affairs*. The Principal Investigator is my advisor, Linda Kuk, PhD, Associate Professor, CSU School of Education, and I am the CoPrincipal Investigator.

I would like to ask your assistance in one of two ways:

1. Please e-mail me the names and e-mail addresses of students who are eligible (graduating spring term) to participate in this study, OR
2. Please pass along this information to your students who are graduating in May. The attached flyer outlines the study requirements and how the students can participate.

Thank you again for your assistance. Please feel free to contact me should you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

Liz Okuma

Doctoral Candidate & CoPrincipal Investigator

Colorado State University

Elizabeth.Okuma@colostate.edu

330.201.5706

Linda Kuk, PhD

Principal Investigator & Associate Professor

Colorado State University

School of Education

Linda.Kuk@colostate.edu

## RESEARCH STUDY



Colorado State University  
School of Education  
Higher Education Leadership

Dear Student,

My name is Liz Okuma, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership program at Colorado State University's School of Education. In addition to my doctoral work, I currently serve as Vice-President and Dean of Students at Hiram College. I am embarking on my dissertation research and would greatly appreciate your participation.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to use the constructs of Schlossberg's Transition theory to explore the experience of new professionals who have recently graduated from a student personnel master's program, and their transitions to full-time professional jobs.

### **Time Commitment**

There are two phases to this study. Data for the first phase will be collected from early May to late August. During this first phase, participants will be asked to respond and submit online answers for 4 to 5 questions monthly. All participants will select a pseudonym. All responses will be kept secure and confidential. The researcher and her advisor will be the only ones with access to the data. The second phase will be a focus group in September. I am asking that you participate in a 45-minute focus group. This focus group will be conducted online and will be recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be kept secure and confidential. One purpose of the focus group is to make sure I have accurately interpreted your online journals. You will have time to review your journals and submit any corrections to the researcher.

I look forward to hearing from you if you have additional questions, or that you are willing to participate.

Liz Okuma  
Doctoral Candidate & CoPrincipal Investigator  
330.201.5706  
Elizabeth.Okuma@colostate.edu

Linda Kuk, PhD  
Associate Professor & PI  
Colorado State University  
linda.kuk@colostate.edu

## APPENDIX C: NASPA REGIONAL AREAS

Region	Member States, Provinces, and Countries
Region I	CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT, Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island (Region I Canada), Belgium, England, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Wales (Region I Europe)
Region II	NY, PA, WV, DE, NJ, MD, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, Afghanistan, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Italy, Turkey
Region III	AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, VA, Bahamas, Bermuda, Bulgaria, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mexico, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Taiwan, Trinidad & Tobago, United Arab Emirates
Region IV-E	IL, IN, IA, MI, MN, OH, WI, Ontario
Region IV-W	NM, CO, WY, ND, SD, NE, KS, OK, MO, AR, Manitoba, Saskatchewan
Region V	UT, AK, ID, OR, NV, MT, WA, Alberta, British Columbia
Region VI	Northern CA, Southern CA, AZ, HI, Australia, Guam, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, & China

Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA),  
Retrieved February 3, 2015 from [HTTPS://WWW.NASPA.ORG/CONSTITUENT-  
GROUPS/REGIONS](https://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/regions)

## APPENDIX D: LETTER TO STUDENTS VOLUNTEERING TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Date  
Name

Dear (Name),

Thank you for volunteering to participate in my study. My name is Liz Okuma, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership program at Colorado State University. You may contact me with any questions at [elizabeth.okuma@colostate.edu](mailto:elizabeth.okuma@colostate.edu) or by calling me on my cell phone at 330.201.5706.

For my dissertation research, I am exploring the transition experiences for students graduating with a student-affairs master's degree into their full-time employment. The title of my research is *Transitioning from Student to Professional: The Experiences of New Professionals in Student Affairs*. The Principal Investigator is my advisor, Linda Kuk, PhD, Associate Professor, CSU School of Education, and I am the CoPrincipal Investigator.

