SUPERVISORY LEARNING JOURNEYS FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored how supervisors in student affairs describe their supervisory learning journey. Supervision is an important facet of the student affairs profession, yet there is an apparent lack of intentional supervisory training and development for these professionals. This study endeavored to understand how supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise and how their own supervisors influenced their learning journey. Generic qualitative methods guided by a conceptual framework informed by reflective and emotional aspects of experiential theories of adult learning were employed to answer two research questions. The sample featured 11 supervisors in student affairs from a myriad of institutions across the United States representing a few different functional areas of student affairs. Multiple interviews and reflective writing activities were conducted with participants during the summer of 2023. Analysis of the data indicated that participants' learning of supervision was highly influenced by their previous supervisors, and that, overall, supervisory learning was a subjective, irregular, and informal process. Moreover, participants revealed that supervisory learning was a lifelong endeavor involving emotional and reflective responses to experiences. This dissertation concluded with implications for research and practice as well as recommendations for future research.

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Kyle Currie.
Thank you for your love, empathy, and unwavering support. I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Before beginning my Ph.D. in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE), I worked for five years as an academic advisor for a large urban research institution in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The advising office I worked in was large in comparison to the other advising offices on campus, employing approximately 50 academic advisors tasked with addressing the various needs of almost 10,000 undergraduate liberal arts and science students. In my five years there, the office had to replace at least 40 of those advisors due to attrition.[1] Of further note, new advisors in my former office were required to go through a highly organized year of formal training for their role; however, those advisors who were promoted to supervisor did not receive any formal training or professional development specific to *learning* supervision. My observations and conversations with departing colleagues led me to understand that, for many student affairs professionals, supervision plays a pivotal role in job satisfaction. Indeed, scholars have found that supervision is linked to job satisfaction and employee retention (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006), which in turn can affect the achievement of organizational goals (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Yet, there is little intentionality applied to the learning and development of supervision in the field of student affairs (Holmes, 2014; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). So how do supervisors learn to supervise?

This chapter introduces my study on the supervisory learning journeys of student affairs supervisors in higher education. Here, I outline the research problem and the purpose of this study, including my research questions. I continue with the significance of the study. From there I provide an overview of the research design and the conceptual framework guiding the design. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the delimitations that bound my study.

[1] Attrition, related to employee job satisfaction and ultimately turnover, "is defined as the cognitive shift a person makes when they are starting to detach from a place of employment" (Mullen, et. al., 2018, p. 96).

Problem Statement

Supervision is considered a major contributor to the job satisfaction[2] and retention of student affairs professionals (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006, 2009, 2014; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998). There is an assumption in student affairs that new supervisors enter their roles with the necessary skills to lead and manage effectively (Wilson, et al., 2020; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998). Those who supervise, however, often lack intentional supervisory training and development (Holmes, 2014; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Moreover, little is known about *how* supervisors in student affairs learn supervision. Some literature notes that the onus to learn supervision is on higher education and student affairs (HESA) graduate preparation programs (Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Shupp & Arminio, 2012), yet there are many professionals in the field who do not have HESA graduate degrees, and evidence of continued, intentional education on supervision for student affairs professionals beyond the classroom is scarce.

Nichols and Baumgartner (2016) looked to fill this gap with their qualitative study on the supervisory learning journeys of midlevel managers in student affairs. They found that supervisors identified three components important to their learning journey: (1) realization of becoming a supervisor; (2) implementation of learning strategies; and (3) recognition of barriers and support to their learning (p. 66). In the implementation of learning strategies, participants indicated that observation of and reflection on other supervisors' practices was influential over the development of their own supervisory practices. These participants chose to emulate the supervisory practices they liked and avoided practices they did not like. This suggests that supervisors often rely on subjective observation to inform their practice. Other researchers

[2] Tull (2014) describes job satisfaction "as resulting from a person's perception of fulfillment achieved through their values and the importance they have assigned to those values" (p. 55).

confirm that learning supervision through informal observation of other supervisors is pervasive in student affairs (Holmes, 2014; McGraw, 2011). Learning from subjective observation is exacerbated by the lack of formalized supervisory learning opportunities (Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003).

Research indicates that supervisors in student affairs feel inadequately prepared for their supervisory role, and that they received little to no education in supervision in graduate preparation programs (Holmes, 2014; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Wilson et al., 2020). There is a disparity between HESA graduate preparation programs and the field of student affairs regarding where professionals are supposed to learn supervision (Holmes, 2014; Wilson et al., 2020). The result is a learning gap for supervising professionals. Once they enter their supervisory role, these professionals are often expected to self-direct their own learning journey without formal guidance (Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Wilson et al., 2020). The lack of formalized supervisory learning opportunities leaves professionals with little choice but to subjectively imitate models of supervision they observe and experience, regardless of the quality of those supervisory experiences. Wilson et al. (2020) argue that this can perpetuate a cycle of poor supervisory practices, and can thus impact job satisfaction, employee attrition, and student success.

The trickle-down effect that poor supervision may have on student success is concerning. Kuh (2009) explored the copious research concerned with the positive impact student engagement has on student success (retention and completion of a college degree), noting that the institution plays a significant role in helping students engage and student affairs professionals are essential to achieving that organizational objective. Building strong relationships with student affairs professionals helps students engage in their institution, increasing loyalty to the

institution, and affecting student success measures (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). The high turnover of student affairs professionals disrupts the relationship building between professionals and students, potentially impacting student engagement and thus student success. As supervision is tied to job satisfaction and attrition for student affairs professionals, it could also affect student success.

Supervisors are in a prime position to shape the future of the student affairs profession. They influence the development of future leaders in student affairs (Gordon, 2021) and possibly factor into the loss of talent and experience when professionals decide to leave the field (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2014). Examining the influence that previous supervision has on supervisory professional development can produce knowledge that contributes to the future of continued professional education and development practices in student affairs. The purpose of my study is described in the following section.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of my study is to understand how supervisors in student affairs describe their supervisory learning journey. The *professional learning journey* is a metaphor used in the field of teacher education to describe the professional experiences that influence learning and development for teachers from their beginning as student-teachers to becoming new professionals and through their professional lifespan (Jasman, 2010). Similarly, I am interested in the professional experiences that influence the learning and development of supervisors across their career in student affairs, from first-time supervisory roles through more senior positions.

Conceptual Framework Rationale

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that is informed by reflective and emotional *aspects* of experiential and transformative theories of adult learning. It is important to

note that I am extracting *reflective* and *emotional* facets of adult learning theories to build a conceptual framework, and that I am not subscribing to a specific theory of adult learning to guide this study. In this subsection I offer a brief rationale for using reflective and emotional learning concepts for this study. I then expand on the explanation of my framework and its foundations in experiential and transformative learning theories in the second chapter of this proposal.

Nichols and Baumgartner (2016) found in their study of midlevel managers in student affairs that, through the implementation of learning strategies, participants reflected on observations of previous supervision to influence the development of their supervisory practices. The authors noted the interesting role that emotion played in participants' reflections:

> Implicit in these findings is the role of emotion. Participants reported liking or disliking particular methods used by previous supervisors. Respondents implemented supervisory techniques they appreciated and avoided those they did not like from their bosses. (p. 70).

