A Study of New Professionals in Student Affairs: Women's Early Career Experiences in Their Own Words

By

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 2011
Dip.Ed., University of British Columbia, 2016

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We acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

My feminist qualitative study examined the lived experience of five young women working in the field of student affairs and services in British Columbia. Using this feminist approach I explored their stories, views of gender, and conceptions of leadership. Central aims of this study were to uncover unexamined perspectives of these young women working in the field and their perceptions of leadership. By lending legitimacy to women's experiences my study provides insights that have been discounted in the literature, as well as due to women's age, level of experience, and gender. Ultimately however, these insights could have a positive impact on practices in student affairs and services.

I gathered data through semi-structured interviews and a focus group. My research findings demonstrate the importance of mentorship and support, particularly from other women, as well as the broad impact of gender and age on the experience of student affairs professionals. My research also reveals the wide variety of ways young women are engaging with professional development and leadership as part of their work. This lends new insight into the current student affairs landscape as lived by young women, what impacts their experience as staff and leaders, as well as their vision for themselves and for the field in the future.

I conclude this thesis with recommendations aimed to improve the experiences of new professionals and their supervisors, and to influence positive change within the systems and institutions in which they operate. Conducting this study with practitioners in British Columbia contributes to the research landscape by providing research from within the Canadian post-secondary context. It also provides research focused explicitly on women working in the field and on the experiences of new professionals from their own perspective, both of which are currently under-explored areas of student affairs and services research.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee ii
Abstract iii
Table of Contents iv
Dedication vi
Chapter 1: Introduction 1
Statement of the Problem 2
Use of Specific Terms and Language 4
Student Affairs and Services Context 4
Research Question and Objective 6
Design of the Study 8
Significance of the Study 9
Chapter 2: Literature Review 11
Feminist Theory 11
Student Affairs and Services 14
Formal, Non-Formal, and Informal Learning in Student Affairs 16
Supervision and New Professionals 21
Performance Evaluations and Gendered Experiences in the Workplace 24
Chapter 3: Methods 27
Qualitative and Feminist Research Approaches 27
Feminist Research Methods 28
Participant Recruitment 29
Data Collection Methods 31
Data Analysis 35
Trustworthiness and Validity 37
Chapter Four: Findings 41
Supervisors and Mentorship 41
Issues of Identity 50
Personal and Professional Development 60
The Importance of Informal Learning 63
Chapter Five: Discussion 67
Self-Blame and Ownership of Problems 67
Responsibility of Supervisors 71

Importance of Identity and Relevant Support 75
Creation of Positive Spaces 80
Chapter Six: Recommendations and Opportunities for Future Research 83
Recommendations for Supervisors and Leaders 83
Recommendations for Student Affairs and Services Departments 86
Further Research 89
Final Thoughts 90
References 91
Appendix A: Interview Questions 99
Appendix B: Focus Group Questions 100
Appendix C: Ethics Certificate 101
Appendix D: Recruitment Information 102

Dedication

My conversations with the participants were wide-ranging and provided insight on a variety of topics. Comments were often funny, wise, honest, discouraging, challenging, hopeful and more. I am so appreciative of the women who participated and trusted me with their insights and emotions. I am thankful to them for their time and contribution to my research through the stories they shared and the ideas they brought forward. These young women, along with many feminist researchers and thinkers who continue to inspire me, have impacted not only my research but my life and work beyond this thesis.

Ahmed (2017) tells us feminism is “how we pick each other up” (p. 1). I thank my supervisor Dr. Darlene Clover and the members of my committee for picking me up, as well as my colleagues, friends, and family for their support.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This is a study of young women professionals working in the field of student affairs and services and their understandings and experiences of learning and leadership in post-secondary institutions in Canada. This study is based in a feminist research framework and explicitly centres the voices of the women who participated. My interest in this study comes first from own experience of working in the field of student affairs and services for more than 10 years. Post-secondary institutions are complex organizations whose primary aim is to educate students both in and beyond the traditional classroom environment. While instructors and faculty members are the primary educators and most visible leaders to post-secondary students, this is not a complete picture of the complex leadership and educational workings of a postsecondary institution. As Browne et al. (2015) articulate, “numerous support staff fulfill critical roles within institutions, not as instructors but as facilitators between the student body and various facets of the institution. One of the most critical of these facilitating roles is that of the student affairs professional” (p. 344). I questioned early in my career if my thoughts or feelings about the work I was doing was shared by others. I wondered what it meant to see oneself flourish as a woman leader in the field of student affairs, and how leadership was being perceived and practised. I had insights and ideas at that time, but there was seldom a venue where I could share them. Now, as a leader and a supervisor of staff, the majority of whom are female new professionals, I continue to wonder what it was they wanted and needed from their work, how they understood and articulated their leadership, how they perceived the value of their own skills and experiences. Based on this I wanted to explore what could be done to better support these women. My study begins here.

Statement of the Problem

There are a number of gaps in the literature that my study aimed to fill. To begin, despite the ubiquity of departments of student affairs and of student services at colleges and universities across Canada, there is a lack of research focusing on Canadian institutions in the field of student affairs and services. Seifert (2014) takes particular note of this, showing in her study that there is a "limited amount of research that has examined the field of student affairs and services in Canada" (p. 300). Similarly, Browne et al. (2015) found that most of the research was coming out of the United States of America (USA) while Clarke and Arnold (2022) remind us that there are fundamental differences between the two countries which warrant studies specific to the Canadian context. As quickly became apparent in my own review of the literature, the prevalence of studies focused on American institutions and practitioners in prominent journals such as the *Journal of College Development*, which is affiliated with the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), and the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, which is affiliated with the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), became evident. In addition, the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS), which could be seen as a Canadian counterpart to these organizations, does not produce or support research in the same manner as the American associations and affiliate journals, and there are no other Canadian journals focusing on student services (Clarke & Arnold, 2022).

The second gap is that research in student services tends to focus on examinations of staff experience, learning, and development, particularly amongst new professionals, within a context of retention and the challenge of turnover, as attrition rates are shown to be high in student affairs, particularly in the first five years (Duran & Allen, 2020). Often, this research is

conducted through the lens of supervisors or directors identifying what skills or learning they look for in new staff or the support they try to give, rather than speaking with new professionals about their goals, aspirations, needs, or practices (e.g., Tull, 2006). The focus in much of the literature is on what departments or institutions need from student services professionals or how to ensure these new professionals have the skills perceived as required or lacking by Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) who oversee their work (e.g., Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012; Kuk et al., 2007). In my research I focused instead on the views, opinions, and experiences of these new professionals themselves and specifically for women, which brings me to the final gap.

The most significant gap in the research is focusing on women in the field. Women's involvement in student affairs and services work dates back to the earliest days of the profession. Beginning in the early 20th century women have been key to early research and in fact to the growth of the field (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010b; Hevel, 2016). Today, however, due to the wide ranging nature of the field, representative population demographics are not easily identifiable (e.g., Muller et al., 2018). This is confirmed by Seifert (2014), who found that "no data exist that described the demographic characteristics of those [working] in student affairs and services in Canada" (p. 300). However, research, anecdotal evidence, and my own observations suggest that women are the clear majority of practitioners in the area of student affairs (e.g., Muller et al., 2018; Renn & Hodges, 2007; M. E. Wilson et al., 2016). Despite this, gender is rarely discussed in literature about the emerging trends in student affairs and services research (e.g., Green & Davis, 2021; Roberts, 2007). Equally, gender is rarely explored or discussed in daily work practice or at the professional conferences I have attended. In other words, the exploration of gender and women in the field of student affairs and services remains under-

explored and under-theorized. For this reason, I took the opportunity to centre my study on women and their leadership experiences and to centre the voices of women in my research.

Use of Specific Terms and Language

There has been conversation around the use of language in regards to student affairs and student services and if these terms may be used interchangeably or have distinct meanings and nuance (e.g., Clarke & Arnold, 2022; Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010; Seifert, 2014). In my experience, in daily use in the field these terms are often used interchangeably. Clarke and Arnold (2022) note the complexity and suggest although there is sometimes an understood hierarchy with *student affairs* being an umbrella term that may encompass *student services,* in other situations and literature however, this is not the case, or there is no understood distinction. In their work Clarke and Arnold chose to use the term *student services* due to "its application in instrumental Canadian resources" (p. 148). In my work I will use the terms interchangeably or combined to *student affairs and services* to reflect the common use of both terms, and the language used both in the literature and by my participants. Similarly, the terms practitioners, professionals, and staff are all used to refer to those working in the field of student affairs and services and are distinct from those in faculty roles. As an additional language clarification, for Canadian readers we should understand the use of *college* in references to the literature to mean post-secondary institutions, rather than a community college, unless otherwise specifically stated.

Student Affairs and Services Context

While the field of student affairs and services is hugely varied, providing student engagement opportunities and leadership development outside the classroom is a core component of student affairs work in post-secondary institutions across North America and is

practised in a wide range of areas and different departments across campuses (ACPA/NASPA Joint Task Force on Professional Competencies and Standards, 2015; Browne et al., 2015; Fernandez et al., 2016). Kuh (2009) describes student engagement as “educationally purposeful activities” to which students devote a significant amount of time and are “linked to desired outcomes of college” (p. 683). At the same time, student engagement also includes “what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities” (p. 683). Purposeful student engagement activities occur under the direction of student affairs staff in areas such as residence life, orientation, peer coaching and tutoring. Student affairs and services practitioners can also be found working on more specific topics such as health and wellness, athletics, equity and diversity, academic advising, and sustainability. Work may be with specific groups such as international students or first year students, embedded within faculties, or operated out of a central student affairs and services or student engagement office.

For many student affairs and services staff, a core component of the work is supervising and supporting groups of student leaders, often called peer leaders, to help them grow their leadership skills (e.g., Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010a; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012; Tull, 2006). This is particularly common in entry-level staff who are most likely to work directly with student leaders (Belch et al., 2009; Kuk et al., 2007; Renn & Hodges, 2007). These staff are often responsible for the creation and day to day oversight and administration of student engagement programs, and for the supervision of peer leaders (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012). Student leaders, both paid and volunteer, fill roles such as residence advisors, orientation leaders, peer academic or career coaches, student mentors, health and wellness peers, and many other roles on campuses across the country. These student leaders increase capacity for student services at their institutions, improving reach and impact, and in turn these student leaders build skills, apply

learning, and contribute to their campus community. For students, being involved in their campus community has benefits for their own learning and retention and is a way for them to make connections and build skills outside the classroom. Involvement is often framed as a core component of the university experience both historically and today (e.g., Astin, 1984; Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010a; Kuh, 2009; Patton et al., 2016).

Research Question and Objective

My research focuses on full-time female student affairs professionals at Canadian universities. More specifically, women who are early in their career, known colloquially as *new professionals* or *entry-level professionals*. In the literature these professionals are defined as having been in a full-time role for five years or less, and are often still developing their own leadership styles and identities at work (Duran & Allen, 2020; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012). Duran and Allen (2020) refer to this as an "influential…period when student affairs administrators first begin to develop their professional values and their philosophy on how to work with students" (p. 132).

The two primary questions that guided this study were: 1) How do new female professionals describe their experience working in student affairs and how has gender impacted their experience? and 2) How do they perceive and conceptualize leadership in the context of student affairs and services? I was interested in the types of activities in which they engaged to develop their leadership skills and how they felt that these formal, in-formal, and non-formal methods of education and learning strengthened their capacities. In essence, what supports or blocks their growth and professional development?

Through conducting this study, my aim was to learn more about younger professional women's work and leadership experiences in student affairs and to identify differences and

commonalities that could inform future engagement and needs-based support. Another aim of this feminist study was to give space and legitimacy to young women's personal experiences and to highlight the importance of this experience to knowledge creation and of course, the field of student affairs and services (Ahmed, 2017). I aimed to provide insights that may often be discounted due to their age, level of experience, and gender but ultimately could have a positive impact on practices in the field.

I used individual interviews and a focus group to explore participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method as they offer the opportunity to gain insight and an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of participants, while the focus group provided a space for sharing and community, and was a means to delve deeper into some of the themes that emerge from individual interviews (McHugh, 2014). The focus group also provided space for participants to consider and build off of the stories and insights shared by their fellow practitioners (McHugh, 2014).

Self-Location and Positionality

A central component of feminist research is situating oneself as the researcher and recognizing the outlook, experiences, and power dynamics one brings to research, and how this influences the work. As feminist qualitative researchers remind us, research is never impartial nor neutral and the researcher is never divorced from the participants or the outcomes (Hesse-Biber, 2012b; McHugh, 2014). Reflexivity, self-critique, and self-awareness on the part of the researcher are therefore critical to feminist research (Lather, 1988).

I am situated in this work as an educated, white, straight, cisgender woman, and a settler on lək̓ʷəŋən territory. This social identity has impacted the way I have experienced and engaged with educational systems and post-secondary spaces. For me, education has always been a site of

growth, development, and opportunity, and has not been a site of oppression or discomfort. My professional identity and background are similar to many of my colleagues, and we often share similar outlooks on the role and impact of student affairs and the value and on nature of education. This shapes my views on the topic, and how others perceive my work and scholarship. My background makes me attuned to some experiences participants shared, and I have surely made assumptions and filled in gaps with my own perceptions and experiences. I relate to some statements or outlooks shared by participants more than others. My lived experiences have shaped how I understand and conceptualize leadership in this context and how I set about researching, designing, conducting this study, and engaging with the participants. I have strived to honour this in my work, recognizing the precariousness many new professionals feel in their roles, particularly those from marginalized groups or identities. I am honoured participants have trusted me with their stories. I feel the weight of their experiences and the optimism of their ideas. This has now shaped my own views of the field and the work of student affairs and for that I thank them all.

Design of the Study

This study consists of six chapters, including this Introduction chapter. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature focusing on the field of student affairs broadly, with specific attention to research on new professionals in student affairs. Chapter Three is an overview of my study methods, including using interviews and a focus group. Chapter Four is an overview of my findings from my research and features words and voices of the participants. Chapter Five is my discussion of the results, and Chapter Six is the conclusion, including future recommendations and opportunities for research.

Significance of the Study

As noted, studying female practitioners in student affairs and services who are new in their careers is of interest to me due to my professional background, identity, and daily work. As a current student affairs professional who has worked in a variety of settings and roles and who now supervises and mentors new professionals, I am interested to explore this topic further. As a woman in the field, I am motivated to improve both our knowledge of gender dynamics in this work and support for other women entering the field. I believe centring the voices of new professionals and women in student affairs is necessary to provide support and improve work experiences. In the course of their day-to-day work, new female professionals are often told what they need or others in more senior roles assume what would be best for them, rather than asking them for their views or preferences. As new student affairs professionals represent 15% to 20% of the field in the USA (Renn & Hodges, 2007) and are also a substantial component of the workforce in Canada, ignoring their place and agency in the field serves everyone poorly.

Centring the voices of participants is based in a feminist research framework (Hesse-Biber, 2012b). A feminist research framework matches well with my approach and personal leadership philosophy, and with the topic I am investigating. I believe this approach resonated with the participants as well, who were excited to be contributing to the research and to have a space to discuss this topic. Their willingness to share their experience and views in their own words meant a lot to me and I hope will be impactful to others as well. My goal was to create space for them to derive meaning and make sense of their roles, their work environment, and their place as leaders in their work. By exploring participants' perceptions of gender, leadership, and development structures, it is expected that programs and support can be improved, which can positively impact both individuals as well as the field of student affairs more broadly. I hope the

effect on the participants will also be positive and an opportunity for consciousness-raising- that is working together to make sense of experiences as both personal and political (Hesse-Biber, 2012b).

The insight provided by the study could result in new approaches to staff engagement, day-to-day supervision, and support of new professionals. Overall, “feminist research is not viewed as a static entity, but as transforming and transformative practice” (McHugh, 2014, p. 3) and my goal with this research was to provide ideas and guidance to improve the experiences of new professionals as well as the systems and institutions in which they operate in order to empower these women, and women in the future.

Conducting this study with Canadian practitioners also contributes to the Canadian student services landscape, which as noted is limited despite the number of institutions and the important role student affairs plays. As a feminist, I aim to be what McHugh (2014) calls *corrective*, in that I want to broaden knowledge in Canada, by bringing attention to our specific landscape, as well as the under-explored perspectives of women in Canada in the field.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

For my literature review I focused on pulling out specific threads from wider research on post-secondary student affairs and services. Student affairs research is diverse and touches on many topics, which provides rich opportunity for exploration. Although there is a segment of literature concentrated on student support and success in the field, my focus was instead on the experience of those working in the field and on research on the factors that impact those doing the work on a daily basis. Special attention for this chapter was paid to literature focusing on new professionals, of which there were ample examples, and on women in the field, which was significantly more limited. This chapter also includes literature on learning in the workplace, as well as professional development and professional competency. As my research is explicitly feminist in approach and focus, I will begin by devoting some space to feminist theory.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory underpins my research and has heavily influenced my research design and methodology. Feminist theory is hugely varied and there are countless definitions of feminism and ways to conduct feminist research. Feminism continues to be questioned, explored, and expanded upon. It is central to the ideas that helped me to shape my direction for my research.