To participate in this study, you will need to respond to 4 to 5 questions via an online site one time each month starting in May and ending in August. This should take no longer than 25 to 30 minutes each month. To begin the process, you will be asked to complete a consent form and provide general demographic information. Both of these forms will be e-mailed back to the researcher. You will only need to provide information for which you are comfortable. You will also select a pseudonym, and your real name will not be released to anyone. All online journals will be kept secure and confidential. The researcher and her advisor will be the only ones with access to the data.

In September, I will ask that you participate in a 45-minute focus group, which will be conducted online. The focus-group session will be recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be kept secure and confidential. One purpose of the focus group is to make sure I accurately interpreted your online journals. You will have time to review your journals and submit any corrections to the researcher.

All information collected will be kept confidential and secure. The data collected will be analyzed and reported as a part of my dissertation. A summary of the results will be available upon request.

I look forward to hearing from you if you have additional questions, or that you are willing to participate.

Sincerely,

Liz Okuma  
Doctoral Candidate & CoPrincipal Investigator  
Colorado State University  
[Elizabeth.Okuma@colostate.edu](mailto:Elizabeth.Okuma@colostate.edu)

Linda Kuk, PhD  
Principal Investigator & Professor  
Colorado State University  
School of Education  
[Linda.Kuk@colostate.edu](mailto:Linda.Kuk@colostate.edu)

## APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

### Contact Information

Name:

Phone/Cell number:

Preferred e-mail address:

Pseudonym:

### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to use the constructs of Schlossberg's Transition theory to explore the experience of new professionals who have recently graduated from a higher-education master's program and are making their transitions to full-time professional jobs.

### Time Commitment

There are two phases to this study. Data for the first phase will be collected from early May to late August. During this first phase, participants will be asked to respond online to 4 to 5 questions monthly. The second phase will be a focus group in September. I am asking that you participate in a 45-minute focus group. This focus group will be conducted online and will be recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be kept secure and confidential. One of the purposes of the focus group is to make sure I accurately interpreted your online journals. You will have time to review your journals and submit any corrections to the researcher.

### Sociodemographic Data of Volunteer

Current age:

Gender:

Ethnicity or Race:

Religious Affiliation:

Undergraduate Degree—Major, Place and Year Completed:

Master's Degree—Major, Place and Year Completed:

Relationship status:

Children (Yes/No):

New Job—Institution: Place, City, Institution Size:

Years of prior full-time work experience:

(inside student affairs)

(outside student affairs)

## **General transition questions**

When do you graduate?

When do you start your new job?

Please describe your current support system(s), and how important this is(they are) to you. (100 words or less)

Please describe your current employment situation and how important this is to you. (100 words or less)

Please describe what strategies you used in graduate school to cope with challenges; would you use them again? (100 words or less)

Where do you consider “home/comfortable” to be?

How important is connecting to home?

List your previous significant life experiences from prior/post high school to graduate school (i.e., work, travel, volunteer, family).

Has anyone in your graduate program discussed transition with you, and if so, what did that look like?

Should you have questions, please contact:

Researcher: Liz Okuma  
Doctoral Candidate  
Colorado State University  
Higher Education Leadership Program  
330.201.5706  
Elizabeth.Okuma@colostate.edu



## APPENDIX F: INFORMED-CONSENT FORM

**Project Title:** *Transitioning From Student to Professional: The Experiences of New Professionals in Student Affairs*

**Researcher(s):**

Liz Okuma  
Doctoral Candidate & CoPrincipal Investigator  
330.201.5706  
Colorado State University  
Elizabeth.Okuma@colostate.edu

Linda Kuk, PhD  
Advisor  
Associate Professor & PI  
Colorado State University  
linda.kuk@colostate.edu

**Introduction:**

You are being asked to take part in a research study conducted by Liz Okuma for completion of a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Linda Kuk in the School of Education at Colorado State University. You are being asked to participate because you are a graduating master's student from a student-personnel program. Up to 15 students will participate in this study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to use the constructs of Schlossberg's Transition theory to explore the experience of new professionals who have recently graduated from a higher-education master's program, and their transitions to full-time professional jobs. Participants in this study will contribute to a greater understanding of recent graduate students' transition into their first professional full-time employment.