Nichols and Baumgartner (2016) observed that this finding confirmed anecdotal evidence presented in the self-narrative reflections on supervision described by McGraw (2011). McGraw depicted her observations of the characteristics and practices of previous supervisors and reflected on how those observations influenced her supervisory development and learning. McGraw included anecdotes that described emotional reactions to previous supervision that fed into her reflections. Together, the Nichols and Baumgartner (2016) study and McGraw's (2011) self-narrative suggest that examining supervisory learning journeys through *reflective* and *emotional* learning lenses can provide a deeper understanding of how supervisors make sense of their experiences with previous supervisors and how that relates to their professional learning

and development. Therefore, I use this framework to guide my qualitative study which endeavors to answer the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. How do supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise?
2. How do supervisors in student affairs describe the influence of previous supervision on the development of their supervisory practice?

Research Design Overview

Given these research questions, a generic qualitative approach was appropriate for this study. Generic qualitative research approaches "seek to understand how people interpret, construct, or make meaning from their world and their experiences" (Kahlke, 2014, p. 39). A strength of this approach is the opportunity to borrow appropriate qualitative methods from more rigid methodologies (e.g., phenomenology) and maintain the flexibility that enables me to design a study that will best answer my research questions (Kahlke, 2014). This aligns with my positionality as a pragmatic researcher (Coe et al., 2017), as I see that truth and knowledge can be found through multiple methods of inquiry, and that the question being asked influences how we should approach finding truth and knowledge. That said, generic qualitative studies are paradigmatically social constructivist and interpretivist (Merriam, 2009), meaning that there are multiple realities constructed individually and socially, and therefore direct knowledge of the world is not possible (Coe et al., 2017, p. 16). Instead, these individually/socially constructed realities develop knowledge "through a process of interpretation" (Coe et al., 2017, p. 16) done by both the participant and the researcher. This study, then, is designed with a constructivist-interpretivist lens, and as such I acknowledge the ontological and epistemological assumptions framing this study.

Qualitative methods were employed for data collection, including multiple in-depth interviews and a reflective writing exercise. In Chapter Three of this study, I provide a more detailed account of my methodological approaches and research design. In the next section of this chapter, I describe the significance of focusing on how supervisors learn and how they describe the influence of previous supervision on their learning.

Significance

Examining how supervision is learned and the influence previous supervision has on learning can contribute to professional education and development practices for student affairs professionals. Continued learning and professional development post graduate school is important to job satisfaction and career growth (Bender, 1980/2009; Rosser & Javinar, 2003, 2009; Tull, 2009; Winston & Creamer, 1998), yet intentional opportunities for continued learning dwindle after the first 1–2 years of an individual's career (Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). As Nichols and Baumgartner (2016) and McGraw (2011) suggest, supervisors often employ subjective methods of observation and reflection to guide their practice in lieu of more intentional approaches to learning supervision, and that subjectivity is often tied to an emotional response to said experience. It is less clear, however, how reflection and emotion influence learning, and if supervisors are critical when reflecting. *Critical reflection*, as described by Mezirow (1991), engages learners in a process that confronts and re-examines pre-existing knowledge which may challenge, confirm, change, reinforce, negate, or otherwise develop knowledge used to solve a problem or confront a future experience. An implication of not engaging in critical reflection could be that supervisors unknowingly perpetuate poor supervisory practices either by emulating the poor practices of supervisors they have observed or by sheer ignorance of the skills and practices needed to be effective supervisors. Exploring how

supervisors describe their use of reflection to make sense of emotion-laden experiences with previous supervision may highlight issues or gaps in how student affairs currently approaches supervisory learning and development.

For this study I focus on how individuals learn supervision and how supervisors make meaning from the influence of previous supervisors on their learning journey. While the purpose of this study is not directly focused on the *effectiveness* of learned supervisory practices, the results of this study could have implications for understanding how effective supervision is learned. Effective supervision is important to the future of the student affairs profession because it has the potential to impact the job satisfaction and retention of student affairs professionals. Examining how supervisors describe their learning journeys and experiences with previous supervision may inform improved and intentional approaches to supervisory learning. This, in turn, may lead to more effective supervision practices.

Supervision is considered one of the significant factors contributing to job satisfaction (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006; Wilson et al., 2020; Winston & Creamer, 1997) and researchers commonly use job satisfaction to predict and understand attrition for student affairs professionals (Bender, 1980/2009; Marshall et al., 2016; Mullen, et. al., 2018; Rosser & Javinar 2003, 2009; Tull, 2006, 2014). Low job satisfaction and high attrition rates in student affairs are generally considered a problem (Marshall et al., 2016; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Sallee, 2021). Though a moderate rate of attrition is to be expected in any profession, student affairs is estimated to lose 60% of professionals to attrition within 10 years or fewer of beginning their career (Marshall et al., 2016). Recently, Macmillan Learning released an announcement regarding preliminary results from a study on student affairs employee experiences by Skyfactor and the Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA) (Bluestone, 2022). The study

results indicate that 37% of student affairs professionals were job searching with 19% looking to leave the field altogether (Bluestone, 2022). This loss of talent, institutional knowledge, and valuable years of experience has significant implications for the future of the student affairs profession. Attrition has also increased for those in management and supervision roles. Nationally, those who are in management positions "report more stress and burnout and worse physical wellbeing and work-life balance than the people they manage" (Harter, 2021, para. 1). This problem has been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic with employee engagement for those in management positions significantly declining between 2020 and 2021 (Harter, 2022). Exploring supervisory learning journeys could reveal reasons for developing more purposeful approaches to supervisory learning and development that may result in a positive impact on job satisfaction for all student affairs professionals.

Focusing on how supervisors learn and develop is important to revealing where the potential deficiencies or gaps in supervisory professional learning and development exist and to further understand the lifelong education associated with career development in student affairs. This can inform student affairs departments, institutions of higher education, and HESA graduate preparation programs of professional development gaps within the lifetime of a career in student affairs. If these gaps are addressed, this may lead to an overall increase in job satisfaction for student affairs professionals which has implications for the sustainability of a career in student affairs and could further influence the future of the profession. Next, I present the delimitations bounding my study.

Delimitations

Delimitations indicate what a study is *not* (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 119) and therefore provides boundaries for what is and is not to be included in the study. As discussed previously,

this study is not concerned with the phenomenological focus of *lived experiences* of supervisors in student affairs. Although qualitative research is described as a means for understanding lived experiences (Coe et al., 2017; Rossman & Rallis, 2017), Percy et al. (2015) contend that lived experience is a concern of phenomenological methodology that is focused on the pre-reflective conscious experiences of participants and "the inner essence of cognitive processing" (p.77). The authors contrast *experiencing* (the focus of phenomenological research) with *experiences*, stating that,

> *Experiencing* addresses the inward and ongoing act of taking in and making sense of a phenomenon – how does one do this? What is the structure of one's cognitive process? *Experiences*, on the other hand, focus our attention outwardly – what was experienced? What happened? To what does the belief point to in the outer world? (p. 77).