Hesse-Biber (2012b) describes feminism as "a diverse and differentiated social and scholarly movement" which promotes living and acting in ways to "promote justice and the well-being of all women" (p. 207). According to Ahmed (2017) "feminism [is] a way of challenging the universal" (p. 29). McHugh (2014) argues "feminist research is research that is not only nonsexist, but also works actively for the benefit and advancement of women" (p. 2). Feminist research is informed every step of the way by feminist theory. This began when feminist scholars

started calling attention to issues of *androcentric bias* beginning in the 1960s, particularly in the fields of science and social science (Hesse-Biber, 2012b). Feminist researchers also began finding ways to deconstruct traditional knowledge frameworks and correct these research biases, which spread quickly across disciplines through the 1970s and 1980s (Hesse-Biber, 2012b). On early feminist works Ahmed (2017) explains that they "emphasized the importance of women telling their own stories that dislodged the happiness myth, stories that are not simply about unhappiness but about the complex, ambivalent, and messy feelings that women have." (p. 57). This complexity invites and necessitates the continued exploration and celebration of women's stories and perspectives.

Feminist Leadership

The idea of feminist leadership is explored extensively by Batliwala (2015). She defines feminist leadership as:

> women with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilise others- especially other women- around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic and political transformation that ensures equality, peace, justice and human rights for all. (p. 188)

Picking up on mobilization, Ahmed (2017) speaks to the power of building connections amongst those in the feminist movement to recognize, name, and build understanding about aspects of oppression and oppressive systems in order to challenge and correct them. For Batliwala, the goal is not to simply have more women leaders, but to "lead differently" to advance "feminist social transformation" (p. 173).

Although leadership is a concept that could be considered self-evident, Batliwala (2015) encourages us to look beyond what leadership is, and focus instead on what it should be. Ahmed (2017) brings forward the importance of questioning the universal and questioning our

experiences as the centre of living a feminist life. This can be applied directly to concepts like leadership, and who a leader is, or appears to be, as these concepts could be interpreted as fixed, innate, or as common knowledge. Batliwala's (2015) definition requires reframing leadership to be seen as a means to something better, not an end. She states that "we build leadership capacity and skills *for* something, *to do* something, or *change* something, and not because leadership is a product or service for consumption" (p.173, emphasis in original). Moving to feminist leadership requires a fundamental shift in our collective understanding of what leadership is, who it is for, and who we perceive as leaders in our workplaces and society.

Voice and Being Heard

Women's voices and perspectives are central to feminism, as they have so often been silenced or ignored (DeVault & Gross, 2012). Knowledge and insights being disregarded due to issues of oppression or of prejudiced perception is what Fricker (2007c) calls epistemic as well as *testimonial injustice*. In a situation of testimonial injustice, relationships and discussion are impacted by a "credibility deficit" where during an exchange between the speaker and the hearer the speaker is "wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower" (Fricker, 2007c, p. 20). This can have far reaching consequences, because "when it is not only persistent but also systemic, testimonial injustice presents a face of oppression" (Fricker, 2007b, p. 58). Experiences of testimonial injustice are common for women, whose accounts are often assumed to be false, or sensationalized, or lacking facts simply because the speaker is a woman (Ahmed, 2017). Combatting issues of epistemic injustice and valuing of young women's voices is an important aspect of my research and I will return to this concept in my discussion chapter.

Student Affairs and Services

As noted in Chapter One, student affairs is a growing and changing field, which has continued to evolve over time to meet the needs of students as well as of student affairs practitioners. The professionalization of student affairs and services in Canada is linked to a large increase in post-secondary enrolment following World War II, including a wider diversity of students requiring specialized supports, including veterans, students with families, and more women (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010b). The largest professional organization in Canada is the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS), which was founded in 1971 and can be seen as an early reflection of the need to self-identify as a field, learn from fellow practitioners, and formalize the nature of the work (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010b). From the beginning, the goal of these early student services practitioners was student success. Today, student affairs and services are provided on campuses by a “highly sophisticated group of professionals who bring expertise from any number of specialties” (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010a, p. xi). Due to this expertise in a diversity of roles, student affairs professionals are part of a complex network that includes faculty, staff, and administrators that promote a campus community where students are engaged and learn both inside and outside the classroom (Clarke & Arnold, 2022). Like in many areas of education, expectations and demographics of students are shifting and therefore “the skill sets being demanded of student services staff are changing and intensifying” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 187). This creates a dynamic field that will continue to evolve in the future and will need new, innovative, and committed new professionals to join its ranks.

Women in Student Affairs

Although the literature is scarce, studies that do exist show that women tended to be the driving force in the creation and professionalization of the student affairs field, and were some of the earliest practitioners in the early 20th century (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010b; Hevel, 2016). Women's work during this time as Deans of Women at post-secondary institutions has directly impacted the focus and evolution of many roles in student affairs and services today (Hevel, 2016). Despite the early impact of women on the field, the lack of available demographic data makes it challenging to know how many women, particularly young women, are working in student affairs in Canada (Seifert, 2014). Although CACUSS is considering collecting gender-based data from their membership in the future, they do not currently have reliable statistics available. Based on optional profile information, currently 72% of members identify as female, however that portion of the profile is not required or completed consistently by members, meaning it is only useful as a general gauge of current professionals (J. Hamilton, personal communication, March 31, 2022).

If we look at the following examples of studies and professional membership in the USA, they indicate women are employed in greater numbers in the field than men or non-binary individuals. In a case study conducted on graduate students entering the field in the USA, 80% of participants identified as female, which was representative of their graduating class (Renn & Hodges, 2007). Other studies have also identified a higher proportion of women as participants, including those by the two largest professional associations in the United States. In two studies focusing on National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and American College Personnel Association (ACPA) members, 67.4% and 67.7% of participants identified as women, matching the demographics of those professional organizations (Muller et al., 2018; M.

E. Wilson et al., 2016). In a study of Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs), the gender breakdown was closer to 50% women and 50% men (Kuk et al., 2007), which could indicate a change in demographics as practitioners advance to senior roles. Other studies did not include demographic data in their analysis (e.g., Roberts, 2007)), and only a few accounted for non-binary or trans individuals (e.g., Duran & Allen, 2020; M. E. Wilson et al., 2016). Despite these elevated numbers of women practitioners, there is limited research focusing explicitly on women's experiences in the field, or the contributions of women to student affairs.

Formal, Non-Formal, and Informal Learning in Student Affairs

Adult education and learning are two other areas of research that provides a backdrop and analytical framework for my study. I was interested in how young women were learning or being educated to do their jobs in student affairs and services, and what assistance my findings might offer to them.

Adult education is categorized by Clover et al. (2013) into three areas which were all pertinent to my study: formal education (degrees and certifications), non-formal education (organized intentional activities such as workshops), and informal adult learning (ubiquitous and takes place in all spaces of home, community, workplace, etc.). Clover et al. explain that although "education and learning are often used interchangeably …they are not necessarily the same thing. A person can learn without being 'educated' (taught) and education does not automatically mean a person will learn. However, there is often a reciprocal relationship between learning and education that enriches and informs the other" (pp. 31–32). That student affairs positions are located within the post-secondary context, which is within institutions of formal education, make the focus on education and learning top of mind for those working in the field. As my focus was entry-level professionals who are often learning a lot about working in the field

of student affairs and being a part of a workplace, studies about how learning and development occur in this context helped to frame my overall understanding of how women were building leadership and professional skills.

Formal Education

Numerous studies by American scholars such as Kuk et al. (2007), and Perez (2017) show that it is very common, even expected, that people coming to work in students affairs in the United States will have completed a master's degree program. Master's degrees in areas such as: student affairs and services, higher education, or post-secondary administration are seen to be the professional preparation for jobs in this area and they are often paired with internships or practicum placements as part of the program (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). The ubiquity of these programs leads to a more formal pathway into the field than currently exists in Canada, and American graduate programs are a pipeline for new professionals to enter the field. Many articles published for the American context assume staff have completed a master's program, or explicitly study practitioners who have completed such a program. Graduates of these programs will have a different experience of socialization to the field than individuals working in similar roles at Canadian institutions who generally do not have this educational background (Duran & Allen, 2020).

In Canada it is less common for people to immediately complete their master's degree following their undergraduate degree, and before having any full-time experience in the field. Studies show that people often complete a master's degree as a mid-level professional, or pursue studies in other areas rather than specialized student affairs programmes (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010a; Seifert, 2014). In other words, having a master's degree is not expected for new professionals in Canada, something that I also found in my research. As Robinson (2010)

identifies: “there is little current formal professional preparation in Canada for this work, and as with many student affairs positions, staff members are often self-directed in their learning” (p. 97), with relevant experience often coming from part-time student leadership roles. However, these expectations are starting to shift with the rise of professional preparation program options, changing desires of employers, and rising levels of education amongst practitioners in the field (Clarke & Arnold, 2022; Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010a; Seifert, 2014). In my research there was a perception among participants of higher-level degrees as a next step of career progression; this is explored in future chapters.

This fundamental difference in educational background and exposure to the field means directly translating and applying literature on new professionals from the American context to the Canadian context is challenging and often inappropriate. As Seifert (2014) has noted “a fair amount of differentiation exists in how post-secondary education is provided for across Canada… in most cases universities are relatively autonomous” (p. 299), therefore making generalizations across Canadian institutions is challenging when it comes to reviewing literature on student affairs and the experience of student affairs professionals. This fundamental difference in background, formal education, and experience must be taken into consideration when applying lessons or research to Canadian institutions and practitioners. This was something I considered during my literature review on formal education in this field and links to my desire to focus my own research in British Columbia.

Non-Formal Education and Socialization

Socialization through non-formal adult education opportunities was identified in the literature as important means of gaining competence and confidence as a new professional and becoming more established in the work. Socialization in this context can be understood as “the

norms of the student affairs professional and the skills needed to be successful" (Duran & Allen, 2020, p. 132). Socialization results in knowledge acquisition, which improves role performance in new professionals and can have long-term effects on their career (Strayhorn, 2009). Tull et al. (2009) argue that socialization is not only essential to the success of individual new professionals, but to the work of the wider institution. Studies show that socialization occurs through networks and relationship-building opportunities, rather than through formal education. Non-formal learning activities could include: conferences, institutes, professional associations, professional networking, or communities of practice (Duran & Allen, 2020). Janosik (2009) states conferences and professional associations positively impact new professionals by expanding their networks, improving their knowledge and skill, being exposed to new perspectives, and allowing them to positively impact the profession through their engagement and active participation. Engaging with professional associations is an effective way to improve socialization to the wider field of student affairs outside of an individual institution (Janosik, 2009).

Informal Workplace Learning

The value of informal education to student affairs practitioners was highlighted across the literature. Aspects of the recruitment and interview phase of the hiring process were identified as setting the tone for the role and were used by new professionals to judge fit, compare practices at various institutions, and learn about professional norms (Belch et al., 2009; Renn & Hodges, 2007). Activities such as coaching and mentorship are a flexible way of improving the supervisor-supervisee relationship, building connections, and encouraging informal education for new professionals (Mecoli et al., 2019). The literature shows that one of the reasons there is such an emphasis on informal learning is it is of a relatively lower cost than of formal learning. For

example, the American study by Mecoli et al. (2019) found that "[c]ommunity colleges or state colleges are often limited in funds for developing staff… the most popular activities were low- or no-cost" (p. 73). They argue therefore, that "finding low or no cost activities such as active listening and holding after-hours, off campus team building activities may boost staff creativity productivity and team engagement" (p. 73).

Central and connected components of adult education and learning in a professional development context are the ideas of mentoring and informal learning. Informal mentorship could be as simple as connecting with a more seasoned colleague for guidance or support. A more structured approach could entail being introduced to a mentor as part of an onboarding program. The importance for structured and unstructured coaching and mentorship opportunities for new professionals is cited frequently in in the literature to support retention, positive work experience, and socialization (e.g., Belch et al., 2009; Muller et al., 2018; Renn & Hodges, 2007). This literature also states that entry-level professionals highly value the opportunities to develop mentorship relationships in new roles and they see these relationships as a way to promote career development and progression. Encouraging new professionals to engage with a mentor or participate in a coaching programs is a flexible and effective way of improving staff experience and performance as it creates a setting that sparks informal learning amongst colleagues and demonstrates an investment in new staff (Mecoli et al., 2019). These types of mentorship opportunities differ from support, direction, or guidance offered by a supervisor although, there could be an aspect of mentorship that develop from those relationships as well. The importance of supervisors is the third aspect of my literature review.

Supervision and New Professionals

The role of supervisors, and the exploration of the impacts of formal supervision is another important area in the literature. As Brown et al. (2020) write, "[s]upervision is universal in the field of student affairs" (p. 2). At all levels of the profession practitioners will be supervised by someone, and often will supervise others in the field. The links between supervision and personal and professional development are unavoidable, and "[l]eadership and supervision of staff as well as effective and open communication are… intertwined in staff development" (Mecoli et al., 2019, p. 70). Supervision should be seen as an intentional focus on personal and professional development across the career lifespan, and "is distinct from the role of management, which tends to prioritize task-fulfillment" (Green & Davis, 2021, p. 42). Entry-level student affairs professionals require more concentrated, time-intensive supervision than more seasoned staff members (Green & Davis, 2021; Tull, 2006). This means a certain level of supervisory skill is required of supervisors. As Green and Davis (2021) highlight however, on-the-job learning is the most common preparation model for supervisors, meaning skill levels vary widely and supervisors in student affairs "collectively lack formal supervision skills training" (p. 46). For new professionals, highly competent supervisors are shown to improve career satisfaction, commitment and retention among entry-level staff (e.g., Belch et al., 2009; Green & Davis, 2021; Strayhorn, 2009; Tull, 2006; M. E. Wilson et al., 2016). Conversely, Tull (2006) cautions "the inability of supervisors to provide the necessary support and reassurance to new professionals through the orientation and socialization processes can hamper the development of new professionals" (p. 465). A lack of training and supervisory skill can lead to hostile workplaces that can ultimately hinder learning and growth, lead to high rates of staff turnover causing organizational costs and challenges, and limit capacity to implement significant change

in the wider organization (Brown et al., 2020; Green & Davis, 2021). When issues do arise in a supervisory relationship Green and Davis (2021) argue they are often seen as a "personal struggle" that does not resolve, rather than a systemic issue. This framing is problematic as it places undue pressure on the staff member (and on the supervisor) to resolve complex issues individually.

The *Synergistic Supervision* model (Winston & Creamer, 1997) is the basis for several studies of supervision in student affairs that focus on how new professionals are supported by their managers and the impacts of that relationship on performance, engagement, and perceptions of support (e.g., Brown et al., 2020; Tull, 2006; A. B. Wilson et al., 2020). According to this model, effective supervision requires effort from both parties, and hinges on communication skills, with a focus on competency and goal setting. The supervisor is not the only driver, as the supervisee also has significant agency and ability to impact the relationship (Brown et al., 2020; Tull, 2006; Tull et al., 2009). There are correlations between the perceived level of synergistic supervision received, job satisfaction, and intention to leave the role which can influence an individual's career and longevity in the field (Tull, 2006). Positive relationships and the ability to articulate the organization's goals, norms and values lead to a better work culture and clearer understanding among new professionals of both day-to-day work and the wider post-secondary institution (Tull et al., 2009).

Diverse Identities and Inclusive Supervision

The focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion in student affairs work has been increasing in recent years, and so too has the impact of diverse identities on staff performance and development (Brown et al., 2020; A. B. Wilson et al., 2020). Institutions, students, and those who serve them are becoming increasingly diverse however, high rates of attrition persist in

professionals of colour (Brown et al., 2020; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012; A. B. Wilson et al., 2020). Green and Davis (2021) note an increase in tensions in the supervisory relationship when student affairs professionals have different social and personal identities than their supervisors, something that will only increase as diversity increases in the field. These identities may include race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and culture. Brown et al. (2020) suggest the NASPA and ACPA competencies require further updating to include systemic issues of oppression and centering of diverse identities, rather than focusing exclusively on individual actions or practice. They further explain "[supervision] disconnected from social identity, reinforces systems of dominance that support white supremacist and patriarchal attitudes and behaviors" (Brown et al., 2020, p. 6). They call this identity-neutral supervision, which perpetuates systemic bias and argue instead there needs to be "[a] shift… to an equity focused practice and a foundation built from the understanding that individuals have unique needs based on identities such as race, gender, religion, socio-economic class, ability, religion, sexual orientation, appearance, and citizenship" (Brown et al., 2020, p. 6).