**Procedures:**

There are three phases to this study. Data for the first phase will be collected by an information page the participants fill out. This should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes. Data for the second phase will be collected from early May to late August. During this phase, participants will be asked to respond online to 4 to 5 questions monthly. This should take no longer than 25 to 30 minutes each month. The third phase will be a focus group in September. I am asking that you participate in a 45-minute focus group. This focus group will be conducted online and will be recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be kept secure and confidential. One of the purposes of the focus group is to make sure I accurately interpreted your online journals. You will have time to review your journals and submit any corrections to the researcher.

**Risk/Benefits:**

The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are no greater than ordinarily encountered in everyday life. However you may feel discomfort talking about your situation during this transition. A synopsis of the findings of the study will be provided to all participants who may benefit from learning about the experiences of their peers. Finally, this study will contribute to a greater understanding of recent graduate-student's transitions into their

first professional full-time employment. Please note: There are likely no direct benefits to the participants.

### **Compensation**

There is no compensation involved in this study.

### **Confidentiality:**

All information collected that identifies individuals and their respective institution will be assigned pseudonyms and will be kept safely secured by the researcher. In regard to other details about the demographic information, the researcher will make sure to keep information as confidential as possible. For example, institutions will not be revealed; however the NASPA regions, which include many institutions, will be shared. The researcher will make every reasonable attempt not to have participants/addresses/positions/institutions/etc. identifiable. All consent forms will be stored separately from the online journals to keep participants' identities confidential. All data, including the audio recordings, will be kept in a secure location, with access available only to the researcher. All data will be destroyed within 3 years of the completion of the study.

### **Voluntary participation:**

There is no penalty for students who wish not to participate. Participating is completely voluntary, and you have the right to terminate your involvement at any time for any reason. If you do not want to be in this study, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participating at any time without penalty.

### **Questions:**

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Liz Okuma, or the faculty advisor, Dr. Linda Kuk, at the contact information listed below:

Researcher:  
Liz Okuma  
Doctoral Candidate & CoPrincipal Investigator  
Phone: 330.201.5706  
Colorado State University  
Email: Elizabeth.Okuma@colostate.edu

Faculty advisor  
Linda Kuk  
Associate Professor  
School of Education  
209 Education Building  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1588  
Phone: (970) 491-7243  
Email: linda.kuk@colostate.edu

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Liz Okuma, at 330.201.5706. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at RICRO\_IRB@mail.colostate.edu or 970-491-1553. Please keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

Typing your name below and returning this consent to the researcher acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing two pages. Please send this email back to the researcher as soon possible.

The undersigned freely and voluntarily consents to participation in the research.

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

---

Researcher's Signature

---

Date

## APPENDIX G: TENTATIVE TIMELINE FOR DATA COLLECTION

**First week of March**—Send information about the study to the program directors.

**Third week of March**—Send a reminder e-mail to program directors.

**Month of April**—Send invitation letter, participant information; sign consent letter and send timeline to participants.

**First week of May**—Give an overview on Schlossberg's study, and ask the participants to write a couple of brief sentences on how they feel about their upcoming transition, based on self, support, situation, strategies.

**Third week of May**—Send out a reminder to those who have not completed the questions.

**First week of June**—Ask participants to journal their responses based on a set of questions.

**Third week of June**—Send out a reminder to those who have not completed the questions.

**First week of July**—Ask participants to journal their responses based on a set of questions.

**Third week of July**—Send out a reminder to those who have not completed the questions.

**First week of August**—Ask participants to journal their responses based on a set of questions, and ask for availability for September focus group.

**Third week of August**—Send out a reminder to those who have not completed the questions and/or did not submit times for the focus group.

**Third week of September**—Participate in a 1-hour focus group together.

**First week of October**—Follow up if needed.

## APPENDIX H: MONTHLY EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Greetings, Transition Participants,

I hope this finds you well. First, I cannot thank you enough for your participation. Please click on the link below to answer this month's set of journals.

[ADD LINK]

As a reminder, please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Happy Writing,

Liz Okuma

330.201.5706

Elizabeth.Okuma@colostate.edu

## APPENDIX I: REMINDER EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Greetings, Transition Participants,

I hope this finds you well.

This is just a friendly reminder that your set of transition questions should be answered before the end of the month. Please click on the link below to answer this month's set of journals.