This study focuses on how participants describe their outward experiences of learning supervision to understand the journey towards learning supervision and what that may imply about how the student affairs profession approaches supervisory learning. It is not, however, focused on the specific cognitive processes involved in how supervisors experience their learning journey. It is important to note this delimitation because, while methods associated with phenomenological methodology are included in my research design (e.g., in-depth interviews, purposive sampling), a strict phenomenological approach is not truly appropriate to answer my research questions.

Another important delimitation is that this is not a study focused on the effectiveness of supervisors in student affairs. I am interested in *how* supervision is learned and how supervisors describe their experiences of being supervised in their learning journeys. I am not concerned with *what* is learned or with which traits or characteristics are considered valuable in effective

supervisors. As such, I do not spend time focusing specifically on the acquisition of skills and competencies denoted as essential to effective supervision. To be clear, I do refer to seminal pieces of literature related to skills, competencies, and models of supervision in the literature review, but it is important to explain that these elements of supervision are not the focus of this study. Instead, I focus on the journey of learning as described by individual student affairs supervisors to better understand and highlight the gaps that exist in the field's approach to continued professional education.

Chapter Summary

The field of student affairs is concerned with the learning, development, and success of college students, yet it has presumably ignored the need for a focus on the learning, development, and success of its supervisors—a vital population of student affairs professionals. My qualitative dissertation study on how supervisors in student affairs learn supervision, and how previous supervision influences the development of their supervisory practice has the potential to illuminate issues with the way supervision is currently being learned. Moreover, investigating supervisory learning through a conceptual framework that includes reflective and emotional aspects of adult learning can lead to a better understanding of how supervisors make sense of their professional learning. As such, this study has the potential to lead to important implications for how the field can improve its approach to professional development and continued education for its professionals.

In the next chapter, I review literature related to the field of student affairs, its professionals, its supervisors, and what is currently known about how supervision is learned. The literature review endeavors to highlight current tensions in the field of student affairs and issues with continued learning in the profession. I also develop important definitions relevant to this

study, such as supervision and student affairs professionals. The literature review concludes with the development of my conceptual framework, including definitions of reflective and emotional aspects of adult learning theories.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise? (2) How do supervisors in student affairs describe the influence of previous supervision on the development of their supervisory practice? To answer these questions, it is important to develop an understanding of the student affairs profession and the professionals within it, as well as theories on how professionals learn. In this chapter, I present a review of the relevant literature that informs this study. I begin with a brief background of student affairs as a field and profession. I include a discussion of tensions in the profession, brief descriptions of common values, competencies, and standards of the profession, and an explanation of functional areas identified in student affairs. Student affairs professionals are then described. This provides a foundation to introduce a review of supervision and supervisors in student affairs with a discussion of what is currently known about their supervisory learning journeys. I conclude this chapter with an explanation of the development of my conceptual framework based on the reflective and emotional aspects of adult learning theories.

Student Affairs: Professionals and the Profession

Student affairs has existed for a relatively short time in the history of higher education. The concept of student affairs emerged after the United States Civil War from the popularization of deans of women and deans of men, "the direct antecedents to the modern student affairs administrator" (Hevel, 2016, p. 847). The shift to coeducation prompted colleges and universities to decide additional oversight was needed, especially over the female students, thus deans of women and deans of men became responsible for the social, moral, and physical welfare of college students (Dungy & Gordon, 2011; Hevel, 2016; Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). These early

administrators provided a foundation for the professionalization[3] of student affairs in the 20th century.

The student personnel movement of 1937 (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012) established many of the administrative functions of colleges and universities that are still recognizable today, including divisions of enrollment management, student needs assessment, and career development (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017). These divisions increased with the rapid growth of college enrollments following World War II (Sandeen, 2011). The student personnel movement in tandem with the influx of students pursuing higher education created a need for more personnel to help students navigate their institutions. It also developed avenues for the creation of supervision and management, not just over college students but over professional administrative staff.

Today, student affairs professionals are integral to the support and development of students in higher education and to the achievement of institutional goals. They are responsible for many facets of a student's college experience outside of the classroom, including student housing, student conduct, financial aid, and academic advising (Mullen, et al., 2018; Rosser & Javinar, 2009; Sandeen, 2011). The roles and professional titles associated with student affairs can include positions such as hall director, academic advisor, admissions counselor, financial aid advisor, college recruiter, orientation coordinator, student events director, etc. There is no standard for how these roles and offices are defined (Tull, 2014). As such, clear definitions of student affairs as a profession and of its professionals are evasive. Winston et al. (2001) contributed the most straightforward definition of student affairs I found:

[3] Professionalization is a process through which a "profession seeks to regulate its area of expertise and authority and create conditions that must be met before entry into the profession is permitted" (Lee & Helm, 2013, p. 293).

> [T]he purpose of student affairs administration is to educate, and the criterion for determining success is reflected in how well students utilize the learning opportunities (both formal and informal) available to them within the institution. All other roles are viewed as supporting the fundamental mission of furthering students' academic, social, and personal development. (p. x)

Scholars in student affairs describe several tensions that complicate the professionalization of student affairs and highlight the challenges with defining student affairs professionals (McGill et al., 2021; Sandeen, 2011; Torres et al., 2019). Sandeen (2011) suggested that student affairs is still an emerging profession as it continues to debate what it is and should be. Sandeen argued that this is both a challenge and a strength, as the field remains open to change and diverse opinions. Similarly, Torres and colleagues (2019) characterized student affairs as a low-consensus field defined by its acceptance of multiple perspectives. While the openness of the field may be considered one of its strengths, several tensions associated with this openness contribute to the difficulty in developing specific definitions. In this section, I first discuss some relevant challenges of the profession, and then provide a working definition of student affairs professionals based on the literature.

Tensions

McGill et al. (2021) identified five tensions "that illustrate efforts to professionalize student affairs and barriers to achieve professional status" (p. 125): (1) lack of specialized knowledge; (2) lack of unified purpose and focus; (3) divided professional community; (4) diversity of student affairs credentialing; and (5) lack of autonomy for student affairs practitioners at the individual and organizational levels. In this section, I focus on the third and fourth of these tensions, *divided professional community* and *diversity of student affairs*

credentialing. These two tensions particularly contribute to the difficulty of defining professionals in student affairs, especially related to individuals developing a professional identity. Pittman and Foubert (2016) explained,

> A professional identity consists of the relatively stable and ingrained self-concept of beliefs, values, attributes, and experiences through which people define themselves in a professional role. Professional identity forms through experiences and meaningful feedback that allows people to develop insight about their core preferences and values. (p. 12)

Development of a professional identity is important to job satisfaction, career commitment, and professional effectiveness (Pittman & Foubert, 2016). The divisions in the professional community and the diversity of student affairs credentialing present challenges for establishing a professional identity, and thus for developing a core definition for the profession and for professionals.