There are two recent models that aim to address the centrality of identity to working in student affairs. The first, Brown et al.'s (2020) model for *Identity-Conscious Supervision* "presents a structure for culture change that simultaneously showcases strategies for employees to demonstrate their value to the organization" (pp. 10-11). It is based on the approach to supervision put forward by Winston and Creamer (1997) that includes mutuality, being goal-oriented, and promoting growth in a supervisee as part of an ongoing process. The relationship with self and others is the central component of the identity conscious supervision model. Components of the model focus on both supervisory and organizational relationships as well as interplay between them, and the impact of power and influence on relationships.

A second example, Wilson et al.'s (2020) *Inclusive Supervision Model* is based on four tenets: creating safe spaces, cultivating holistic development, demonstrating vulnerability, and building capacity in others. They found through their research: "multiculturally competent supervisors appear to simply live a philosophy of inclusion. Their efforts… in every action and interaction resulted in a perception of them as not only as multiculturally competent but as simply and intentionally inclusive" (p. 28). The increased focus on intersectionality and diverse identities of those joining the student affairs profession is beneficial as it presses everyone to continue to examine power dynamics, harmful practices and expectations, and ongoing assumptions that have shaped, and continue to shape, the field. The most successful supervisors demonstrate different supervisory methods and create individualized approaches rather than a one-size-fits-all approach (Tull, 2006).

Equity, diversity, and inclusion should continue to be explored in student affairs to make positive change and increase inclusion and retention of women from marginalized backgrounds working as new professionals. Particularly in the Canadian context the more recent push to decolonize and Indigenize institutions, create meaningful opportunities for Indigenous students, and the potential impacts on student affairs has been explored (e.g., Pidgeon, 2016; Pidgeon & Rogerson, 2017; Waterman et al., 2018). The impacts of decolonization on supervisors and new professionals, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners, requires further attention by researchers in the field.

Performance Evaluations and Gendered Experiences in the Workplace

In research on performance evaluations, developmental feedback, and formal performance conversations in the workplace, the nature of feedback is frequently gendered (e.g., Doldor et al., 2019; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2019). These interactions are

important to consider as structured conversations about performance and future development are one of the few opportunities that employees have to explicitly discuss how they can and should learn and develop in the workplace, and these interactions play a role in the development of leadership skills (Doldor et al., 2019). In studies that examined formal performance evaluations as well as developmental feedback conversations, men are often shown to be given feedback that focuses on agentic characteristics such as vision, leveraging relationships to get ahead, being assertive, and displaying confidence in actionable areas. Women on the other hand, according to a number of scholars, get a similar amount of positive feedback but it is often vague and focused on communal characteristics such as being kind or helpful, meaning it is less precise and actionable in a workplace (e.g., Doldor et al., 2019; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2019). Feedback for women focuses on delivery rather than vision; and research shows women are praised for being cooperative and deferential instead of pursuing leadership or being ambitious (Doldor et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019). In one study the most common positive term used to describe women was *compassionate*, while the most common term used to describe men was *analytical* (Smith et al., 2019). Although both positive attributes in and of themselves, being analytical is perceived to be an agentic quality more beneficial to a workplace and more frequently desired in leaders. Women are also more likely to receive conflicting feedback or be penalized regardless of approach, which can result in a "double bind" situation making it challenging to implement feedback or have clear direction to move forward (Smith et al., 2019, p. 161). As Smith et al. (2019) state "[small] differences can result in practical importance in the workplace. Indeed, over time, research shows that small biases against women in performance evaluations can cumulatively result in large disparities in gender diversity at senior leadership levels" (pp. 166-167).

Leadership Potential

In one study's findings women were consistently rated as having less potential for leadership and management-level positions meaning they were often passed over for promotion, despite outperforming men when they obtained those more senior positions (Benson et al., 2022). Even when behaviours or actions are similar, men are perceived by the group to be leaders more than their female peers (Benson et al., 2022; Doldor et al., 2019). Doldor et al. (2019) describe this as the "enduring and global 'think manager- think male' phenomenon" (p. 8). This highlights not only the impact of implicit gender biases on workplaces but also on women themselves who receive both overt and implied messages that they are not ready for additional responsibilities or do not fit in with current leadership. This underestimation also extends to women's self-perception as leaders at work. When asked to rate their own level of efficacy as leaders in the workplace women rated themselves as less effective compared with how men rate their own performance; this despite when more factors were considered there was no significant difference in efficacy ratings (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Although this is not specific to student affairs, these gendered workplace dynamics and the common challenges that result are still at play in the field and must be considered when examining the experience of new professionals.

The literature informed the design of my study, specifically a qualitative feminist research approach. How I took up these methods, including how they were conceptualized, defined, and implemented with my participants is explored in Chapter Three. I will return to potential areas for future research to expand on the current literature in Chapter Six.

Chapter 3: Methods

In this chapter I outline my research methods, including an overview of the feminist research approach I employed. Additionally, I will outline my research process from participant recruitment and selection to the interview, and finally focus group phases. Lastly, I will explain my process for analysing the qualitative data I gathered and how I demonstrated respect, reciprocity, and contextuality throughout the research process. I strived to build credibility and respect into my research by having transparent interactions with my participants, being diligent about record keeping, and through close adherence to the ethics approval received from the University of Victoria.

Qualitative Research Approaches

I used a feminist qualitative research approach in the form of individual interviews and a focus group. Qualitative research is an umbrella term that covers a wide variety of approaches and methods. The data primarily consists "of materials such as interview transcripts…that document human experiences about others and/or one's self in social action and reflexive states" (Saldana et al., 2011, pp. 3–4) I selected a qualitative inquiry approach because it is considered to be appropriate when exploring a phenomenon, a situation, or a process, and it aims to uncover and understand the meaning that people construct about their lives (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Comfort and engagement of participants was important to me and I was guided by Saldana et al.'s (2011) statement that in all interactions "the goal is to establish an atmosphere and working relationship of comfort, security, and equity" (p. 39). Further, Mayan (2009) tells us to choose a method based on the research question and how that question demands to be treated. My question sought to uncover the lived experiences of women in their work lives which could not

be adequately captured or reflected using quantitative methods and instead demanded conversation, interaction, and ongoing exploration.

Feminist Research Methods

In thinking about my research ideas, goals, and philosophy, it seemed apparent from the start that I would need to be guided by a feminist research approach. What defines feminist research is varied as is the approach. Reinharz (1992) reminds us, for example, that two of the most important aspects of feminist research are for the researcher to "identify herself as a feminist doing research" (p.7) and to be open to a wide variety of methods. For McHugh (2014), what is central to feminist research is that it "examines the gendered context of women's lives, exposes gender inequalities, empowers women, advocates for social change, and/or improves the status or material reality of women's lives" (p. 2). Lather (1988) adds that "to do feminist research is to put the *social construction of gender* [emphasis added] at the centre of one's inquiry" (p. 571). This construction is a primary focus of my research question as I explicitly explore the impact of gender on the participant's experience in the workplace. The aim of my study approach was to speak to women new to the field of student affairs to centre their voices, acknowledge their personal expertise and role as leaders, and use my findings to advocate for change and progress in student affairs and services.

Also critical to a feminist research approach, and why I chose it, is how this approach can lead to important education and learning encounters between the researcher and participants- learning through and from each other- and how this can help to elicit a new knowledge for change (Hesse-Biber, 2012b). The construction of knowledge and the production of social change are core to feminist research, often called its *double dimension* (Brayton et al., n.d.). The construction of knowledge means data is generated between the researcher and participants in a

spirit of reciprocity and co-creation of knowledge (Lather, 1988). My hope was this co-created knowledge would influence and inform the participants as they move through their careers in the future, and impact wider change in their lives as well as the field of student affairs.

In the feminist research approach relationships are developed through the course of interactions between the researcher and participants, allowing power dynamics to shift and the role of the researcher to be diminished (Brayton et al., n.d.; DeVault & Gross, 2012; Lather, 1988). It was important to me that I was not centred as an expert in conducting my research, as a core aspect of this work is a belief that each participant was the expert in her own experience (Hesse-Biber, 2012a). This dynamic felt more comfortable and genuine to me than a researcher relationship that was detached or extractive. I am also aware of a power dynamic that exists between those new to the field and myself as a more seasoned professional, and I wanted to minimize the impact of this dynamic on the participants. I was guided by McHugh's (2014) statement: "If the purpose of feminist research is to challenge or dismantle hierarchies of oppression, then it is crucial that the research process not duplicate or include power differentials" (p. 15).

Participant Recruitment

To recruit participants, I relied on my professional network. I was seeking approximately six women who were new professionals, meaning they had worked in the field of student affairs for five years or less and were currently working full-time at post-secondary institutions. I aimed for six participants as I wanted sufficient breadth and depth across the field of student affairs to provide a range of opinions, responses, and experiences and to ensure sufficient participation throughout the data collection process without having to recruit additional participants at a later date. I thought four participants was a minimum for the type of conversations I was hoping to

hold and knowing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the busy nature of student affairs, I wanted to be sure that if participants were not able to complete their interview or participate in the focus group that I would still have a diverse group of voices to draw upon. To avoid a conflict of interest or possible problematic power dynamics I set parameters that I would not select participants I currently supervised or supervised in the past, or women I knew well as part of my professional role (Saldana et al., 2011). I was also concerned that this working relationship would have an impact on the dynamics and outcomes of the interview and the focus group, create an unequal power dynamic between us, and potentially cause discomfort or harm to the individual due to the inherently personal nature of my interview questions.

In the first step in the recruitment process I sent an email seeking participants to approximately 15 former colleagues and professional contacts and asked them to share it with those who met the research profile. The recruitment email included some basic information about my research as well as a link to indicate an expression of interest to participate and contact information. This link also included more in-depth information about the research, and an overview of the research ethics and procedures for prospective participants to review before completing the form.

Overall, I was surprised and pleased by the immediate level of interest and uptake to participate. I had anticipated I would need to make multiple attempts to recruit participants who met my parameters and had planned to send out information via professional listservs and amongst my close colleagues. However, the initial request for candidates resulted in 17 responses in the first week which meant I did not need to engage in further recruitment efforts. I am very thankful to everyone who shared my initial email request with their colleagues and contacts, and to those who completed the expression of interest survey. In some ways I was a bit

dismayed by the large response as I felt badly I would not be able to speak with everyone who was willing or wishing to share their experiences working in student affairs. In my view, the speed and quantity of responses indicated the topic resonated widely with those who read it, and I do wish there had been a way for me to provide everyone an opportunity to share their story and experiences, but to meet the specific scope of my research choices had to be made.

Participant Selection

Of the 17 expressions of interest I received four were excluded immediately. Two did not meet the research criteria, and two others had an ongoing working relationship with me, which as discussed was outside the scope of my ethics approval and study parameters. As I had more prospective participants than I was able to accommodate, I prioritized women working in British Columbia, in different types of roles and at a variety of institutions. In the end, I invited seven women to participate in the study. One did not respond after her initial expression of interest for reasons unknown, leaving me with my final six participants with whom I arranged times for the initial interviews. Of those who participated all were young women who identified themselves as new professionals, and two were women of colour. One participant worked at a college while the others worked at mid or large sized universities in BC.

Data Collection Methods

I used two methods to collect data: individual interviews and a focus group. I started with interviews because as Brinkmann (2014) contends, interviewing is ideal when “one is interested in qualitative features of human experience, talk, and interaction because qualitative interviews are uniquely capable of grasping these features” (p. 3). Additionally, as Reinharz (1992) highlights, interviews allow for “access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than the words of the researcher” (p. 19) which is particularly important for

researchers centring women, as for centuries women have had ideas have been ignored, or they have had men speak on their behalf.

Specifically I chose the semi-structured interview format, which allows for a conversational tone and is the most widespread type of interview in the human and social sciences (Brinkmann, 2014). Importantly, it is the style of interview favoured by feminist researchers, with Reinharz (1992) saying it is the "principal means" feminist researchers have to build "active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives" (p.18). This style of interviewing falls between a structured interview, which follows standardized questions that allow for responses to be compared across participants, and an unstructured interview, which does not follow set questions but instead allows information to emerge in the course of spending time with the participant (Brinkmann, 2014). Brinkmann (2014) states the benefits of semi-structured interviews are two-pronged, in that they allow for open-ended questioning to "make use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the participants" and in that the interviewer "has a greater say in focusing the conversation on issues that [the participant] deems important in relation to the research project" (p. 16). This mix of flexibility and structure in individual interviews suited my desire for dialogue and the knowledge co-creation I was striving for in my research.

The focus group allowed for further exploration of themes that emerged as part of the interview process and for a sharing of stories, experiences, and ideas in a different forum. Focus groups tend to be closer to everyday discussions than interviews and are important because they enable more spontaneous expressions and discussions to occur (Brinkmann, 2014). The focus group format also allowed me as the researcher and the participants to engage in new ways in a

group environment. From a feminist research perspective, focus groups are valuable in revealing "the extent of consensus and diversity of opinion within groups. The group environment can provide rich data regarding complex behaviors and human interactions" (McHugh, 2014, p. 24). Additionally, for the researcher, McHugh (2014) argues that "the focus group provides the opportunity to observe how people form opinions, influence each other, and generate meaning in the context of discussion with others" (p. 24). Due to these interpersonal interactions, the influence of the researcher can be minimized in the focus group setting which allows for more meaningful connection amongst participants.

Pilot Interview

Saldana et al. (2011) suggest using a pilot interview to test interview questions in a live environment and assess their quality. I conducted a pilot interview with a colleague who was not involved in my study. Through the process of asking the questions aloud and based on her sample responses I was able to make small tweaks to the language or phrasing in a few questions. I also re-ordered some questions to allow for a better flow to the interview. In addition to improving conversational flow, the pilot interview confirmed sharing the interview questions with participants ahead of time was helpful and a practice I should integrate into my research. I discovered my pilot participant had made some notes in preparation for the inteview because she felt it helpful to have reflected on the questions as she had not thought previously about the concepts or ideas my questions were raising. Knowing what topics we were going to discuss made her feel more at ease participating, and of course respect and safety are central to feminist research (Hesse-Biber, 2012b). Many of her responses linked to what I had previously found in the literature, making me more confident my questions would elicit rich responses and

discussion, and were clear and understandable. I very much appreciate my colleague's support and assistance by participating as the pilot interviewee.

Individual Interviews

All interviews with the actual participants were conducted via the University of Victoria's Zoom account due to participant location and uncertainty surrounding safety during the COVID-19 pandemic environment at the time. Based on the pilot interview, the research questions were shared ahead of time with all the participants so they could choose to review and respond to them and to make them feel more prepared going into the interview. (For the full list of interview questions see Appendix A).

One participant was unable to complete the interview due to work load and an unexpected impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on her role and time. This meant I was able to complete five interviews with women from three different institutions over the course of a six week period in the winter of 2021/2022. Most of the interviews ran approximately 40 minutes. All these interviews were able to cover the full question set, and all included additional follow up questions and conversation depending on what the participants shared. Audio from the interviews was recorded in order to produce a transcript.

To maintain privacy and lessen the potential harm of participating, participants are referred to by pseudonyms, and identifying information has not been included in the final write up (DeVault & Gross, 2012). After the transcripts were completed all participants were given the opportunity to review them for omissions or errors in a process known as "member checks", however no requests for corrections or clarifications were made (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 227). All recordings were destroyed in accordance with university policy once the entire transcription and analysis process was completed.

Focus Group

After the interviews were completed, a date and time was chosen six weeks later to hold the focus group with the five participants. A brief agenda was circulated a week ahead, including a short overview of what I hoped to explore further, and confirmation the focus group would primarily be driven by what the group wanted to discuss and what caught everyone's interest. (For the full list of focus group questions see Appendix B). Unfortunately the day before the focus group one participant had a conflict arise and was no longer able to participate, while another did not attend for reasons unknown. This resulted in three participants contributing to the focus group. Although a larger group would have been ideal to allow for wider connections and story sharing, having a slightly smaller group allowed for each woman to speak more frequently and discussion flowed naturally. Overall, the goals of the focus group were met with the group that convened and it was a positive way to complete the data collection.