[ADD LINK]

As a reminder, please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Happy Writing,

Liz Okuma

330.201.5706

Elizabeth.Okuma@colostate.edu

## APPENDIX J: ONLINE JOURNALING PROTOCOL

### FIRST WEEK OF MAY

Schlossberg's (1995) transition model presents four arenas that impact one's ability to cope with a transition. These are *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies* and are referred to as the 4 Ss of transition theory. The first factor, *situation*, describes the circumstances one is facing during the transition. *Self*, the next factor, explains how one's experiences impact the individual's transition. The safety net in place to help one's transition describes *support*, the third factor. The final factor, *strategies*, focuses on the individual's current coping mechanisms, which will help them positively navigate through transitions (Goodman, 2006). This theory is psychosocial in nature, does not have an age/stage component like other student-development theories, and relies heavily on other theories and ideas, such as the Bridges model of transition. (Evans et al, 2010).

Evans, N. F., Forney, D.S., Florence, G.M, Patton, L.D., and Renn, K.A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research and practice* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Goodman, J. N. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition*. New York, NY: Springer.

### Questions each participant will answer and submit online:

When asked the following questions, please respond to them with how you feel. Do you agree with these statements? Why or why not?

1. When I think about how resilient I am when facing change, I would describe myself as resilient.
2. As I prepare for this transition, I can count on support from my family or friends and peer group.
3. From where I stand now, this situation (transition) is likely to be manageable.
4. There is one activity that I will do that will help me through this transition.

### **FIRST WEEK OF JUNE**

1. In responding to this transition, I find myself...
2. Do you feel like you have support right now? If so, from whom are you getting your support?
3. I view this transition as...
4. I feel like I am ..., which is helping me get through this transition.
5. Open question for the researcher to use.

### **FIRST WEEK OF JULY**

1. In responding to this transition, I find myself...
2. Do you feel like you have support right now? If so, from whom are you getting your support?
3. I view this transition as...
4. I feel like I am ..., which is helping me get through this transition.
5. Open question for the researcher to use.

### **FIRST WEEK OF AUGUST**

1. In responding to this transition, I find myself...
2. Do you feel like you have support right now? If so, from whom are you getting your support?
3. I view this transition as...
4. I feel like I am ..., which is helping me get through this transition.
5. Open question for the researcher to use.



## APPENDIX K: FOCUS-GROUP TENTATIVE AGENDA

1. Introductions
2. Overview of the goals of the session
3. Questions for the participants about the process:
  - a. Describe how it was to participate in this study.
  - b. What would you improve?
  - c. What would you keep the same?
  - d. Anything you wish you would have done differently?
4. Re-ask the General Transition Questions on Participant Information Form (Appendix E)
5. Questions for the participants about their journaling:
  - a. How did you feel now about your transition?
    - i. During the transition, did you find yourself... [ADD THEMES]
    - ii. You received support from... [ADD THEMES]
    - iii. You viewed the transition the following ways: [ADD THEMES]
    - iv. You used these strategies to help with your transition: [ADD THEMES]
6. Anything else?

## APPENDIX L: INITIAL CODING TEMPLATE

1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
  - a. Gender
  - b. Race, age
  - c. Undergraduate major/institution/year completed
  - d. Graduate degree program/institution/area of employment
  - e. Relationship status
  - f. New institution/area of employment
2. SITUATION at
  - a. Transition 1 (April)
  - b. Transition 2 (May)
  - c. Transition 3 (June)
  - d. Transition 4 (July)
  - e. Transition 5 (August)
3. SELF
  - a. Previous experience
  - b. Transition 1 (April)
  - c. Transition 2 (May)
  - d. Transition 3 (June)
  - e. Transition 4 (July)
  - f. Transition 5 (August)
4. SUPPORT at
  - a. Transition 1 (April)
  - b. Transition 2 (May)
  - c. Transition 3 (June)
  - d. Transition 4 (July)
  - e. Transition 5 (August)
5. STRATEGIES at
  - a. Transition 1 (April)
  - b. Transition 2 (May)
  - c. Transition 3 (June)
  - d. Transition 4 (July)
  - e. Transition 5 (August)