Regarding the first of these two tensions, *divisions in the professional community*, scholars of student affairs and higher education continue to raise concerns about the fractal nature of the profession (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; McGill et al., 2021; Sandeen, 2011). The student personnel movement in the early 20th century provided a foundation and rationale for dividing the functions of student-facing work into individual units. It allowed "a large university [to] operate like a smaller one in its individualized treatment of students" (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017, p. 26). Over time, these divisions created specializations in student affairs that established their own professional organizations (McGill et al., 2021). These divisions continue to expand as higher education evolves and college enrollments increase. Dalton and Crosby (2011) noted, "student affairs is in a constant process of shifting and evolving, and these persistent changes

make it difficult to clearly define and promote a core of essential work roles that are shared by all practitioners" (p. 2).

Student affairs professionals often align their professional identity more closely with their specialization than they do with the broader field (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; McGill et al., 2021). While the creation of these divisions enabled student affairs professionals to provide a more personal experience for individual students, the fractioning of the field created inconsistencies in professional development practices, making it difficult to establish a set of agreed upon principles that define both the profession and its professionals (McGill et al., 2021; Sandeen, 2011; Torres et al., 2019). Sandeen (2011) argued that "there are now so many functions subsumed under the area of student affairs that it is difficult to see how a single educational philosophy or theoretical foundation can fit all areas" (p. 3). The divided nature of the community means determining a common way to describe and define student affairs professionals is tricky and idealistic. This is exacerbated by the fact that those who enter the student affairs profession do not necessarily have educational foundations or direct experience in the field.

The second tension in defining professionals is the *diversity of student affairs credentialing* (McGill et al., 2021). Student affairs professionals "come from a variety of academic backgrounds and no specific degree is generally required to do student affairs work" (McGill et al., 2021, p. 128). There is continued debate about the value and necessity of completing a higher education and student affairs (HESA) graduate preparation program to be a student affairs professional (McGill et al., 2021; Reason & Broido, 2016; Sandeen, 2011; Torres et al., 2019). Though a graduate degree is often listed as a requirement for jobs in student affairs, job postings are sometimes vague or overly generous about *which* graduate degree satisfies the

requirement (McGill et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2019). HESA programs are assumed to be the primary space where future professionals formally learn about student development theory, values and standards that influence the field, as well as theories of leadership, organizations, and governance (Calhoun et al., 2020; Davenport, 2016; Torres et al., 2019). Pittman and Foubert (2016) explained that student affairs professionals with HESA graduate degrees often have a better understanding of the profession and its various roles and "tend to have a stronger sense of professional identity than those who enter via less typical paths" (p. 16). Yet, even the most senior professional roles often do not require graduate education in HESA (Carpenter, 2001; McGill et al., 2021). "Indeed, there is no consensus as to what constitutes entry-level profession preparation…For now, only professional conscience, institutional precedent, and the job market appear to dictate preparation standards" (Carpenter, 2001, p. 216). The varied backgrounds of student affairs professionals, then, adds to the difficulty of aligning professionals to a core philosophy and with the creation of a professional definition. It also contributes to inconsistencies in professional development approaches. That said, scholars noted that there are several broad characteristics that can guide our understanding of the enduring mission of the profession and its professionals (Reason & Broido, 2016; Sandeen, 2011). In the following subsections I describe student affairs work through an exploration of some of the overarching values, functional areas, and standards of the profession.

Common Values and Principles of Student Affairs Work

Student affairs work encompasses a variety of roles and responsibilities integral to supporting college students and upholding institutional missions (Dalton & Crosby, 2011). It is further diversified by institutional type, institutional goals, the needs of the student populations institutions serve, as well as the individuals who make up the profession (Dalton & Crosby,

2011; Sandeen, 2011). Though Blimling (2001) and Sandeen (2011) suggested the divided nature of student affairs makes developing a cohesive purpose or philosophy that fits all areas of the profession nearly impossible, others agree that there are several common values and principles that guide student affairs professionals (Dalton & Crosby, 2011; Reason & Broido, 2016; Sandeen, 2011).

Winston et al. (2001) and Reason and Broido (2016) each came up with a list of five characteristics, standards, and principles essential to student affairs professionals and their work. The two lists are comparatively similar, both focusing on advocacy for students, dedication to the education of college students, engaging in theory-based practice, and upholding ethical and socially responsible principles. Winston et al. (2001) also included professional involvement as one of their five essential characteristics of a student affairs professional. Dalton and Crosby (2011) similarly stated that "concern for the whole student, support for the academic mission of the institutions, justice, equality, and a concern for community" (p. 6) are values central to student affairs professionals and their work. Sandeen (2011) remarked that professionals also share a passion for the work they do and a commitment to holistic care for students and their learning. It is clear, then, that student affairs professionals are generally responsible for upholding several common values regardless of where they work in the organization. Next, I provide a brief overview of functional areas.

Functional Areas of Student Affairs

The categorical nature of the field means that student affairs professionals often work in a variety of specialized roles on campus, commonly referred to as functional areas. The Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) (Wells & Henry-Darwish, 2019) defines a functional area as "a distinct grouping of activities, programs, and services within

higher education that can be differentiated from other groups (e.g., departments) by its focus, mission, purpose, policies, practices budget, body of literature, and professional interests and backgrounds of its practitioners" (p. 11). CAS identified forty-six functional areas of student affairs and higher education. Similarly, through an annual survey of vice presidents for student affairs, NASPA identified thirty-nine functional areas of student affairs. Generally, the functional areas of student affairs include any aspect of the educational environment a student may interact with outside of the classroom (e.g., admissions and orientation, financial aid, affinity spaces, student conduct, student activities, housing and dining services).

Employees in these functional areas are commonly categorized into three professional levels: entry, mid, and senior. Entry-level employees tend to have the most student-facing roles (Burkard et al., 2005; Winston et al., 2001), while mid-level professionals are usually those who oversee entry-level employees and take on more administrative functions (Márquez & Hernández, 2020; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Winston et al., 2001), and senior level professionals often hold titles such as vice president of student affairs and are responsible for developing the long-range plans of the division and meeting the expectations of the president or chancellor of the university (Bass, 2005; Tull & Freeman, 2008; Winston et al., 2001). Titles of roles at all levels are non-standard across the field (Bass, 2005; Tull & Freeman, 2008), and institutional type determines how many functional areas are present on a campus, how they are divided, the responsibilities included in those units, and to where those units report (King, 2011; Sandeen, 2011).

Not all functional areas are organizationally located under the student affairs umbrella. While functional areas such as student conduct, new student orientation, and campus activities most commonly report to offices of student affairs (Wilson, 2016), some student-facing roles

may report to academic affairs. For example, according to a survey on reporting lines conducted in 2011, only 21% of academic advising units reported directly to divisions of student affairs (King, 2011). NASPA identified academic advising as one of the thirty-nine functional areas of student affairs, though NASPA reports that only 38% of academic advising units in the United States report to student affairs (Functional Area Profiles, 2008–2022). Yet, arguably, academic advising is one of the few student-facing roles on college campuses where students can consistently meet one-on-one with professionals to get holistic support from the institution (Wells & Henry-Darwish, 2019, p. 32). Thus, student affairs work can take place throughout the institution regardless of whether the functional area reports to student affairs or academic affairs (Reason & Broido, 2016). While there are many distinctive aspects of the student affairs profession, standards and competencies have been developed to help guide the field's professional practice. These standards are discussed next.