Data Analysis

A component of my qualitative research method was data analysis. According to Saldana et al. (2011) the researcher is able to identify patterns, construct meaning, and reveal to others what was discovered through analysis. As data was first generated via individual interactions with participants at their interview, I was able to analyse and reflect on it in an ongoing manner throughout the process. I engaged in more systemic analysis following the interview phase and at the conclusion of the focus group using written transcripts of all conversations. Both my ongoing informal analysis and more formal coding after my data collection had concluded allowed me to identify categories within the data, and to determine relationships between categories to identify themes (Mayan, 2009).These categories and themes shifted slightly over

time as new data was collected and as further reflection and analysis occurred, however there was a high level of repetition and consistency amongst responses.

I coded the written data into categories using *in vivo coding*. In vivo coding pulls on participant language, using words or phrases that stand out or show the essence of what is being said as the code (Saldana et al., 2011). The language and the way certain words and phrases are used can be quite distinctive in student affairs and holds specific meaning that is implicitly understood in the field. Because of this internal language, in vivo coding worked well, and also retained the voices of the participants through this part of the process which was important to me, and in alignment with a feminist research approach.

After the interviews I identified themes within the categories using the methods above to develop questions that warranted further probing in the focus group. At the focus group I was able to share the themes I had observed in the interview phase as a starting point to our meeting. This was very positively received by the group and helped develop some initial comfort and rapport. Participants all stated the themes I shared were familiar and reflected their experience. Participants were somewhat relieved to hear the topics of discussion and observations they talked about during their interviews were not totally unique and instead were part of a wider shared experience between them. One participant, Alex, stated after hearing the initial themes "it is so nice to hear that other folks were feeling similar things and… validating in some ways that the way I'm feeling is also felt by other folks in this field of work." Participants also stated some themes reflected their experience or reminded them of something they wanted to discuss further, even if a specific theme had not arisen during their individual interview. The participants were very interested to hear some of the learnings from my research up to that point, and were keen to continue the conversation on many topics during the focus group.

Coding the data and determining categories and themes was not always straightforward as there was a lot of nuances and meaning behind responses I got from participants. Brinkmann (2014) warns that in the process of identifying themes, ignoring complexity for coherence is a mistake, as "it is important to be open to multiple interpretations of what is said and done in an interview… 'meanings' that qualitative interviewers are commonly looking for are often multiple, perspectival, and contradictory and thus demand careful interpretation" (p. 18). While I strived to balance complexity with coherence in my final interpretations I am aware there is no perfect balance when analysing qualitative data. In all my data work my ultimate goal was to centre and value the words of the participants and allow them to speak for themselves, and as such I have made use of many of their quotes and reflections.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Qualitative researchers for decades have been concerned with the more quantitative notions of is *trustworthiness* and *validity*. Feminist researchers have found critical ways to speak to these ideas differently, rejecting the idea of *objectivit*y embedded in them as possible and instead focusing on the importance of other concepts in the research process (e.g., Dallimore, 2000a; DeVault & Gross, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012b; McHugh, 2014; Reinharz, 1992). For example, Dallimore (2000a) reframes trustworthiness as applicability, highlighting the importance of research being accountable to participants and that it furthers equity and social change. Similarly, McHugh (2014) highlights credibility as an important aspect of trustworthiness, showing the importance of being respectful and responsible to the participants and wider community. Rather than focus on trustworthiness and validity I have instead picked up some of the concepts suggested by these feminist researchers to guide my commitment to the

research process, to the participants, to myself, and the field of student affairs. These include respect, community and connection, contextuality, trust, and reciprocity.

Feminist research is based on a respect for the participants as equals and agents, rather than subjects, and this guided my interactions with my participants (McHugh, 2014). I strived to show respect to their lived experiences, their words and expertise as knowers, and their willingness to participate in my research. I was open with the participants about the scope of my research and about the ethics approvals and balances that were in place to protect them, including the ability to withdraw, the use of pseudonyms, and their ability to control what and how they shared without pressure to participate in ways that made them uncomfortable. I have included the participants' words frequently throughout my work, which lends to the authenticity of my representation of their stories and ideas.

For McHugh (2014) "community and connectedness" (p. 217) are essential to establishing validity in research. Being a part of the student affairs community, and my past lived experience as a young woman in the field demonstrated a clear link to the community and a genuine connection to the participants, and they understood my interest in both the topic and in what they had to contribute. I took care to build connection and trust through the interviews and focus groups by demonstrating personal interest in the participants. This meant listening carefully to their words and meaning, and by also being open about my past experiences, as well as my intentions for my research. As discussed above I produced transcripts and engaged in member checking to ensure accuracy and allow participants control over their interviews (DeVault & Gross, 2012).

In terms of contextuality, throughout the data analysis process I continually considered the wider context of student affairs as well as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on

individuals and their work. Student affairs is a field with busy peak periods and many roles deal with emergencies or emergent issues which can be draining and cause unexpected challenges. COVID-19 increased stresses and complications in everyone's personal and working lives which had impacts on mental and physical health, as well as work environments and relationships. I was conducting my research during a time of uncertainty and stress which I am sure impacted my participants and those around them in a myriad of ways and could have also had an impact on my role as a researcher and interpretation of my findings.

Consciousness Raising

A central idea in feminist research and one that links closely to my research approach is consciousness raising. That is, the use of the research process to encourage new ways of thinking, relating, naming or acting on or about women's experiences and knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2012b; Reinharz, 1992). Commitment to consciousness raising as part of the research design demonstrated that community, connection, and reciprocity were at the core of my research. While consciousness raising is done in individual interviews and engagement with the researcher, it is particularly true in focus group settings where "women to women talk" occurs (Reinharz, 1992, p. 23). In such a group a camaraderie develops as there is "a sense that there are others like you out there, that you are not on your own, that you were not on your own" which causes women to realize "that others have been here before" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 31).

In order to enable women participants to think more critically and deeply about their own lives or work, in my case it was important to create a feeling or sense of safety in the group, a forum where they can openly share experiences, problems, and solutions with peers in language they understand (DeVault & Gross, 2012; McHugh, 2014; Reinharz, 1992). I did this by encouraging people to share as much or as little as they were comfortable with, being clear on

aspects of confidentiality and privacy, and being open with my own background and experience when it seemed relevant. Most important though, was that I made a concerted effort to listen and show genuine interest and care in their stories. Feedback from the conclusion of the focus groups indicated a sense of safety had developed and consciousness raising had taken place. One participant stated “I just wanted to say thank you for the work that you're doing. I felt so validated through this whole process”. Another agreed saying at the end of the focus group “I wanted to thank you for creating such a safe space to share how we're feeling…I feel like I’ve really benefited from hearing the stories of others”. This feedback was a validation for me of my research topic and methods, and signaled that there was a benefit for those who participated in both the interviews and focus groups. More of their words are shared throughout my findings in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter shares my findings from both the individual interviews and focus group with women working as new professionals in student services roles in British Columbia. Based on my data analysis, I have divided my findings into four main categories: Supervisors and Mentorship, Issues of Identity, Personal and Professional Development, and the Importance of Informal Learning. Within each category a number of themes emerged such as approachability, feelings of empowerment and disempowerment, trust and respect, peer support, and conceptions of leadership. As a primary goal of this feminist research project was creating space for the participants to speak and be heard, my way of honouring this is to use quotations in their own words. Throughout the chapter I will refer to the five participants by their pseudonyms: Rosa, Jamie, Golden, Anna, and Alex.

Supervisors and Mentorship

As noted in Chapter Two, the literature shows supportive supervision is a critical element of success and retention in the field of student affairs (e.g., Belch et al., 2009; Green & Davis, 2021; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull, 2006). It is therefore not surprising that a key category I created from the data was the importance of mentorship and the role supervisors played in the careers of the participants. Especially for these women who are early in their career development, the leadership, or lack of leadership, of supervisors has a substantive impact on all aspects of their experiences on the job. Supervisors provide important guidance to acclimatize to the workplace and all participants spoke about relying on supervisors in both their daily work and their longer-term progression, success, and personal fulfillment in their roles. There were also, of course, challenges which had to be negotiated.

Approachability and Experimentation

The first theme to emerge in this category is what I call approachability and experimentation, meaning how approachable and available supervisors were perceived to be by participants, and therefore how comfortable participants felt experimenting with new ideas and practices under their supervisor's guidance. Approachability and openness to experimentation were identified as positive traits in supervisors and several participants shared how fortunate they felt to have worked with good supervisors early in their careers. For example, Rosa highlighted being approachable and available as essential to being a good supervisor:

> I think I got very lucky with my previous job that I had a manager and director who are both really great, very approachable. They took the time to have one-on-ones with me where I could ask all the questions that I felt were silly, where I could learn from them, and get different ideas about different paths within student affairs.

Approachability meant that Rosa did not have to worry about bringing forward her ideas to supervisors, or to ask questions. Many inexperienced staff in new positions worry, as Rosa did, that their questions are wrong or "silly" and therefore, having someone who is willing to provide answers in a non-judgemental way is critical to feeling comfortable in their new role.

Jamie echoed Rosa's sentiments, stating she too had been "fortunate" to have supervisors who were "open to pursuing or allowing me to pursue new challenges… I think having just very open and supportive supervisors who have been very willing to explore my own development… has been really helpful." Jamie was particularly excited about being allowed to explore new ways of working as a means of personal growth as well as a critical component of good supervision. Golden too described herself as "fortunate to have had an absolutely wonderful

supervisor" early in her career but took it further by including the idea of empowerment. As she noted, her female supervisor had really helped her to "go beyond and feel happy and empowered." While there are challenges to the concept of empowerment, and if one can be empowered by others, for many of my participants' empowerment came through supervisors' willingness to trust them enough to stretch themselves in their role.

Being given the space and opportunity, and even to be pushed, by supervisors to experiment is important for the employee herself as well as the larger student body she interacts with. The first import is that it is a sign of trust and respect. The outcome was participants felt more able to innovate, more fulfilled, and confident that the work they were doing was meaningful. This brings about employee happiness which is linked to better student support and engagement. Secondly, trust and respect are particularly important in new professional roles as their work is frequently on the front line, interacting directly with students. A positive and supportive experience for these new professionals has a downstream effect of creating positive experiences for students. Thirdly and linked, when new professionals are supported and secure in their roles, they feel more comfortable experimenting with novel ways to meet the needs of students on a daily basis and trusting themselves to make good decisions. Finally, as so many participants noted, this type of support gave them a deeper sense of ownership and responsibility for the work.

The Importance of Values

A second theme under supervision and mentorship is the importance of shared values to working in student affairs. Anna focused on the idea of "shared values" as something she felt was important to her compatibility and admiration of supervisors. Specifically, Anna highlighted the values of "adaptability", "flexibility", and "humour." The latter she described as a

“lightness”, important both to her as an individual, but also to working with students on a daily basis in often unpredictable and changing circumstances. Golden also explained the importance of values she linked to leadership approaches. Speaking about qualities she respected in a past supervisor Golden explained, “[she] was just the leader that I want to be… steadfast, thoughtful, mindful, caring, and extremely intelligent, and organized, and thorough. So I think having those influences around me, just having those people to look up to was very impactful.” When Golden provided examples of values and qualities she respected, she also discussed how she was working to bring them into her own supervision style. This highlighted the importance of alignment of values and practices in that supervisory relationship.

Safety and Gender

One of the themes in feminist literature is the importance of women-to-women conversations and the value of women-centric spaces for comfort, empowerment, and understanding (e.g., Ahmed, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2012b; Reinharz, 1992). Rosa and Jamie both talked about the sense of comfort, safety, and enjoyment in the workplace that came from working with women, both as colleagues and in leadership roles. As Rosa explained “all my supervisors have been women, which I think like also kind of makes it a little bit easier to find a positive role model and personally to reach out and have a bit of a safer, to me, environment.” When discussing the makeup of her current team in comparison to her time in other roles, Jamie too spoke of a “comfortability with working with a high number of female-identifying staff members.” Also related to gender, Anna talked about the motivating impact of the positive behaviours that she had witnessed in the women leaders she had reported to, and how these had made her want to succeed not only for herself but also for other women. As she put it, “it's cool

to see a lot of successful women in this career path. It helps me visualize myself potentially staying in this industry or this field and moving forward in different student affairs roles."

What is interesting about my findings is that gender is not a topic of focus in the literature on socialization to the student affairs profession, although based on my interviews it plays a large role for these women and their comfort and integration into their workplace. The importance of gender identity and identifying closely with other women was in fact at the core of what the majority of my participants shared about their experiences and is something I discuss further in later chapters.

Learning from Role Models

Learning through observation from role models in the workplace is a key facet of the socialization process for new professionals and central to the literature (e.g., Duran & Allen, 2020; Tull, 2006). In my study, many of the participants talked about finding themselves mimicking the constructive behaviours they were witnessing, and most importantly, of what that they were learning from observing good leadership. As Alex notes:

> I think it's even more motivation to be a good supervisor in the future. Like if I see myself growing in student affairs and moving into a manager role where I'm supporting student leaders and supporting full time staff I want to be one of those good supervisors. Because those supervisors it seems like play a huge role in steering female leaders in their development. [Supervisors] can be super helpful and also can be impactful in not such good ways, so I think it motivates me to work extra hard to be able to create those spaces for folks, [so] they have a really good first experience working in this field.

Similarly, Rosa noted that she had been fortunate to have "a lot of those positive role models in my previous job, so I was able to learn from them and then try to take what I found is helpful in

the mentee position and then try to emulate that in my role.” Building on this, Golden reflected on the importance of learning through observation and from time spent with different supervisors, but her motivation came from the opposite perspective. She spoke of the learning that comes from “having leaders around me that I didn't want to be like… so learning from that as well as understanding what it was that I wanted to be as a leader, just having both those influences was supremely helpful.” Although it was challenging to have negative experiences with a supervisor, Golden was still able to take some positive learnings from it to apply to her future work and the development of her own leadership practice.

Several participants in the focus group shared how they were already putting the positive behaviours they were observing into action in their work with student staff and volunteers. In particular, participants talked about becoming more reflective of their own power and impact as leaders on students. Participants also mentioned the desire to grow and develop in the field, which would likely lead to supervising new professions in the future. Optimism about the work and their career futures was high amongst the participants, largely influenced by positive role models.

The Importance of Mentorship

Another theme I identified was the importance of mentorship. This is related, but I would argue distinct from the conversation on positive role models. As noted in the literature, a mentorship relationship can develop with supervisors; however, in many situations a mentoring relationship can develop with a more experienced colleague or someone working in a different area of student affairs (Tull et al., 2009). In the following examples, *mentorship* refers explicitly to these types of external relationships, not to mentoring from those also in positions of authority at work, such as supervisors or departmental leaders. These external mentor relationships could

be constructed through a formal mentorship program in which people are paired together, or informally through ongoing connection and conversation. One participant in particular, Anna, shared that one of the most important supports to her as a new professional was a woman who she viewed as a current mentor. This mentor is about 10 years her senior and has been working in the field for almost as long a period. What Anna found to be the most important in terms of positioning her as a mentor was that:

> [she] had more experience and it's helpful to get another perspective... I think she also sees some of the patterns and things like that in the office that I've seen, and it's helpful to get validation sometimes, or just to talk through situations and see if there's advice [she can offer] if she's been through something similar. I really value getting to work with her.

This quotation is instructive as firstly, Anna has noted that this mentorship relationship provides an outside perspective on her day-to-day work by someone who has similar experiences and can understand and speak to them. In my observation working for many years in student affairs, it can be challenging to new professionals to parse what is normal in the field or at work versus is unique to their role or experience. This uncertainty and desire for a second opinion was articulated in various ways throughout all the interviews. Having a variety of mentors and supporters can help provide needed context, both in positive and negative situations to women new to the field. Secondly, Anna's quotation shows that mentors can play an important function by providing space for young employees to openly discuss their future. For Anna this was for her daily work as well as her future career development. For example, she was considering enrollment in further education such as a master program, or to take on a new position. I will return to the importance of mentorship conversations that stretch beyond the daily role in my discussion chapter as it was a unique aspect to the mentor relationship.

Struggle and/for Survival

While I would say that most of the examples of supervisory relationships were positive in my study, there were also examples of problematic relations. Power dynamics are always present and the damaging, negative, or strained effects are a risk for new professionals, as in fact they are for all people in workplaces. This is particularly true in tight job markets, or in smaller institutions or cities where simply leaving your job or changing positions is not easy. In these circumstances, participants talked about diverse forms of survival.

To begin, Golden described how she had to work hard to maintain positive relationships with her supervisor, despite challenges or mistreatment because:

> [The supervisor] relationship is so tied to your survival in the world. It's not a relationship you can just walk out on without major consequences... a work relationship is so tied to your survival while you're kind of stuck there until you find something else, which can sometimes take time.