Standards and Competencies of Student Affairs Work

The roles, titles, and organization of student affairs work are not universal, and they are subject to the wants and needs of the institution (Sandeen, 2011). That said, standards for practice do exist. As mentioned, CAS developed standards for forty-six functional areas of student affairs and higher education. The CAS standards, as they are better known, were created for "developing and promulgating standards of professional practice to guide higher education practitioners and their institutions, especially in regard to work with college students" (Wells & Henry-Darwish, 2019, p. 2). Student affairs professionals may learn about CAS standards in HESA graduate preparation programs (Calhoun et al., 2020). As of 2019, forty higher education professional organizations are members of the Council for Advancement in Higher Education, including both ACPA and NASPA. In 2009, ACPA and NASPA joined together to develop their

own set of student affairs professional competency areas, which were most recently updated in 2015 (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). The ten competency areas presented by ACPA and NASPA "lay out essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of all student affairs educators, regardless of functional areas or specialization within the field" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 7). While both CAS standards and the ACPA and NASPA competencies are considered influential in expectations of student affairs professionals, scholars note that they are really recommendations, and not always adopted fully by the entire field (Calhoun et al., 2020; McGill et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2019). This is another tension that makes defining the profession and its professionals harder. Next, I review literature related to student affairs professionals.

Student Affairs Professionals

A broad definition of student affairs professionals can be extrapolated from the previous subsections. In sum, student affairs professionals are those who: (a) have developed/are developing a professional identity in student affairs; (b) exhibit the essential principles, values, and characteristics of the profession; (c) work in a functional area of student affairs; and (d) fulfill the expected standards and competencies of the field. Further, Winston et al. (2001) assert that student affairs professionals are those who act as educators, leaders, and managers in their individual roles, and that they are integral to helping achieve the goals of the institution and its students. This broad definition serves as a foundation for understanding who supervisors are as professionals in student affairs. That said, it is important to note that there is a significant gap in understanding this population related to their career choice and preparation. I briefly discussed that not all student affairs professionals, including supervisors and even senior student affairs officers (SSAOs), have educational or experiential foundations in student affairs (Carpenter, 2001). There is an incomplete understanding of how one chooses to pursue their career in student

affairs, which is important as there is an assumption in the field that supervision is learned in higher education and student affairs (HESA) graduate preparation programs (Holmes, 2014; Lamb et al. 2018 Calhoun et al., 2020; Davenport, 2016; Torres et al., 2019). Yet, if some do not have foundations in HESA graduate education, then where, how, and from whom do they learn supervision? Understanding the career and educational journeys of student affairs professionals could help answer these questions.

There are several studies related to the career path of senior student affairs officers (SSAO) (e.g., Biddix et al., 2012; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Tull, 2014) and many others focused on HESA graduate preparation programs (e.g., Cooper et al., 2016; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). However, there is virtually no published research detailing the educational backgrounds and career pathways of general student affairs professionals. While it has been documented that the undergraduate experience in student affairs influenced many to pursue a career in the field (Hirschy et al., 2015; Oxendine et al., 2018), not all professionals have HESA graduate degrees (McGill et al., 2021). For instance, in Oxendine et al.'s (2018) study of career pathways taken by Native American student affairs professionals, only 18 of the 52 respondents had HESA graduate degrees. Few studies include this information, however. Muller et al. (2018) noted that 78.3% of participants in their study of factors influencing professional competency attainment in student affairs held master's/doctoral degrees but did not specify if those were HESA or non-HESA graduate degrees. Pittman and Foubert (2016) purposefully omitted the data of those respondents who did not have HESA graduate degrees or were not currently enrolled in a HESA program from their study of predictors of student affairs professionals' identity development. In the recent national NASPA survey of student affairs professionals (NASPA, 2022) participants were not asked *specifically* about their educational background. Participants

were asked generally about their career path and could select generic answers such as “worked in higher education institutions within student affairs for entire career” or “moved in and out of higher education,” but participants were not asked to share their level of degree attainment nor if they had HESA or non-HESA graduate degrees (NASPA, 2022, p. 38). Participants could indicate if they were currently in a master’s or doctoral program of study, but not whether it was a HESA or non-HESA program (p. 37). As such, a current understanding of student affairs professionals’ graduate education preparation for careers in student affairs career is incomplete.

The knowledge gap related to student affairs professionals’ career choice and preparedness presents an opportunity for future study. Moreover, this is particularly important to understanding the learning journeys of student affairs supervisors as Holmes (2014) notes that these supervisors are untrained in supervision yet are also regarded as the foremost teacher of supervision to other student affairs professionals. I discuss this further in the following section, where I explore the literature related to supervision and supervisors in student affairs as well as what is currently known about how supervisors learn.

Supervision in Student Affairs

Supervision is a critical function of the organizational effectiveness of student affairs units in higher education as it is considered influential to the professional development and job satisfaction of supervisees, and thus to achieving the mission of the unit and institution (Marshall, et. al., 2016; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006, 2009, 2014; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998). Several definitions of supervision in student affairs exist (Keehner, 2007; Schuh & Carlisle, 1991; Wilson et al., 2020; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998). For this study, I define supervision as a hierarchical, yet complementary relationship where one person has several responsibilities related to the

leadership, management, professional development, and support of one or more other persons for the achievement of organizational and individual needs and goals.

Supervisors in student affairs have many responsibilities focused on accomplishing the goals of the institution and developing professionals as individuals and teams to accomplish those goals (Tull, 2009; Winston et al., 2001). Supervisors keep staff accountable by means of feedback and performance evaluations (Brown et al., 2020; Tull, 2009; Wilson et al., 2020). Brown et al. (2020) noted that "Providing clear direction, establishing engagement toward a set of community standards or principles, and regular and timely feedback all help build a strong motivated team that functions for the support of the institution" (pp. 34–35). Brown and colleagues also explained that indirect and untimely feedback leads to ambiguity, which can lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction in the workplace (Tull, 2006). As such, supervisors are responsible for providing clear and timely feedback so employees have opportunity to meet their job expectations (Brown et al., 2020). In addition to feedback, supervisors are often responsible for giving annual performance evaluations. "In a supervisory relationship, performance evaluations, when used appropriately, should support decisions related to training and career development, compensation, promotions, and employment termination" (Wilson et al., 2020, p. 95). The evaluation process can be less effective, however, when not used for its intended purpose, which is as a professional development tool to set employee goals and performance expectations, and to include feedback relevant to those goals and expectations (Wilson et al., 2002, p. 95).

While supervision has elements of management and leadership, it is important to note that these are distinct roles. Holmes et al. (2021) explain that "the roles of supervisor, leader, and manager have different primary responsibilities, tools, and strategies, and can achieve different

outcomes" (p. 19). Holmes and colleagues differentiate supervision as a relational role that focuses on the job tasks and performance of individuals, whereas leadership focuses on organizational visions, and management is concerned with the tasks associated with administration and system support. Holmes et al. (2021) argue that the inclusion of the word "relationship" is of utmost importance in the definition of supervision and emphasize, "It is critical for supervisors to develop their relationship with the staff they supervise to build trust and develop mutual understanding and respect" (p. 20). The highly relational nature of supervision is important because supervisors are integral to the learning and development of future supervisors in the profession (Holmes, 2014; McGraw, 2011; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Tull, 2009; Wilson et al., 2020).

The supervisor-supervisee relationship can be particularly important for early-career student affairs professionals. Tull (2009) noted that "supervisory relationships hold great potential to influence self-image, job satisfaction, and professional development" (p. 130). Dinise-Halter (2017) found that new professionals in student affairs looked to their supervisors "to facilitate growth within their positions" (p. 8). Participants in Dinise-Halter's study noted that supervisors facilitated growth through challenges that pushed them out of their comfort zone. Furthermore, early-career professionals often look to their supervisors as a source of mentorship (Renn & Hodges, 2007; Tull, 2009). That said, like the need to differentiate supervision from management or leadership, Renn and Hodges (2007) and Tull (2009) differentiated between the definition of supervisor and of mentor. Renn and Hodges (2007) emphasized that supervisors and mentors are not the same, noting that graduate preparation programs need to help new professionals understand this difference and how to navigate finding appropriate mentors (p.385). Tull (2009) explained that supervising and mentoring have several similarities but

described supervision as a formal, cooperative relationship that supports the professional development of supervisees and is concerned with accomplishing the goals of the institution/unit. Tull (2009) describes mentorship as a more informal relationship where student affairs professionals can find motivation, inspiration, advice, and emotional support to assist with their professional development. Early-career professionals may find a mentor in their supervisor, but the two roles should be considered distinct.

Tull (2009) explained that supervisors are important to helping early-career student affairs professionals become socialized in their new profession.[4] As such, supervisors are responsible for providing organizational information, giving professional feedback, and for the overall development of student affairs staff (Tull, 2009). Moreover, Tull noted that new professionals in student affairs identified that they look for supervisors to provide "structure, autonomy, frequent feedback, recognition of limitations, support, effective communication, consistency, role modeling, and sponsorship" (p. 130). Tull highlighted that the supervisory role is highly influential over the learning and development of student affairs professionals and can impact how long those professionals remain in the field. Tull advised supervisors in student affairs to adopt synergistic supervision as their model for effective supervision. Synergistic supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998) is one of three models of supervision for student affairs that highlight that relationship building is a key component of effective supervision.

Synergistic supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998), Inclusive Supervision (Wilson et al., 2020), and Identity-Conscious Supervision (Brown et al., 2020) are three models of supervision for student affairs that all suggest effective supervision is dependent on cultivating

[4] "Socialization is the process by which new professionals enter the student affairs profession" (Collins, 2009, p. 3). This involves acquiring the skills, values, and understanding of organizational cultures necessary for their professional role.

strong relationships with supervisees. The three different models require supervisors to have a strong sense of self and others as well as the needs/goals of the organization. Synergistic supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998) is a model that focuses on a dyadic relationship between supervisor and supervisee where two-way communication and feedback is used to help both supervisor and supervisee develop professionally, and where both parties are concerned with the goals of the institution and the goals of the individual. Research suggests that those who employ synergistic methods of supervision are seen as more effective supervisors (Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Tull, 2006, 2009; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998; Womack, 2020). In her dissertation study, Womack (2020) surveyed over 350 student affairs professionals and found that a lack of synergistic supervision behaviors from supervisors in student affairs was linked to less engaged employees who were more likely to leave the field within three years.

Inclusive Supervision (Wilson et al., 2020) and Identity-Conscious Supervision (Brown et al., 2020) enhanced the synergistic supervision model by emphasizing the important role supervisors play in creating safe and inclusive workspaces for student affairs professionals to thrive. In the Inclusive Supervision Model (Wilson et al., 2020), supervisors are responsible for (a) developing safe spaces, (b) cultivating holistic development for their supervisees, (c) demonstrating their own vulnerability by their willingness to accept feedback and admit weaknesses, and (d) building capacity in others to carry out institutional goals for diversity and inclusion (pp. 29–30). Identity-Conscious Supervision (Brown et al., 2020) highlights the power differential between supervisors and supervisees, noting that supervisors are responsible for making the supervisor-supervisee relationship both positive and productive. Brown and colleagues (2020) uplifted the concept of establishing trust between supervisors and supervisees to create a strong positive relationship. This framework is centered around the self-work

supervisors must do to be more conscious of the needs of their unique, diverse supervisees. Synergistic supervision, inclusive supervision, and identity-conscious supervision are valuable tools for supervisors in student affairs to engage. That said, as supervisors in student affairs report that they receive little to no formal education or training related to supervision (Holmes, 2014; Lamb et al., 2018; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003), it is unclear when or if supervisors learn any models of supervision. As such, supervisors may be missing important knowledge to help them be effective in their positions. In the next subsection, I explore what is known about learning supervision in student affairs.

Learning Supervision in Student Affairs

Supervision is noted as an important skill for student affairs professionals to acquire (Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Much has been written on what is expected of an effective supervisor (Arminio & Creamer, 2012; Brown et al., 2020; Cuyjet et al., 2009; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Wilson et al., 2020; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998). Books written on higher education administration for students in HESA graduate preparation programs commonly include a chapter or section on management and supervision (Amey & Reesor, 2015; McClellan & Stringer, 2019; Schuh et al., 2011; Schuh et al., 2016; Tull et al., 2009; Winston et al., 2001). Standards of effective supervision are included in the CAS standards (Wells & Henry-Darwish, 2019) and the standards developed by NASPA and ACPA (2015). Research indicates that new supervisors often enter their supervisory roles with inadequate preparation (Cuyjet et al., 2009; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Schuh & Carlisle, 1997; Winston & Fitch, 1993). Additionally, there is a muddled understanding between HESA graduate programs and divisions of student affairs about where professionals should learn supervision, each expecting the other to be responsible for teaching this essential skill (Holmes, 2014; Kuk et

al., 2007; Lamb et al., 2018; Muller et al., 2018; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016). Instead of formal routes of learning, supervisors in student affairs indicate that they learned to supervise from observing their own supervisors or otherwise from experiential based trial and error (Holmes, 2014; Lamb et al., 2018; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016).

Nichols and Baumgartner (2016) presented findings from a qualitative study of twenty midlevel student affairs professionals and their experience of learning supervisory skills. Their study found that practical experience in supervision was a mechanism for professionals to identify as supervisors, and prior to that epiphany midlevel supervisors felt they had not received adequate training in supervision. Student affairs professionals have desire for formal training and education in supervision (e.g., Cuyjet et al., 2009; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), but participants in Nichols and Baumgartner's (2016) study suggested there were very few opportunities to formally learn supervision. Instead, participants indicated that the realization of their supervisory identity prompted them to engage in self-directed, experiential, and reflective learning strategies to assist their supervisory learning journey. Moreover, Nichols and Baumgartner found that developing trust and rapport in the relationship between a supervisor and an employee was integral to the employee's supervisory skill learning and development (p. 69). Arguably, then, supervisors are one of the most important teachers of supervision.