As Golden's statement suggests there is an additional workload and emotional toll that comes with the struggle and time it takes to maintain good relations and take on unequal responsibility for repairing relationships. Green and Davis' (2021) research on supervisory tensions in student affairs show that conflicts with and mistrust of supervisors have a negative impact on employee's job satisfaction and can lead to practitioners leaving their roles or the field entirely. For Anna, the negative experience is a matter of what she called survival and she linked that directly to capacity. She stated "[my supervisor is] just like very busy all the time and so I think it's hard sometimes to get extra support." Implicit yet unspoken in this statement is a concern about being

a bother, taking up too much of the supervisor's time, or adding to their workload when they appear to be already overloaded. Supervisors are often overloaded, so the sentiment is understandable, however, it also illustrates a lack of mindfulness by the supervisor to provide what is needed to their staff. This statement shows Anna's belief that she needs to take responsibility for managing others' time and actions, despite it being outside her scope of control. I will discuss this further, along with the feeling of responsibility to repair relationships in the next chapter.

A Peer Support System

In their study, Renn and Hodges (2007) drew attention to the idea of *peer support* in terms of socialization and a person's longevity in the student services field. In addition to supervisors and more senior mentors, many participants in my study explained the importance of their peers to their onboarding to their new positions and workplace, and to socialization to the field. For Alex, one of the best parts of working in a department with many new professionals and at a large institution was the built-in support network it provided. Returning to the value of having a sounding board and people who listen and understand, she stated that:

> having folks to bounce ideas off of, folks to share work with, it sounds simple but [to have people to] talk about work with that will understand at the same level has been really, really helpful and something I've really enjoyed… I found that really helpful in terms of a support system.

Conversely, some participants talked about the problem of a lack of peers. For example, Jamie noted that her primary challenge when working at a smaller college was how few people she readily identified with. She said she was "challenged by the size of the institution" because there were so few at her level with whom she could connect. By not having much contact with

other new professionals it led to a lack of exposure to new ideas, and opportunities to discuss career exploration and advancement in the field.

Golden spoke to the importance of peers as a source of support and neutral perspective. This is reflected in Strayhorn's (2009) study that highlighted the importance of peers to the socialization process of new professionals, saying "supportive staff-peer relationships facilitate integration into one's department or office that can lead to a sense of membership, belonging, [and] commitment" (p. 165). Golden explained a positive aspect of the peer relationship was that she could raise problematic experiences to a supportive audience to aid in her own understanding of what she was experiencing. She gave the example of having peers who helped her see the impact of systemic issues of race and gender that she did not initially identify as underlying negative factors shaping her experiences in the workplace. As she noted "I was never quick to arrive at the conclusion that this is happening because of my gender or my race but it was rather my peers pointing it out to me that perhaps this is the reason." This brings me to the issues of gender, race, and age raised by participants, which work separately, but also, in tandem.

Issues of Identity

Scholars writing from a of diversity standpoints have found that people are treated differently in the workplace based on gender, race, and age, as well as other identity markers (e.g., Benson et al., 2022; Doldor et al., 2019; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2019). The field of student affairs is no different. My participants spoke to various factors of their identity, and also how they interacted to create intersectional patterns of bias and oppression in their work in student affairs. What is the most challenging in all this is participants felt an obligation to push past the bias they were experiencing, and feelings of self-doubt or blame for something that was not within their control.

Gender

As all participants were women, they were quick to share their perceptions of gender-based bias and unequal treatment in the workplace. Although some examples illustrate overt sexism, other stories conveyed a subtly practiced sexism that all women are familiar with, although not all may be able to articulate, identify, or will admit to. I speak here to interactions that cause you to pause, statements that make you wonder if you mis-heard or mis-understood, a certain tone that seems to convey a different or deeper meaning. Individually they might be less visible, but even for these women who had only been working in student affairs for a short time they noticed how quickly these interactions built into patterns. These patterns are in fact systemic issues, rather than individual concerns. Golden spoke to how slow it was for her to come to this realization due to the obscured nature of the bias saying "it's hard [to see the impact of gender at work] because it is so subtle." Although many gendered experiences were subtle, two specific issues that came to the forefront throughout the interviews were preferential treatment of male colleagues, and concerns about not being heard or listened to.

Gendered Preferential Treatment

In addition to negative treatment, participants spoke of gendered preferential treatment of male co-workers as an example of gender dynamics in the workplace. Although preferential treatment was highlighted in the literature in systemic ways and in formal processes or settings like performance reviews (e.g., Doldor et al., 2019; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2019) what the participants spoke about was more focused on meetings, social interactions, and casual settings. Preferential treatment of male staff is not something I saw frequently in the

student services literature and so I found it interesting that it came up so often in my interviews. Anna told a story of how she noticed a more personal, chummy type of relationship forming between her male manager and her male co-worker, even though both she and he were equally new to their roles. She described this as "having a good thing going on" between them, and noted how often she had seen "them joking in his office and things like that." Anna was not experiencing this kind of close camaraderie and attributed this to her gender. She began to question what she was seeing and of course, found the differences in treatment very destabilizing.

Anna's feelings of being left out forced her to begin second guessing her role in the organization. She also began to question the lack of clarity around boundaries or what constitutes an appropriate level of sociability in the workplace. According to Green and Davis (2021), "muddled" boundaries and questions of what is an "optimal balance between the personal and the professional" (p. 45) in relationships is a common source of tension in student affairs workplaces. This ambiguity in relationships can cause perceptions of bias and favouritism amongst colleagues if their observations of others relationships with supervisors do not match their own relationship. Social and professional boundaries often blur due to the nature of the work and norms of close working relationships within the field. Navigating the balance of these personal-professional relationships is only made more complex by gender dynamics and other factors of identity, as shown by Anna's story.

Having a weaker or more distant relationship with your supervisor can have negative impacts including: being passed over for projects, having less access to professional development conversations or guidance, and decreased staff retention (e.g., Smith et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2009; Tull, 2006). This difference in treatment from supervisors resulted in

participants feeling frustrated, out of place, or left out of important office opportunities, dynamics, and decisions. Golden noticed how differently she was treated by a senior decision maker when she asked for clarity on a project, being told she "needed to listen better", but when her male colleague expressed uncertainty he was coached and supported with "clear bullet points", which for her indicated they were working together to assure his success. Rosa felt that because there were fewer men working in student affairs it seemed that they were singled out and promoted more quickly than women, that "it's a little bit easier for them. That's my take on it." Seeing the preferential treatment of men working in the field of student affairs is not just an annoyance, it can have real impacts on women's long term career progression. Rosa's observation is supported by the literature, as despite the field being predominantly women in entry level roles, by the time people reach the level of Senior Student Affairs Officers men and women are equally represented, indicating that men are promoted to senior positions in higher numbers than women in the field (Kuk et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2016).

Differential treatment of male co-workers by supervisors was not the only challenge. Alex noticed that when her male counterparts walked into a room, there was "a certain level of respect" bestowed upon them simply because they were men. She argued that she needed "to earn that respect" as a woman. The challenge is that this difference in treatment had become so common Alex realized she no longer noticed it consciously, although she noted that it continued to colour her behaviour and approach. The impact of this internalization is that, as Alex noted, is that "I don't really think about" as it becomes so expected. Feminists such as Ahmed (2017) and Fricker (2007c) speak to negative effects on women of assumed male superiority. These messages are both conscious and unconscious and they become harmful, as I alluded to above, because they reinforce inequality as well as negative shared understandings of social identity and

gender norms. This can have long-term impacts on self-perception, personal and professional development, and career progression.

Who is Being Heard?

Building on the above, feminist literature talks about the importance of voice and about women speaking their truths, but equally importantly, it talks about being heard and when heard, being believed (Ahmed, 2017; Fricker, 2007c). As noted in Chapter Two, Fricker (2007c) calls this *testimonial injustice* which is part of a larger project of epistemic injustice, of the discounting of women as knowers and producers of knowledge. My participants talked about whose voices get listened to and whose do not, and how their words are received when they do speak up. Golden addressed the impact of gender on not being heard at work and her voice not holding the same weight as male colleagues, stating "I do believe that there has been an impact that my gender has had… I think it's had a huge impact on being heard." Which voices are listened to is linked to the issue of respect and (un)equal treatment discussed above, but came up specifically in the context of gender in several of the interviews. Elaborating on her previous point, Golden shared her observation of a pattern of behaviour that developed in one of her workplaces:

> There have been so many instances… where you know I've been advocating for something for quite some time and…it's continuously dismissed, or not put into practice, and then it takes one meeting that my male colleague has with my supervisor to make it happen. So I think things like that have definitely made me feel a way.

Her observation speaks to the frustration of not being listened to and having to advocate for yourself, while male colleagues seem to be automatically trusted and their suggestions are listened to and enacted more quickly. The added struggle to be heard in addition to the day-to-

day work, which in student affairs is often very draining and taxing, makes the work doubly challenging. The exhaustion of having to do this extra work was highlighted by multiple participants in the focus group.

In this context, Anna made a similar observation to Golden, sharing “there's something I've noticed is around who's speaking in the room, who gets the attention or the legitimacy behind their words.” Anna also had a short example of how this manifested itself, explaining: “I can think of a co-worker, a male co-worker…who definitely got a lot of extra attention, and praise, and space in meetings. And so I think that was something that took some adjusting I guess, or getting used to.” In Anna’s case she has taken this to heart in her own work with her student staff team, and with her colleagues when she chairs meetings. She has adjusted her practices in formal settings where she is aware some people may feel less comfortable contributing to “make sure that more voices are being heard in that space.” Anna spoke often of the behaviours she has adopted to counteract the bias or inequality she observes and experiences. I explore the roots and impacts of these personal adjustments and mitigating strategies in Chapter Five.

Age

Age related discrimination in the literature often focusses on the older or elderly population, and how they are ignored, excluded, and discounted due to their age. However, ageism can operate in both directions and “may manifest in negative attitudes leading to discrimination against both older and younger individuals” (Jones et al., 2017, p. 1081). In my study, ageism was related to the relative youth of the participants in relation to other student affairs and services professionals, as my participants could not accurately be described as youths. One age-related concern raised by participants, which may be unique to the area of student

affairs, was being mistaken as student staff members or volunteers, although they were actually full-time professional staff. For example, Jamie shared an anecdote about being discounted and ignored at an event where colleagues assumed she was a student employee. Not being recognized as the primary organizer had implications because it made her feel "awkward and out of place." The likelihood of staff being of a similar age to students is quite high, making this type of interaction more common. Participants spoke about how these experiences of being assumed to be *just students* shows how automatic it is to assume a link between age competency and knowledge. This is of course not to say that students do not have competencies and knowledge and they should not be treated as such (the field of student affairs is built on the understanding that they do), but to point out that when this happens to young employees they feel like they are being underestimated and devalued. I have witnessed this devaluation on more than one occasion as supervisor and know the impact it can have.

Age-based differentiation was identified by my participants as more of a fact of life than a real concern. It was immediately noticeable to me that participants discounted or excused this type of bias more so than experiences related to gender or race. In sharing an experience in her first role, Golden realized she was not being treated with the same consideration as older colleagues and assumed this was due to her young age. However, she also wondered if this was partly her fault for not acknowledging her youth and compensating by working harder or being more prepared than older peers, saying "perhaps it was my fault. Being a young leader… not having that self-awareness that my age and gender will play a role so I should [come more prepared]." This reveals Golden's uncertainty if it was fair or reasonable to be asked to prove herself due to her age, or if instead her age should not have an impact on her supervisor's perception and treatment.

Anna took a slightly different tack, describing an age-related challenge in terms of her status as the younger member of her department. Being young she recognized that others had "lots of experience and knew more about the work than I did" which could offer opportunities for her own learning but made it challenging to feel her contributions were valuable or necessary. On its face this is a reasonable interpretation, as (presumably) the older you are, and the more experience you have had, and the better you will be at the job. But the concern emerges when that awareness is turned back on the young employee herself and she begins to question her own abilities due to her youth. This negative self-perception and self-doubt can quickly spill into work performance and relationships, causing further uncertainty and damage (Tull, 2006). This makes it imperative that colleagues and supervisors be able to manage the age divide in ways that do not undermine what older employees know, but which also highlight the benefits of new perspectives. For example, new professionals could bring fresh ideas and enthusiasm, and be attuned to current student needs as they may still identify closely with the current cohort of students. I will take up age as a seemingly acceptable bias in my discussion chapter along with the importance of recognizing and capitalizing on the alternative ideas new professionals often bring to their work.

Race

Race is another facet of identity politics that women navigate in student affairs and services (e.g., Brown et al., 2020; Pidgeon, 2016; M. E. Wilson et al., 2016). Two participants in my study were women of colour and both discussed the impact of race on them as student affairs staff. Golden and Rosa each raised the issue of race as a primary aspect of their identity and reflected on the impact of racism on work. Rosa for example explained that racial bias meant others discounted her, thinking she did not have "the gravitas or the experience to be a leader and

to make bigger decisions." For Golden, race is something people immediately used to inform their opinions of her in terms of perception and treatment, leading to discrimination. Building on this, Anna drew attention to the lack of allyship she had witnessed but also, from her perspective as a white woman, talked about becoming more aware of biases in her department that affected others with different identities, especially BIPOC women. She realized this was not something she should get used to or ignore but instead should learn from her BIPOC colleagues about their experience so that as an ally "if necessary, I can feel confident to speak up."

Anti-racism scholars such as Brown et al. (2020) remind us of the value of solidarity as well as allyship when navigating racial diversity in student affairs and services, and their importance was understood by my participants as well. A positive aspect of her racial identity that Golden described was the chance to work with other BIPOC women in terms of solidarity and support. This was both beneficial in terms of mutual understanding but also, of agency in terms of taking "all of these disadvantages we were facing" and asking ourselves "are we going to do something about it?" Golden talked about the importance of being with people who "share that experience and…empathize with it" to her work in the field as well as her ability to overcome discrimination and find a sense of belonging and support at her institution.

Not Being Taken Seriously

Women not being listened to or taken seriously in the workplace and professional fields are regularly taken up in feminist scholarship, showing the ubiquity of these experiences (e.g., Fricker, 2007c; Hesse-Biber, 2012b; Smith et al., 2019). As Fricker (2007c) argues, this is an aspect of epistemic injustice, which she describes as a "prejudicial dysfunction" between the hearer and the speaker which "results in [the speaker] receiving less credibility than she otherwise would have—a *credibility deficit* [in the eyes of others]" (p. 18, emphasis in original).

There was not one aspect of identity that participants pointed to as the underlying cause of this lack of credibility. Instead it was the intersection of gender, age, and for two participants race, that they thought was causing others not to take them seriously. Several participants discussed how challenging it was to tease apart the reasons they seemed to have a credibility deficit with their colleagues and senior leaders in their departments. Not only were they not being taken seriously, but they were also being underestimated and it was clear that it had a deep impact on them. Alex stated that this had become a norm and she linked this directly to the combination of her age and gender saying "maybe this is something that I've just kind of accepted but being underestimated a bit for looking young or being female." This was similar to Rosa, although for her there was an amplified racial dimension: "as a woman specifically I might just not be taken seriously, even by the students themselves, especially because I am young and brown." Golden too found the intersection of her identity immediately impacted perceptions of her as a qualified student affairs professional and how she was treated by colleagues:

> Right away I found that my age, and my gender, and I'm a minority as well, so it definitely had an impact. It was very blatant…it just showed up in in in these ways where I just felt like I was not being taken seriously.

In my study, the feeling of not being taken seriously and the negative emotions it produced was a common concern for all the participants. It was clear my participants felt this lack of respect deeply and personally. This struck me as important not only because of the frequency with which it was mentioned, but due to the emotion behind their words and stories. As Hesse-Biber (2012a) argues, emotions matter; they are critical to feminist research and are "a central aspect to knowledge building" (p. 11). When it came to issues of credibility my participants felt frustration and a level of hopelessness that they could not change the perceptions

of others, regardless of quality of work, innovative ideas, or effort due to negative perceptions of their identities. What to do with these emotions, and how to manage and process them became an additional challenge for all my participants to navigate as they sought to be taken seriously in their work and as student affairs professionals.

Personal and Professional Development

For new professionals, personal and professional development, and explorations of leadership are high priorities but the learning curve can be steep. As outlined in the literature, socialization and a focus on learning and growth are vital to the success of new student affairs practitioners (Duran & Allen, 2020; Renn & Hodges, 2007). The importance of personal exploration, learning, and development was also highlighted by participants in the interviews and was one of the primary topics of conversation in the focus group. Developing leadership skills and building relevant leadership experience through their roles was highly valued by all participants.

Workplace development for all participants came in a mix of formal, non-formal learning, and informal learning. As outlined in Chapter Two, these are all important types of learning for new professionals and across the field of student affairs, although there were some barriers (e.g., Janosik, 2009; Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull et al., 2009). Performance evaluations and focused conversations with supervisors were cited frequently by participants as an important aspect of their professional development and as a clear way to understand expectations and measure their overall performance.

Conceptions of Leadership

My participants had a nuanced view of leadership, focusing on individual approaches and strengths rather than a common set of skills or attributes, or one preferred leadership style. Alex

described a key element in her conception of leadership as “leveraging strengths”, and outlined many examples of positive leadership traits in mentors and supervisors as was discussed previously in this chapter. Participants were thoughtful of what leadership meant to them in their role, and how they wanted to lead others, be it peers or student staff or volunteers. Anna described the importance of diverse approaches to leadership within teams, stating “I think there's definitely a wide variety of things that are helpful as leaders” and if everyone brought the same qualities and strengths it would become “messy”.

The focus on growth as a function of leadership was widely discussed in the interviews and focus group. Growth as a core function of leadership aligns closely with literature on student development theory and common approaches to leadership development in the field (e.g., ACPA/NASPA Joint Task Force on Professional Competencies and Standards, 2015; Astin, 1984; Fernandez et al., 2016; Patton et al., 2016). This concept of growth was referenced both in relation to individual growth in the participants themselves as leaders and in those they were leading. Jamie explained how this blended with student affairs work stating “it's a balance between the supports and services that you are providing to students, and also knowing that that has to come with growth opportunity.” Golden described how often her leadership came through in feelings, rather than decisive action. She argued that a key component of her leadership was “to be mindful of how I'm making people feel.” She went on to say that this does not “always necessarily mean making them feel the greatest because sometimes you have to make people feel accountable and feel responsible towards their actions. But you have to do that in a mindful way where it's not hurtful for them.” For Golden *mindfulness* in leadership meant challenging people to develop, but in a supportive way which did not close them down by causing hurt, thereby stunting personal and professional growth.

There was agreement amongst participants that leadership can be developed over time, rather than being a fixed or innate trait. Transformation, for oneself and for others, through leadership is an aspect of feminist leadership (Ahmed, 2017; Batliwala, 2015). Transformation and evolution of leadership approaches, intent, and impact was discussed by several participants who were still exploring their own leadership as well as its effects on others. Alex stated that over the course of her work she has "slowly grown into realizing that leadership looks different for every person" and that "seeing how [leadership strengths] come out has been really helpful" to her own understanding of how leadership skills might change and progress, both in herself and in students or peers. Although Anna was still a bit unsure of what exactly leadership meant, she understood it to be evolving, saying it "is definitely something I do, and that I am working on" but wasn't her primary focus in her work, noticing instead her approach had changed as she had gained confidence in her role and saw the impacts of her leadership on students and peers.

Creating Positive Environments

The desire to create positive and safe spaces and interpersonal dynamics was at the core of several of the women's conceptions of leadership. This was to ensure they were leading and facilitating environments that were conducive to learning and growth for everyone. Although the participants did not explicitly link it to gender, this description noticeably aligns with the types of feminist environments described by Ahmed (2017) and Batliwala (2015) as fundamental to the feminist movement and social progress. As Ahmed states it is integral to have "places to gather, meeting places… a shelter" to "convene" in to create space for "transformation" (p. 3). To promote a positive environment Rosa explained her leadership approach was as a "facilitator" with the goal to "gather a lot of different opinions… to help a group work together, to make sure everyone is being heard." Similarly, Golden described a leader as "someone who creates space

for others to rise to the occasion as well", demonstrating the desire to facilitate leadership in others, and to promote more equitable power dynamics. She went on to describe one way she does this is through intentional "withdrawal" as it is a "great form of leadership because it creates room for others." I was able to observe several participant's approach to group dynamics and inclusion during the focus group. This was very interesting to me as it embodied many of the approaches participants had described and linked closely to feminist methods. I discuss the positive environment that was co-created in the focus group and what it signals about leadership approaches in Chapter Five.

The Importance of Informal Learning

Although informal learning is happening every day in student affairs roles, participants in my study still identified it as a valuable component of their growth and development as professionals. Jamie spoke to her experience of having purposely scaffolded learning as part of her ongoing development in a new role. She valued having this intentional guidance from colleagues and supervisors over the course of her career saying "the opportunity to grow and develop has come from the programs that I've been able to work in." Jamie's experience highlighted that although informal learning opportunities that come with all positions, guided and intentional development was what many participants were craving in their roles. Similarly, Rosa shared she would have valued the chance to learn more specifically about working within student affairs on a long-term basis from those with more experience in the field as "you can get a lot from that, and it's easier to see a path for yourself [moving forward]" by having the chance to ask questions and hear a variety of responses. Both Jamie and Rosa highlighted the informal learning that can happen in day-to-day activities and the importance of consciously being aware that learning is occurring even in informal ways. Although it could seem routine, for new

professionals on such a steep learning curve these opportunities for development should be recognized and utilized. I will return to this in my discussion.

Barriers to Learning Opportunities

A perceived lack of departmental support was cited by some participants as a barrier to formal and non-formal learning opportunities. Of interest to me, gender was not cited as a barrier to professional development, despite how much of an impact it had to other areas of their work in student affairs. Instead, barriers identified typically came from a place of scarcity of time or funding, or both. This is supported by Sullivan (2010) who states "most post-secondary institutions under-invest in their staff, and scarce professional development resources are often the first to disappear in a time of retrenchment" (p. 176). Given the state of university budgets and impacts of the pandemic it is unsurprising that staff are noticing a pinch in current conditions. Anna shared the challenges she has encountered accessing professional development explaining "it's hard sometimes to get extra support for developing specific skills, or going to conferences, or doing classes, things like that. I'm interested in those things, but it never feels like there's a right time to do that, we're always quite busy." This perception of a lack of time, or it needing to be the right time, was echoed by others which may have led to people focusing on more individualized learning opportunities that were not dependent on others or departmental schedules. When asked about professional development activities, particularly those in the realm of formal and non-formal learning, a commonality across many participants was the self-directed way in which they had engaged. While I had anticipated discussion of conferences, certifications, and workshops, instead participants more frequently highlighted individual, informal pursuits like reading or personal reflection. Alex stated simply "I think the onus is on me to explore",

demonstrating formal professional development was viewed as an individual priority, not a collective responsibility.

Informal learning opportunities present themselves all the time for women starting in student affairs, but that cannot fully replace the value of formal and non-formal learning opportunities. Ongoing professional development is an important aspect of socialization to the field (Tull et al., 2009) and as Ouellette (2010) states "an investment in the professional preparation of staff yields many benefits for the institution and its students" (p. 220). Knowing these women are finding many avenues for informal education through their work, I discuss the responsibility of supervisors and departments to provide formal and non-formal learning opportunities in future chapters.

Performance Evaluations and Personal Reflection

As outlined in the literature, performance evaluations are a common way of measuring progress and success both in student affairs and in other fields in a structured manner (e.g., Doldor et al., 2019; Tull et al., 2009). Anna spoke positively of the chance to have formal performance evaluation meetings in her work. Rather than being a cause of stress or concern she enjoyed them as they allowed space for "intentional reflection" on her work and "validation" from her supervisor. Alex found performance meetings particularly meaningful when she was able to see things that had been discussed at a previous juncture being brought up again, or when it was clear her supervisor was integrating her thoughts, ideas, and interests into their planning. Several participants found these types of pre-set, scheduled performance meetings were also valuable as they served as a recognized way to make space to reflect on progress and challenges and learn from recent experience. This contrasts to some participants who were also engaging in reflection on their performance, but without the benefit of anyone else's views or input.

Golden shared both positive and negative experiences with performance meetings and the personal learning and reflection they encouraged. Like others she found the benefit of someone else's insight valuable and explained "[my supervisor] would recognize things that I couldn't even recognize in myself and encouraged me to pursue…opportunities in-house and external." In other situations though she left feeling frustrated and uncertain how to move forward. As an example of a negative performance conversation she shared "[my supervisor] didn't really have very valid suggestions for me to consider based on my strengths or qualities, and was more expecting it to come from me." For new professionals, having the benefit of others' insight makes reflection and professional development a richer experience and more beneficial for future growth and development. This individualized attention also promotes positive relationship building and a feeling of being heard and supported that should be prioritized. Anna appreciated the efforts to ensure these meetings happened and were meaningful for everyone because "I could see that investment in my growth and learning." Individual meetings and performance conversations are one of the few places participants consistently described feeling seen and heard, showing their value across a variety of roles and institutions.

Interestingly, issues of gendered language and feedback were not a primary concern to the participants when it came to performance development conversations. This is in contrast to the research on this topic, which highlights the frequency and negative impact of gender bias in formal evaluations (Doldor et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019). Gendered language and bias were noticed by the participants much more frequently in informal and group settings rather than the structured one-on-one environment of a performance conversation.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The women who participated in my interviews and focus group had so much insight and wisdom to share about their experience as new professionals, as women in the field of student affairs and their work as a whole. In this chapter I discuss the various themes from Chapter Four including issues of self blame and ownership, the responsibility of supervisors, identity and support, and the need to create positive spaces. The importance of these topics to the field of student affairs and its practitioners is also explored as well as potential impacts. Recommendations and ideas for further research are shared in the final chapter of this thesis.

Self-Blame and Ownership of Problems

Literature shows that while marginalization and discrimination affect people personally, they are in fact systemic, social challenges that go beyond the individual (e.g., Ahmed, 2017; Fricker, 2007a; Jones et al., 2017). As came through in my findings, a thread of *the personal* ran through many statements and reflections by participants who felt they should, or could, combat systemic issues of gender, race, or age with individual actions and efforts. Ahmed (2017) calls this a "fantasy of equality…. that individual women can bring sexism and other barriers (we might describe these barriers as the glass ceiling or the brick wall) to an end through sheer effort or persistence or will" (p. 5). This fantasy of equality idea, the *just try harder* belief, was evident in stories shared by several participants who described how they felt a certain ownership over managing fraught relationships and repairing harm done by others for the sake of a harmonious work environment. There was a tendency amongst participants to first examine their own role in the conflict or interaction, even if they were not at fault, or from my perspective as a supervisor and student affairs professional should not be the ones shouldering the blame. It was interesting how consistently this happened across both the interviews and focus groups, yet without much

self-scrutiny of this socially and perhaps even mentally embedded expectation by participants. As Giroux (2013) argues neoliberalism "privileges personal responsibility over larger social forces" (p. 1) when he warns that institutions of higher education (and those who work there) are becoming increasingly impacted by individualised neoliberalism. It is also within this context my participants were working and being socialized. On one hand, participants might have felt it was empowering to solve a problem and gain control over the situation or that professional norms would dictate they should solve a problem if they can do so without assistance. On the other hand, as a listener to their stories, it was clear to me what they were discussing were wider systemic problems that were not easily resolved by individuals, and attempting to do so would likely lead to frustration and falling short of their goals for appropriate, sustained resolution. I expected an articulation of this at some point by the participants and was surprised when it did not occur. Although my participants identified sexism, for example, as a pervasive issue there was little discussion of the need for systemic change, nor was there any suggestion of working collectively together, rather than as individuals. One exception was Golden, who spoke consistently about the interplay between systemic issues and individual outcomes.

Building on the above there was also a pervasive desire to downplay or excuse systemic issues, although the reason for doing so varied. For some, it was due to a belief that the issue was an isolated event. For example, several participants attributed negative experiences to a specific person, a specific situation, or a set of circumstances such as a miscommunication at a busy time. There are, of course, one-offs and everyone faces challenges in the workplace meaning in one sense, my participants are not wrong to think this way. However, in my experience, and concurring with Green and Davis (2021), positivity, harmony, and flexibility are highly valued in student affairs, and I suspect this has an impact on new professionals' outlook, beliefs and

expectations. Participants may not want to appear overly critical because "when you talk about sexism and racism, you are heard as damaging the reputation of an individual or an organization" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 35). Especially given their generally positive description of their workplaces and colleagues, excusing issues likely feels kinder and more understanding for participants. For others, a component of the desire to downplay or excuse issues was the perceived or anticipated impact it would have on them as young women in the workplace. This was discussed extensively by Golden who was the most aware of the systemic issues at play, and how challenging these could damage her role and position. Others were also aware, however, of possibly increasing the preferential treatment of male colleagues they were already observing, or other counter-productive outcomes. Ahmed (2017) describes the danger of speaking out by saying "when you expose a problem you pose a problem…we become a problem when we describe a problem" (pp. 37-39). By bringing up systemic issues or naming a problem in their department there was an underlying understanding that the focus would move to them as troublemakers rather than the issue itself. Being a troublemaker has the potential to advance the belief that the women were not serious professionals and therefore, would be unable to survive and thrive in a professional environment. All the participants spoke extensively about their futures in the field, professional development, and career growth and being seen as a problem could threaten those opportunities or undercut their ambitions.

Poor treatment due to gender, race, or age is not, however, something new professionals should feel obligated to rectify, nor should others be expecting them to attempt to do so. Green and Davis (2021) remind us tensions in student affairs and in supervisory relationships "are inherently a collective issue, not an individual struggle" (p. 49). As I did not interview supervisors, I cannot say with certainty that this belief existed, but I can say that somehow, my

participants felt they needed to be the ones to resolve tensions. There are two main problems with this. The first is the time, effort and attention wasted by these women who tried to deal with systemic issues through individual actions. When changes were not made, or when tensions persisted, it was tiring and disheartening for participants. The second is the effect this has on their engagement with students. Having to be aware of how you are being perceived and trying to correct mistreatment or supposed misunderstandings on your part, which are in fact often factors outside your control such as age and gender, has a chilling effect on a willingness and the ability to fully engage with students and colleagues, and contribute to shared projects or teams (Brown et al., 2020). In this way trying to rectify mistreatment takes away from their core work in student affairs, and negatively impacts their wider network of students and other colleagues. This is not to say individual efforts do not matter, or that women should give up trying to influence change. Ahmed (2017) reminds women that "individual struggle does matter, a collective movement depends on it" (p. 6). However, there must be a recognition that these young women as individuals are not responsible for or capable of resolving systemic issues and that is what is most concerning here.

Despite the challenges, my study also showed that the participants were optimistic, engaged, and busy experimenting and innovating in their work. Overall, they remained overwhelmingly positive about their roles, the importance of their work, and their relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Optimism and fresh energy are some of the (many) ways new professionals contribute to their workplace and their approach shows the potential impact of the individual on a wider organization (e.g., Belch et al., 2009; Strayhorn, 2009). The vibrancy and commitment these young women bring shows the impact of individuals on systemic issues and persistent barriers.

Responsibility of Supervisors

The influence of supervisors on staff support, professional development, and daily experience was discussed extensively by participants in both the interviews and focus groups. As Green and Davis (2021) argue, "to have an environment where ethical, high quality supervision is the norm and expectation, executive level leaders and administrators must set the stage…by providing it themselves" (p. 42). Even though their sphere of influence is more limited, I would take it a step further and argue it is incumbent on all supervisors to prioritize this high quality, ethical, and effective supervision, not only those at senior levels of post-secondary institutions. What constitutes ethical supervision can and should be debated, however I agree with Green and Davis who see it as an intrinsic commitment that supervisors and executives are making to staff and to the field of student affairs for the betterment of the profession as a whole but equally, for individuals. The importance and the need for high quality, ethical, and effective supervision aligns with what Golden called in her interview, the *survival* of new professionals in student affairs. Supervisors are the primary link between entry-level staff and the wider team (as well as to the field itself) and their role cannot be overstated.

Supporting Entry Level Staff

Structurally, university departments must account for the demands of supervising entry level staff in their planning, and prioritize cultivating positive supervisor-employee relationships. Renn and Hodges (2007) and Tull (2006) found in their studies that this helps create a positive work environment but also builds more engaged, capable staff and assists with retention of entry-level professionals in their role, and to the field of student affairs and services. One way to do this is through prioritizing individual meetings and performance conversations, which are one of the primary venues where my participants felt they were seen and heard. As highlighted by

participants, gender dynamics can further impact informal check-ins and interpersonal relationships making formalized opportunities all the more important.

As noted in Chapter Four, our services affect our students as well as colleagues, which acknowledges the effect that supervisory practices have on entry-level staff in both the shorter and longer term and therefore on student affairs and services broadly. This positioning also encourages supervisors to understand themselves as role models of good practices for new professionals to emulate and provides a blueprint for young women to follow in the future. This could be with students they oversee and support or their own future employees, resulting in this commitment to high-quality leadership continuing to spread across the institution.