As discussed in chapter one, scholars note that one of the main sources of supervisory learning comes through subjective observation and emulation of previous supervision (Holmes, 2014; McGraw, 2011; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003; Wilson et al., 2020). "In the absence of training, supervisors are likely to rely on their own past supervision experiences, good or bad, as their model" (Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003, p. 78). In her dissertation on supervisory skill development for new professionals in student affairs, Holmes

(2014) noted that all her study participants indicated that their own supervisors significantly influenced their supervisory learning journey. Holmes also observed that participants revealed a gap between HESA programs and student affairs divisions in where supervision is expected to be learned. “Specifically, student affairs departments assume that supervision is learned in graduate preparations [sic] programs, and academic programs believe that supervision is learned on the job” (Holmes, 2014, p. 64). Similarly, Lamb and colleagues (2018) note in their study of how student affairs professionals in community colleges learn to supervise that, “The lack of formal supervisory training may be explained by the absence of institutional staff development plans for its supervisors” (p. 741), and that student affairs divisions may erroneously assume that supervision is primarily learned in HESA programs.

Holmes (2014) discovered inconsistencies in where student affairs professionals encountered formal supervisory learning opportunities such as classes in their HESA programs or on-the-job training, and most participants indicated that their main source of learning came from trial and error and observation of their own supervisors. Holmes (2014) concluded:

> Learning supervisory skills from one’s own supervisor is a cycle within student affairs, as that supervisor probably learned supervision skills from his or her supervisor, and so on. Thus, if an entry-level professional’s supervisor was not trained or had not had course work [sic] on supervision, the entry-level professional was learning supervision skills from someone who was also untrained. (p. 88)

The cycle described by Holmes is problematic as it can perpetuate poor supervisory practices (Wilson et al., 2020), which are associated with job dissatisfaction and high attrition of student affairs professionals (Marshall et al., 2016; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Inconsistent opportunities for formal supervisory education and training discussed by Holmes (2014) and

others (Blimling, 2001; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003) suggests that informal, experiential learning comprises the majority of how supervisors learn to supervise. Additionally, studies provide evidence that experience with previous supervisors evokes emotional responses and influences the reflective learning processes for those learning supervision (Holmes, 2014; McGraw, 2011; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016). The role of emotions and reflection in the learning process is present in both transformative and experiential learning theories. As such, I constructed a conceptual framework that guided my study from *emotional* and *reflective* facets of adult learning theories related to both transformative and experiential theories of adult learning. In the following section I describe my conceptual framework and the literature on adult learning theories that informed its development.

Conceptual Framework: Reflective and Emotional Aspects of Adult Learning

My study is guided by *emotional* and *reflective* aspects of experiential and transformative theories of adult learning. Nichols and Baumgartner (2016) found that midlevel managers in student affairs engaged in reflective learning when describing their supervision learning journey. Of particular interest to the researchers was the powerful role emotion had in participants reflecting on the behavior of former supervisors and making meaning for themselves and their own development as supervisors. Study respondents described how past experiences of being supervised invoked negative or positive emotions, and participants thus adopted "supervisory techniques they appreciated and avoided those they did not like [from previous supervisors]" (p. 70). Rooted in those findings is the notion that supervisors have a direct and powerful influence on the learning and development of supervisees, and consequently future supervisors/leaders.

This idea is further exemplified in McGraw's (2011) reflective piece on how her various experiences both supervising and being supervised influenced her learning and growth over time.

While she believed at the beginning of her career that her graduate program would provide much of the necessary knowledge to prepare a professional to supervise, McGraw reflected, "I learned that my supervision style is largely informed by my experiences as a supervisee and by synthesizing past experiences" (p. 25). Holmes (2014) similarly reported that new professionals in student affairs indicated that experiences with previous supervisors highly influenced development of their supervisory practice. These works (Holmes, 2014; McGraw, 2011; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016) suggest that theories of adult learning that include reflection, emotion, and/or both may be useful in understanding how supervisors in student affairs learn to be supervisors. In this section, I first explore reflective learning and specifically Mezirow's (1991) approach to reflection as part of his transformative theory of adult learning. Following, I describe the importance of embodied, emotional learning for adults and then explain how emotion and reflection interact with experience as an interconnected system of learning. I further describe how this works as a conceptual framework to understand how supervisors in student affairs describe their own journey of learning, and how their experience of being supervised may influence their learning.

Reflective Learning

Reflective learning is rooted in the philosophical works of John Dewey (1938) and Jürgen Habermas (1971) and was popularized by Schön's (1983) theory of reflective practice. These works influenced scholars interested in how experience relates to adult learning, thus reflective learning found its way into theories of experiential learning (e.g., Jarvis, 1987; Kolb, 1984) and transformative learning (e.g., Mezirow, 1991). Reflection has a prominent, but contentious place in theories of adult learning. While several authors centralize reflection in their adult learning theories (e.g., Boud et al., 1985; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1983), there is an absence

of a consistent definition of reflection as it relates to learning or practice (Hébert, 2015; Kalk, et al., 2014; Marshall, 2019; Moon, 1999). For this study and with an adult learning perspective, I define reflection as a conscious cognitive process of applying a rational and sometimes critical lens to making meaning of an experience (Marshall, 2019; Mezirow, 1991; Moon, 1999). Presented more simply: (1) we have an experience; (2) during or after the experience we take a moment to think about the experience; (3) we then engage a rational/critical lens to analyze the experience; and (4) this reflective engagement leads to new learning in the form of meaning making.

In the following section I concentrate on Mezirow's (1991) discussion of reflection as it relates to meaning making in transformative learning, as Mezirow's examination of emancipatory learning through critical self-reflection is an important component to understanding how reflection can be a framework from which to understand and re/evaluate supervisor learning in student affairs. I then review the emotional, affective domain related to reflective learning as explored by Dirkx (2012).

Mezirow and Reflection

Mezirow (1991) built his interpretation of reflection on Dewey's (1933) analysis of reflection and took further inspiration from Habermas's (1971) emancipatory approach to learning.[5] Mezirow (1991) explained that reflection is an intentional process that the learner engages to confront and re-examine pre-existing knowledge, and that having an experience itself does not mean the learner engages in a transformative reflective practice. He suggested that critical reflection can challenge, confirm, change, reinforce, negate, or otherwise develop our

[5] Emancipatory knowledge is that which "addresses the forces of society that empower or disempower some individuals over others" (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p. 303), and is a critical approach to learning based in the Marxist notion that emancipation cannot be done through indoctrination (Mezirow, 1991).

beliefs, the knowledge of which can then be used to solve a problem or confront a new experience (p. 111). Mezirow defined reflection in three forms. “Reflection is the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (p. 104). Content concerns thinking about an experience, process is thinking about how to solve problems relating to an experience, and premise is the critical examination of our beliefs, values, and prior knowledge in relation to an experience. Mezirow argued that the reflective form of premise is the only form that leads to transformative learning, saying, “Critique and reassessment of the adequacy of prior learning, leading potentially to its negation, are the hallmarks of reflection” (p. 110).