Gratitude and Criticism

An underlying assumption that frames a lot of new professionals' work is the idea they are supposed to be grateful for the opportunity they have been *given,* not critical of the environment within which they work. I observed this attitude in my participants who were careful and sometimes reluctant to express direct criticism even in a private interview setting. Errors, oversights, or poor policies and procedures can become pervasive if no one is comfortable providing suggestions or criticisms, which many of my participants made clear they were not comfortable doing. As participants explained a feeling of discomfort expressing negative view points was often exacerbated by issues of bias and marginalization they faced. By highlighting how issues such as sexism were intersecting with their workplace experiences, they felt they were speaking out of turn. If there is no venue where new professionals feel they can share observations that will not be negatively received or reflect poorly on their commitment, teamwork, or attitude, some necessary workplace changes will not be made, even those that are relatively easy to implement or correct. This can lead to a hesitancy to bring forward concerns or

suggest changes and improvements, even though their lived experiences, positions as new professionals, and identity may make them best placed to observe and provide feedback on their environment and day-to-day norms or practices.

The Complexity of Time Pressures

I have spoken briefly on the issue of time pressures, but I feel it is important to elaborate as it is such an important aspect of working in contemporary universities. In 2009, Strayhorn (2009) argued that it was "important for supervisors to make time for new professionals. No matter how busy they get, supervisors should carve out room on their calendars for new professionals to talk about their experiences on the job, identify challenges they face, and set professional development goals" (p. 160). While this is important advice it is not as easy as it sounds. Everyone is under time pressure, including supervisors, often unexpectedly due to emergent issues, or at peak periods throughout the academic schedule. Building on this, Strayhorn also encourages new professionals to "make time to regularly meet with their supervisor" (p. 160). Like Tull (2006), he argues that a successful supervisory relationship must be a two way street. Despite time pressures, therefore, both new professionals and their supervisors must seek out dedicated time for providing guidance and professional development conversations. This is particularly central in a field like student affairs which prioritizes growth and development in students and staff alike.

While I do not disagree with this, I feel that it is somewhat challenged by today's university context. Like many other topics explored in my research, a lack of time is also a systemic issue in student affairs and it is not one that supervisors can solve on their own. Since Strayhorn (2009) issued that advice almost a decade and a half ago, we find ourselves in the midst of cutbacks across universities in Canada and beyond due to weakening enrollment,

decreased funding, and decision-making grounded in neoliberalism which prioritizes market-driven demands for both students and staff over educational goals (Eaton & Smithers, 2020; Giroux, 2013). Not having sufficient staff to do jobs and ever-increasing stressors on individual positions across universities puts pressure onto supervisors and the remaining staff. Not only are supervisors more called upon and therefore busier, but it takes us back to the problem of individualised neoliberalism, a systemic challenge according to Giroux (2013) and other higher education scholars (Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010a). This manifested with participants feeling like a burden to others, or fearing they will become so should they seek additional support, all the while knowing it is hard for others to make time to help them in the current neoliberal/izing context of higher education.

Despite some noted issues my participants were generally quite complimentary of their supervisors, the level of support and willingness to engage despite time stressors. This shows me that they recognise the systemic challenges to both supervisors and themselves of working at an educational institution and in student affairs and services in a time of cutbacks and the current neoliberal climate. Most were sympathetic to the pressure those in management positions were under and the lack of time they had to devote to new staff. Moreover, participants were often inspired, motivated, and guided by supervisors who had contributed very positively to the participants' experiences and outlooks. With all this in mind I would argue the core of the challenge is not the lack of willingness of individuals to engage but a lack of structure and support with the system allowing supervisors (and new professionals) to do so. I will take this tension up in my recommendations chapter.

Importance of Identity and Relevant Support

As highlighted in my findings, identity was an important touchstone for participants. Given the scope of my research, gender was specifically cited and discussed in detail, along with intersections of race and age. All participants spoke to the impact of gender as a core aspect of their identity, although it was not one that they often found space to discuss or explore in their work in student affairs. My literature review showed the lack of research focusing on gender in student affairs and services professionals and its impact on their experience in the field (e.g., Brown et al., 2020; A. B. Wilson et al., 2020). The participants' desire to bring their identity to their work in a more explicit way was something I observed in my individual interviews but more importantly, there was a strong desire to discuss the interplay of identities, and specifically gender, in their professional lives during the focus group. For my participants the focus group was in fact the first time they were in a space dedicated to discussing identity and gender in their work as new professionals in student affairs and services. Creating this type of sharing space is central to feminist of research and its aims and it was important to me to see that it worked for the participants (Reinharz, 1992). The focus group demonstrated to me that we need to conduct more research on this topic while also providing staff non-formal spaces for these types of conversations to occur. Non-formal spaces of learning and sharing are important, as Reinharz (1992) observes, because "women listening with care and caution enables another woman to develop ideas, construct meaning, and use words that say what she means" (p. 24). I will discuss the importance of positive spaces for sharing and consciousness later in this chapter and will return to this topic again in my final chapter.

Age as a Challenge and Opportunity

As uncovered in my study, while none of the participants felt gender or race was an acceptable reason to be treated poorly or marginalized, it was less clear-cut when it came to age. As the participants were unsure if this differential treatment from colleagues or supervisors was warranted, it meant it had a different impact on them than discrimination based on gender did. While they were able to confidently discount sexism as inappropriate and problematic, the uncertainty about if the ageism they were experiencing meant it caused additional feelings of uncertainty, harmed their sense of belonging, and undermined their position in their team and organization. While they were appreciative that with age comes experience, my participants also demonstrated self-assuredness in their abilities, as well as the abilities of their peers. They understood there were many ways to gain skills, knowledge, and experience that translated to their work in student affairs and services.

As Fricker (2007b) states, there are critical implications to epistemic and testimonial injustices as a "subject's intellectual performance may be inhibited long-term, their confidence undermined, and development thwarted" (p. 58). While my participants were actively engaging in innovation and experimentation, illustrating a level of confidence which was important, epistemic injustice, like other systemic injustices, operate in the background to seep into consciousness. Actions that have potential to cause damage must continue to be identified and challenged to ensure that young women in student affairs are able to build confidence and reach their potential early in their career, thereby ensuring they are able to contribute to their individual roles and the field more broadly. In my experience in student affairs, and in this study, one very common example of this is young women being mistaken for students rather than assumed to be professional staff, as Jamie shared in her interview. Being assumed to be young is not in and of

itself an issue and it is sometimes simply a one-time mix up. But it happens frequently enough, as my study has shown and I have witnessed, that it causes embarrassment, feelings like one does not belong, and a deflated sense of confidence as well as the ongoing frustration of feeling to not be taken seriously. These negative impacts demonstrate the damage these sorts of assumptions can have and therefore the damage of being assumed to be less qualified and competent than colleagues due to new professionals' (real or perceived) age.

A commonality of age-related bias in student affairs and services is that it focuses on deficit, what employees' lack, rather than on opportunity and what unique attributes they can bring to the field and their teams. Finding ways to focus on how new professionals contribute can be helpful in a positive reframing of their unique position as younger members of the team and the crucial nature of their roles in the field and within educational institutions. In a field that requires adapting to emerging student needs, educational trends, and changing expectations of what post-secondary education can offer, an advantage of new professionals is they are "adept in these newer was of operating, [they] are serving an indispensable translation function and need to be legitimized in that role" (Sullivan, 2010, p. 187). The example of serving as a translator or bridge to students is just one example of how new professionals contribute to the field of student affairs and services. As demonstrated throughout the interviews, these young women are also bringing a sense of optimism, excitement, and energy for the field and their roles, as well as a strong desire to create positive change. Their leadership skills are varied and rapidly growing through formal, non-formal, and informal means. A consistent interest in professional development and curiosity about the field and nature of the work are additional attributes to be elevated and encouraged.

The Value of Mentorship

As noted in Chapter Two, mentorship is valuable to student affairs and services staff, and mentors are people new professionals actively seek connections with early in their careers (e.g., Renn & Hodges, 2007; Roberts, 2007). As outlined, new professionals are defined as those in the first five years of their careers and although that is a relatively short window of time it is a period of intense learning, growth and change (Duran & Allen, 2020; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012). Mirroring the literature, my participants indicated many times that mentors were beneficial both as they were learning their roles early on, but also later as they developed as entry-level staff and began to look for next steps in their career progression. This demonstrated the importance of mentors and their role in informal learning throughout these women's time as new professionals.

Mentor-mentee relationships in student affairs and services are valuable early on because they acclimate "new staff to the division, facilitating the continuing conversation that is characteristic of effective organizations or teaching new professionals the written and unwritten codes that often guide professional practice day to day" (Strayhorn, 2009, p. 162). This highlights the informal learning that occurs during the early days of a role or as a new member of a department or institution. Wide networks of support are helpful in the early stages of these young women's careers and mentoring relationships are a component of that network. Participants spoke warmly of mentor relationships that had developed and the value they found in the informal learning opportunities they presented. Women who had acted as mentors to them had left a distinct and positive impact on their memories of their early days in student affairs and services.

As women progress as new professionals and begin to contemplate future moves, education, and positions, mentorship can begin to play a part in career exploration and

professional development. Some participants shared that discussions about future opportunities or further formal education can happen between mentors and mentees in a way that could be perceived as inappropriate or awkward with supervisors or close colleagues. This is particularly true as new professionals start to contemplate their next steps in their career and consider what their next role will be, either in the field or even in a different sector. As highlighted in my findings, the outside perspective that mentors provided was beneficial to new professionals and ensured young women are not overly reliant on one supervisor or one position to meet all their personal and professional development needs. Renn and Hodges (2007) argue that clarifying "*supervisor* does not equal *mentor*" (p. 385, emphasis in original) helps remove pressure from the supervisor relationship and reduce frustration in staff when their supervisors were not fulfilling a mentorship role. This is not to say these personal and professional development conversations can only occur with mentors, as Belch et al. (2009) highlight a focus on "positive career progression" and the understanding most entry-level staff will change roles in two to five years can provide a natural opening to meaningful between staff and supervisors (p.188). Exploration was an important aspect of the participants' experience as new professionals including considering pursuing further education, and better understanding the depth and breadth of the field. Additionally, they relished the opportunity to discuss their learning with a variety of seasoned professionals.

Lastly, participants highlighted mentoring relationships as a way they engaged positively with identity and mitigated impacts of bias in the workplace. By seeking the support of mentors or more senior female colleagues, participants were able to unpack and make sense of different experiences over the course of their socialization to the roles and to the field of student affairs and services. This is supported by the literature, including Mecoli et al. (2019) who argue "both

formal and informal mentorship relationships" (p. 71) can enhance new professionals' development and sense of belonging, however for my participants who the mentor is and how the mentor-mentee pairing understand one another through shared facets of their identity and lived experience is also important to building rapport and trust. When it comes to issues of identity, they shared having a mentor who can reassure and empathize with the impacts of bias or discrimination can provide an important boost to self-awareness and a space for open discussion, reflection, and support.

Creation of Positive Spaces

As outlined in the previous chapter, many participants were actively considering how to create positive, inclusive spaces for their student leaders and for their professional peers in both group meetings as well as individual interactions. This was closely linked to their conceptions of leadership and how to build positive communities. Even in the face of decreasing funding, the challenges of neoliberalism, and increasing demands on staff (or perhaps as an attempted remedy to them) this type of approach is increasingly common and valued in student affairs, as demonstrated by recent literature focusing on similar topics (e.g., Brown et al., 2020; A. B. Wilson et al., 2020). It also aligns with what feminist scholars refer to as a feminist approach to feminist leadership and women-centric spaces (e.g., Ahmed, 2017; Batliwala, 2015; Fricker, 2007a). Throughout the interviews, participants demonstrated insight, care, and empathy for those who are marginalized or were struggling with their self-confidence. They reflected personally on their own actions and attitudes, oftentimes from their informal learning with difficult supervisors and feeling out of place in peer groups, and how they took deliberate steps to act differently. In the focus group I observed all the participants listen attentively, thank others for their contributions, be mindful of how much they were speaking, and be curious about new

ideas. These behaviours actively contributed to an engaging, meaningful, and comfortable environment and was an embodiment of what many spoke about in their descriptions of leadership. Their intentionality in how they showed up to the focus group had more of an impact on the positive environment than my facilitation as the host.

Another motivation to create positive spaces that was discussed by participants was the desire to be corrective in their work. Although it was not identified explicitly as such by the participants, the push to be corrective links closely to a feminist approach (McHugh, 2014). Participants spoke of the negative environments they had experienced or witnessed as women and new professionals, and in response were actively seeking to break the cycle. Although this is praise-worthy and their efforts should be lauded, it is also concerning. Despite a relatively short time in the workplace these women have had enough negative experiences to have developed determination to not become part of the problem or perpetuate inequality. The motivation to do their best to welcome others, create space for diverse voices, and maintain a sense of safety and security is no doubt positive, but the reasons this is manifesting ought to concern all student affairs leaders. The stories shared by the participants clearly demonstrate we are not yet providing a safe, inclusive environment for young women working in the field. This is at odds with what we expect of ourselves as leaders in the field, but also of those working directly with students. How can we expect new professionals to foster inclusive communities if we cannot offer or model them in our workplaces? We must continue to push back against neoliberal ideals and advocate for systemic changes to occur in the educational landscape to improve workplace experiences for new professionals and young women. Inclusivity is a journey not a destination, we will always be striving rather than obtaining but leaders must not expect more of their entry-level staff than they do of themselves or of student affairs leadership.

As I have alluded to already, it was interesting to me how many participants embodied and promoted feminist approaches in their interactions and work but did not make an explicit connection or name it as such. As feminists argue, this is likely due to a lack of vocabulary and limited awareness of feminist theory and approaches, rather than a dismissal or rejection of these principles (Batliwala, 2015). This points me toward the opportunity for further research, which I share in Chapter Six. The focus group was designed as an important feminist space to give the young women working in student affairs a voice as women and to try to raise the consciousness level of the participants (and for me as a researcher) about the collective and systemic nature of the challenges they were facing. Although I had intended it to focus on similarities between their experiences at work and as women in the field of student affairs, I now see it also provided an opportunity for increased understanding of how feminism can be brought into their daily lives. Similarly, the focus group was an active demonstration of the *double dimension* of feminist research, that is to co-create knowledge and produce social change (Brayton et al., n.d.). Through participation in this research my hope is that participants gained additional familiarity with feminist principles and their ubiquity in their lives and work.

Providing space for the voices of young women to contribute both praise and critique has been integral to bringing forward the themes and learnings discussed in this chapter. In my final chapter their words will continue to inform recommendations for women working as new professionals, for supervisors and student affairs leaders, and for the future of the field, as well as opportunities for further research.

Chapter Six: Recommendations and Opportunities for Future Research

This final chapter consists a number of recommendations which I make as in an effort to promote the feminist research principles of *being corrective* and fostering change by making my findings applicable to my participants and accountable to my professional community (Brayton et al., n.d.; Dallimore, 2000b; Hesse-Biber, 2012b). My recommendations provide insights into ways forward for supervisors and leaders, for student affairs and services departments, and for new professionals. I also speak to the further research that I think would be valuable before concluding with some final reflections.

Recommendations for Supervisors and Leaders

As highlighted throughout this thesis the importance of supervisors and departmental leaders to the success, retention, and positive experience of young women working in student affairs and services cannot be overstated (e.g. Belch et al., 2009; Green & Davis, 2021; Tull, 2006). As such I have two key recommendations for those working in supervisory capacities to new professionals. These relate to socialization of new professionals and supporting the growth of professional networks.

Socialization, Orientation, and an Introduction to the Field

The significance of socialization to the field was heavily featured in the literature as was outlined in Chapter Two (e.g., Duran & Allen, 2020; Janosik, 2009; Tull, 2006), and participants extensively discussed their experiences with their introductions to the field via supervisory relationships. Through this introductory process I recommend supervisors place importance on not only core aspects of the role and responsibilities (as is typically already being done), but also begin to build comfort on what participants identified as more challenging topics to address and navigate as new professionals. Firstly, I suggest normalizing support and personal growth as core

components of being a new professional. Building the expectation of support and a mutually beneficial supervisor/supervisee relationship could help build a feeling of comfort and belonging for young women entering the field as well as foster a higher level of confidence to seek out advice and assistance. Making personal and professional growth one of the goals of their roles from the outset, and telling staff to expect it as such, means new professionals understand its importance alongside their other duties, not in competition to them or of secondary importance. This will help create positive environments for formal and non-formal learning as part of the role, not something that should occur after hours or only when time and resources are abundant - a challenge articulated by participants. Changing these attitudes as part of early expectation setting will lead to more positive, open, fruitful working relationships and workplace experiences for both supervisors and young women entering the field.

Secondly, normalizing critique, disagreement, and discussion in student affairs as part of the socialization process could be helpful in addressing systemic issues and creating more positive work environments. Systemic issues are at odds with both these young women's expectations and perceptions of the field of student affairs which may be why they are quick to scrutinize their own behaviour or dismiss incidents as isolated events rather than entrenched norms or patterns. On many teams there is likely a need to normalize that interactions will not always be copasetic and prioritizing the staff experience does not mean de-prioritizing students. Being clear that critique is respected and expected in student affairs to create improvements and positive environments, and that perspectives from new professionals as well as more senior leaders are valued, builds comfort in sharing insights, including of negative experiences that may not normally come to light lest they be labeled as complaints or the individual be seen as ungrateful for their position. Creating structures or modeling ways for these critiques to be

brought forward constructively may be required, however supervisors should be intentional in creating environments in which disagreement and discussion are welcomed from all team members, and this should begin during the onboarding process.

Professional Networks and Mentorship

The importance of mentorship opportunities for young women and the benefit of wide professional support networks must be recognized and actively supported by supervisors working in student affairs and services. Purposely creating opportunities for wider connection to develop outside of immediate work teams helps forge these relationships and provides a link for new professionals to potential mentors and supporters, particularly women or those with whom they closely identify with (Roberts, 2007). Supervisors must understand these connections are important to new professionals and in turn benefit the wider department. Having access to a wider network (outside of the supervisory relationship) that was supportive and that understood individual and shared identities was an important outlet and support structure for participants, and one that should be encouraged in student affairs, particularly for new professionals. As these connections do not always happen organically, intention is required to build relationships and create opportunities for new professionals to find and connect with mentors, regardless of what stage they are at in their early career. This could come in the form of coaching and support for new professionals to build mentoring relationships, access to formal mentorship programs, or structured and intentional introductions facilitated by supervisors and departmental leaders. Supervisors should proactively offer these connections or professional development opportunities to new professionals as part of their wider orientation processes, rather than waiting to be approached or for a request to participate to come from their staff.

Recommendations for Student Affairs and Services Departments

Just as supervisors have power in the lives of new professionals, so too do the departments and institutions in which these staff operate. Departments set the tone, goals, and direction under which student affairs professionals operate, including both supervisors and new professionals. As discussed in previous chapters, individuals operate as part of wider systems, and systemic approaches are needed to influence system wide changes. Although individual efforts are important, they will not be sufficient for deep and meaningful change (Ahmed, 2017; Batliwala, 2015). I discuss here two recommendations at the departmental level including increased supervisor training and support, and access to spaces for learning and sharing.

Supervisor Training and Support

Linked to the recommendations above on supervisor responsibility, consideration must also be made on how as a field we are preparing and supporting supervisors to be effective in their work with staff who are new to student affairs and services. As a field we must prioritize professional development as well as formal and non-formal learning opportunities for student affairs practitioners to develop their supervisory skills. Intentional training and effective supervision can lead to more equitable and socially-just workplaces that create more positive work environments (Brown et al., 2020; Green & Davis, 2021; A. B. Wilson et al., 2020). Unfortunately, supervisory skills are often learned through observation and other informal means as systemically "an innate ability to supervise is one of the biggest myths of supervision" (Brown et al., 2020, p. 5). Training and guidance based on best practices and needs of post-secondary institutions is required to prepare student affairs professionals before they take on supervisory positions, particularly of new, entry-level staff. Without specific professional development and training, supervisors will continue to model behaviours they see as effective, and reject those

they have found to be ineffective, which only serves to perpetuate current practices. Frameworks, professional development, and new research can inform improvements to supervisory practices, however their use and integration into student affairs must be more formalized at departmental and institutional levels. This will improve the experiences of women in the field, as well as those from other marginalized groups. The wide range of experiences that the participants had with good and bad supervisors highlights the lack of consistency that currently exists, sometimes even within the same institution. This uneven approach and unpredictable outcomes harm not only entry-level staff but is also hard on supervisors who have not been adequately equipped or supported in this aspect of their work.

The lack of time that supervisors have to support entry level staff, either real or perceived, is a barrier to positive, productive relationships with new professionals regardless of the supervisor's level of skill or commitment. As outlined in the literature review, the time intensity of supervising new professionals is higher than supervising those with more years of experience, which can add strain on both the new employee and the supervisor (Tull, 2006). This is something I argue departments need to closely consider in their staffing plans. In the face of shrinking budgets, ever increasing demands on time, and limited resources this is no easy feat. We must be alive to the challenges facing educational institutions while finding ways to protect time and space for effective supervisory relationships. Ultimately, more structural support for student affairs staff is required for both supervisors and new professionals. As supervisors, as leaders, we need to make space for the voices of young women despite demands on time and any number of competing priorities, and institutions must support supervisors and staff to do so.

Space to Hear and Be Heard

In my view departments and institutions must provide opportunities for new professionals to connect and discuss issues of identity and their experience in the field. Equally importantly in my mind is that staff, and in this case particularly young women, must take initiative to find the time, courage, and opportunities to do so as well. Participants shared the positive impact of participating in this research, having the opportunity to speak to each other as part of the focus group, and feeling their stories and experiences mattered to someone. Participating in and facilitating these positive environments gives women space to create them for each other and for their students. I understand pushing back on oppression and marginalization within educational institutions and student affairs is easier said than done. Creating intentional space for these conversations is a challenge and will not meet all needs or provide an equally supportive or safe experience for everybody. Drawing on feminist approaches and principles in creating these spaces for consciousness raising, support, and conversation provides a roadmap. As Ahmed (2017) reminds us "a significant step for a feminist movement is to recognize what has not ended" (p. 5), and so we must continue to take steps and learn from these experiences and each other in an effort to understand how to move forward next.

Conducting this research made it clear to me there is a need for leaders to create intentional space for meaningful engagement and to demonstrate genuine interest in these women's insights and ideas to learn from (and apply) their expertise. This could be particularly powerful in a group setting where they can also be seen as valuable contributors by colleagues, students, and other stakeholders. A primary question we must continue to ask is how we can create space for new professionals to explore, discuss, and trouble what they are seeing and experiencing in their work in a comfortable, non-threatening environment. We strive to create

these spaces for students, but we must also do so for staff who are not often in positions of power or at decision-making tables. As the interviews showed, these young women have valuable insight and experience to share if there is a venue for them to do so and if their words are taken seriously. Listening to these women and acting on their insights and recommendations will improve many aspects of our organizations and operations.

Further Research

Through conducting the literature review and my own work on this topic I became even more convinced of the importance of further research explicitly focused on the experience of young women in student affairs, particularly in a Canadian context. The importance of socialization and the impact of supervision on entry-level professionals was clear (e.g. Duran & Allen, 2020; Janosik, 2009; Strayhorn, 2009; Tull et al., 2009), however the lack of critical analysis on the role of age, gender, or other core aspects of identity on these experiences cannot be ignored. The recent literature focusing supervision and diverse identities, and frameworks that emerged (e.g. Brown et al., 2020; A. B. Wilson et al., 2020), makes me think these aspects of identity will continue to be given more attention moving forward, as a profession we seek to build more inclusive post-secondary communities and positive work environments for new professionals. Explicitly exploring the impacts of gender on the experiences of student affairs professionals in a wide variety of contexts could provide rich ground for future research.

Additionally, in my study the participants embodied many feminist approaches and principles but did not often use that language to describe their actions, thoughts, or motivations. A question that remains is how familiar young women, or others, in the field of student affairs are with feminist research and feminist frameworks. If this is indeed an area of limited knowledge for practitioners, we ought to consider and research what positive impacts learning

about feminism might have on student affairs professionals' sense of self and approach to working with students and with colleagues. It is common to utilize student development theory as part of professional development exercises or when implementing new initiatives in student affairs, and expanding the scope to include exploration of feminist theory may have a positive impact as well. Further study on the current use and knowledge, and of future potential for feminist approaches in the field of student affairs and services could be of interest to future researchers.

Final Thoughts

Working on this topic was of great interest to me not only because of my personal experience in the field of student affairs but because of my desire to make the road easier for those young women who will enter the field next. I am so thankful to the participants for sharing their time and stories. These smart, insightful, and caring young women are assets to their teams and institutions, and I hope they have benefited positively from their participation in this project and continue to thrive in the future. They are supporters and leaders to many and I have no doubt their influence will continue regardless of where their professional journeys lead. Like my participants, young women are an asset to the field of student affairs and services and are the foundation of our departments. Issues of gender, age, race, and other aspects of marginalization and oppression continue to challenge the field of student affairs and services and it is up to everybody to create the same positive experience staff that we aim to create for students. I hope others will continue to take up research on issues of gender within the field of student affairs and at post-secondary institutions in Canada.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Introduction and Housekeeping
Kalenne to review housekeeping before beginning:

- By participating in this interview, your free and informed consent is implied and indicates that you understand the conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project. You may withdraw consent at any time.
- The meeting will be recorded for purposes of producing a transcript only.
- Participant will verbally confirm pseudonym to be used in research.
- Researcher will address questions about confidentiality or data storage

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a bit about your role and how you started working in the field of student affairs.
2. How has your gender had an impact on your experience working in student affairs?
3. How have you built or grown your leadership abilities in your early career?
4. What does leadership mean to you? How do you conceptualize leadership in the context of your work?
5. What criteria or traits do you most try to display as a leader? Why?
6. What are the main challenges you have experienced as a woman and new professional working in this field?
7. What support systems and people have been helpful as you started and/or moved along in your career? What support do you wish could be more readily available?
8. What other ideas or thoughts about your professional experience would you like to share that you we have not had a chance to discuss yet?

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

Introduction and Housekeeping
Kalenne to review housekeeping before beginning:

- By participating in this interview, your free and informed consent is implied and indicates that you understand the conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project. You may withdraw consent at any time.
- The meeting will be recorded for purposes of producing a transcript only.
- Please keep the participants and details of the discussion of this focus group confidential to preserve anonymity of participants

Focus Group Questions

1. Review of four main trends from the interviews. Do these trends resonate with you? Is there anything you continued to think about after our initial interview?
2. Have you ever brought up a concern about unfair or problematic treatment at work, either for yourself or on behalf of someone else? How did that go?
3. What is your experience with formal professional development conversations in your work in student affairs? This could be a formal performance meeting or goal setting meeting with your supervisor. What was that like for you as a woman and early career professional?
4. What advice would you give to women who are starting in student affairs and services positions? Is there anything you've learned you'd like to share with others?
5. Are there any additional thoughts or things you'd like to share before we conclude?

Appendix C: Ethics Certificate

University of Victoria

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	**Darlene Clover** (Supervisor)	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER** Expedited review - delegated	**21-0156**
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT	**Kalenne Heikkila** **Master's student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE	25-Oct.-2021
		APPROVED ON	25-Oct.-2021
UVIC DEPARTMENT	**Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies EPLS**	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE	24-Oct.-2022

PROJECT TITLE **A study of new professionals in student affairs. Women's early career experiences of leadership in their own words**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS **None**

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING **None**

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL
tcps2_core_certificate (1).pdf - 22-Aug.-2021
Kalenne Heikkikla Interview and FG.docx - 13-Sep.-2021
Recruitment info KHeikkila v.2.docx - 24-Oct.-2021

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications
To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropiate standards of ethcis as outlines by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.

Rachael Scarth

Dr. Rachael Scarth
Associate VP Research Operations

Certificate Issued On: 25-Oct.-2021

Appendix D: Recruitment Information

Recruitment Email
Dear Student Affairs colleagues,
As part of my Master of Arts program in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria I am seeking participants for a research study on the experience of new professionals working in student affairs. My study is based in a feminist framework and will focus specifically on women in the field and their conceptions of leadership.
I am seeking participants who identify as women who have worked in the field for five years or less and are employed full time at a Canadian institution. Participant are asked to commit approximately two hours of time to an interview and a follow up focus group. The interview will take place either in person at UVic or via zoom (based on participant's preference); the focus group will take place via zoom.

To learn more about the study and to express interest please complete the following form

If you could please share this with your networks, particularly with those who meet the research criteria I would very much appreciate it. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to be in touch with me at kaheikkila@uvic.ca

Recruitment Form
Hosted by University of Victoria's Survey Monkey platform
Introductory Message
Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study, to be used as part of my Master of Arts degree at the University of Victoria. This study is focusing on the experience new female identified professionals working in student affairs and their conceptions of leadership.
Please review the institution and consent information and then complete the contact information component. I will follow up with you to arrange a time to meet either in person or online. Participants will be asked to participate in an interview and online focus group, with the approximate time commitment being two hours total.

Participant Consent Form
Please review this section before providing your contact information

Project Title: A study of new professionals in student affairs. Women's early career experiences of leadership in their own words.

Researcher(s): Kalenne Heikkila, Graduate student. Faculty of Education, University of Victoria. kaheikkila@uvic.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Darlene Clover, Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Victoria. clover@uvic.ca

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:

Through conducting this study, my aim is to learn more about young professional women's work and leadership experiences in student affairs and identify differences and commonalities which may inform future engagement and needs-based support. Another aim of this study, based in the feminist research framework, is to lend legitimacy and weight to these women's experiences and provide insights that may often be discounted due to their age, level of experience, and gender but ultimately could have a positive impact on practices in the field. The primary question that will guide this study is: How do new female student affairs professionals perceive and conceptualize their own leadership development and experiences as leaders?

This Research is Important because:
This study will focus on the experience of young women, allowing them to share their own views in their own words. The insight provided by the study could result in new approaches to recruitment, onboarding, and day-to-day supervision and support of new professionals. Conducting this study with Canadian practitioners will also contribute to the Canadian student affairs landscape.

Participation:

- Participants must be women working full time in student affairs at a Canadian institution who have been in the field for five years or less
- Participation in this project is entirely voluntary.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your position [e.g. employment, class standing] or how you will be treated.

Procedures:

- Participants will express interest via an online form (via surveymonkey). An interview and follow up focus group will be conducted. Times and locations will be chose to suit participants schedules and preferences.
- **Duration:** One hour interview, one hour focus group
- **Location:** The interview will take place either in person or online, depending on health and safety and logistical needs. The focus group will be conducted online (via zoom)

Benefits:
Centering the voices of new professionals and women in student affairs is necessary to provide support and improve work experiences. By exploring participants' perceptions of leadership, learning, and development structures, programs, and support can be improved, which could positively impact both individuals as well as the field of student affairs more broadly. Impact on participants will also be positive and an opportunity for consciousness-raising, that is working together to make sense of experiences as both personal and political. Feminist research aims to be corrective and a further aim of this study is to bring attention to the under-explored perspectives of women in the field and perceptions of their leadership.

Risks:

- There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research
- Participants will be advised if they have or may have come into contact with an individual who as tested positive for COVID-19. Contact information for participant will be stored in a separate file from research data in the even that follow up is needed.

Withdrawal of Participation:

- You may withdraw at any time without explanation or consequence.
- Should you withdraw as participant, you will be asked if your data collected before the withdrawal date, either during the interview or focus group, can be used in the study and subsequently destroyed in line with approved procedures. If you do not consent your data will not be used in the study.

Continued or On-going Consent:

- Verbal consent will be obtained before all subsequent components of the study.
- All participants will be asked if they wish to review their interview transcript.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

- The identities of participants will be known only to the researcher during the interview phase.
- Due to the nature of the focus group data collection process the identities of participants will be known to the researcher and other participants. Identifying information will not be used in the findings and participants may choose how much detail you share in the group setting.
- Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. Identifying information about their workplace will not be used, for example the name of the institution or the department. Instead broad descriptors of workplaces will be used when needed to provide context.

Research Results may be Used/Disseminated in the Following Ways:

- Results will be shared directly to participants; used in the researcher's thesis, and subsequent presentations at scholarly meetings or conferences.

Disposal of Data

- Data will be disposed of four years after the study concludes. Physical records will be shredded, and electronic data will be erased following approved procedures.

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1;
- Contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria, (250) 472-4545 ethics@uvic.ca

Consent:

By completing and submitting the questionnaire, **YOUR FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT IS IMPLIED** and indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Yes/No I have read and understood the Participant Consent Information

Contact Information

Please complete the following information to express interest in participating in this study

1. First Name
2. Last Name
3. Email
4. Current Job Title
5. Current Institution
6. Confirm the Following Criteria via Yes or No responses
    a. I identify as a woman working in the field of student affairs
    b. I am working in a full time role at a Canadian institution
    c. I have worked in the field for five years or less