In addition to the three forms of reflection, Mezirow differentiated reflective action from nonreflective action. Nonreflective action is separated into two categories: (1) habitual action, which is prior learning that involves practice until it becomes a natural action (e.g., riding a bike); and (2) thoughtful action, which is a “higher-order cognitive process” (p.106) that involves using prior knowledge to make decisions without critically examining that knowledge, thus learning perpetuates prior knowledge. In contrast, Mezirow described reflective action as a rational, cognitive process that “begins with posing a problem and ends with taking action” (p. 108). While nonreflective action is reflexive based on prior knowledge, reflective action requires intentional thinking-on-action that results in insights and potentially a transformation of meaning making. The potential for transformation is part of critical reflection and emancipatory learning.

According to Mezirow (1991), “emancipatory knowledge is knowledge gained through critical self-reflection… [and] is emancipation from…forces that limit our options and our rational control over our lives but have been taken for granted or seen as beyond human control”

(p. 87). He explained that critical self-reflection is an appraisal of prior-held knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs that can lead to transformative learning.

> In emancipatory learning, the learner is presented with an alternative way of interpreting feelings and patterns of action; the old meaning scheme or perspective is negated and is either replaced or reorganized to incorporate new insights…Dramatic personal and social changes become possible when we become aware of the way that both our psychological and our cultural assumptions have created or contributed to our dependence on outside forces that we have regarded as unchangeable. (p. 88)

This concept of critical self-reflection and emancipatory learning is important to understanding the professional development of supervisors in student affairs especially related to professional identity development. By engaging in non-reflective action, as described in the previous paragraph, supervisors can perpetuate prior knowledge and previously held beliefs, values, and assumptions of what it means to be a student affairs professional without critical appraisal of said prior knowledge. If supervisors engage in critical self-reflection, they can examine if those previously held beliefs are "distorting, inauthentic, or otherwise unjustified" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 111). It is, therefore, significant to use a reflective learning lens to inspect if or when supervisors critically reflect on how professional experiences with previous supervisors influenced their own supervisory practices. Given their important role in the professional development of new student affairs professionals, supervisors who engage in emancipatory learning may influence the field of student affairs.

Mezirow's (1991) work on transformative learning is incredibly influential over research on adult learning (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Other influential theorists that explore reflection in adult learning include Schön (1983), Kolb (1984), and Boud et al. (1985). While

these theorists advanced humanity's understanding of the importance of reflexiveness in adult learning, they also tended to minimize the role emotions play in how adults make meaning of their experiences (Dirkx, 2001; Maiese, 2011, 2017; Wagner & Shahjahan, 2015). Reflective learning is often approached from a constructive ontology where reflection on experience leads to individual meaning making (Maiese, 2011, 2017). For instance, Mezirow (1991) differentiated *reflection* from *introspection* by arguing that introspection involves thinking of ourselves and our feelings without validity testing, making it nonreflective, whereas reflection involves active problem solving and guiding meaning making (p. 107). Kuk and Holst (2018) problematized this positionality from a critical feminist perspective, calling out the dualistic ideology encompassed in separating reflection (the mind, male, rational, "the knower") from the context of the experience (the body, female, irrational, "the experiencer"). Seminal scholars of reflective learning habitually extracted the practice of reflection from the context of the experience, essentially perpetuating a separation of reflection (the mind) from emotion (the body) (Kuk & Holst, 2018; Taylor & Marienau, 2016; Wagner & Shahjahan, 2015). Yet, as Nichols and Baumgartner's study (2016) found, emotional reactions to experiences can be catalysts for reflective learning. It is important, then, to integrate an understanding of embodied, emotional learning in tandem with reflective learning as it relates to experience in order to explore how supervisors describe their learning journeys.

Embodied, Emotional Learning

Embodied learning is simply described as learning through the body (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). As discussed in the previous paragraph, much scholarship related to reflexive and experiential aspects of adult learning values cognition over bodily means of learning. While embodied learning often involves physical bodily activities (e.g., playing,

drawing), it also encompasses dimensions such as spiritual and emotional knowledge (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Dirkx (2012) explained that emotions have historically been studied from a cognitive point of view that tries to analyze and understand emotions so that they can be managed or controlled. Influenced by the various works of Carl Jung, Thomas Moore, and Robert Boyd, Dirkx (2012) approached emotions from a psychoanalytic perspective that considers emotions as an interplay between our conscious and unconscious selves. He expressed that, from the transformative learning process, meaning making can happen if more purposeful attention is given to emotions, emphasizing that emotions are essential to reflective processes.

Dirkx (2001) argued that emotions represent many parts of the self, and understanding those multiple selves is done "through the products of our imagination, the images that come to populate consciousness" (p. 65). These emotion-laden images give meaning to context, bringing to the conscious self a piece of the subconscious (Dirkx, 2001, 2012). Dirkx suggested that engagement with these images leads to a better sense of self, and that this is crucial to the learning done in the individual and within a collective. This is an important point, as supervision takes place within a community of professionals, thus a deeper understanding of the self as supervisor can influence community learning. Dirkx later expounded that the meaning-making experience is "intimately bound up with our deep relationships with ourselves, as well as one another, our social contexts, and the broader world" (p. 126). This suggests that learning is not done in a vacuum, and the community to which the supervisor belongs is influenced by the learning journey of the supervisor.

Connecting the mind, body, and emotions to experiential dimensions of adult learning is not a new or unexplored concept. In addition to the works of Dirkx, Maiese (2011, 2017) has written extensively on embodied, emotional learning, including a poignant criticism of historical

notions of transformative learning. Maiese (2017) gave attention to various works by Mezirow, suggesting that,

> …the explicit processes of critical reflection that Mezirow describes, which involve questioning and assessing one's own beliefs and assumptions, are enabled and enhanced by affectivity. This means that the reframing processes that take place over the course of transformative learning always and necessarily have an affective dimension. (p. 203)

Maiese (2017) explained that affective (emotional) experiences are the precursor to cognitive (reflective), higher-level "acts of perception, thought, and judgement" (p. 206). As such, engagement with emotions can act as a frame to help individuals process their experiences into meaningful knowledge. Furthermore, in her book, *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition*, Maiese (2011) reasoned that "cognition and affect are essentially linked and inseparable during the course of human sense-making, so that affective processing and reasoning are necessarily intertwined" (p. 147). Thus, emotions are inherently linked to the body. This is central to Maiese's (2011) Essential Embodiment Theory in which she argued that the mind and body are intimately bound together as an organismic living body. As part of embodied learning, Maiese (2017) argued that "What affects the subject arouses bodily feelings, what is experienced *matters*…. the very way in which the world is disclosed to the subject is shaped and contoured by these bodily feelings" (p. 206). Therefore, Maiese argued that critical self-reflection, as described by Mezirow (1991), must include an affective dimension to guide processes of meaning making.

Much of Maiese's (2011) work focused on pre-reflective desire-based emotions and the intentional ways in which the body responds outwardly to our emotions. That said, Maiese criticized previous scholarship by Solomon (1980, 1993 as cited by Maiese, 2011) who argued

that emotions are constitutive, evaluative judgements by which we make meaning of our experiences. While Maiese agreed with Solomon that emotions do have a role in our interpretations, she highlighted that Solomon's work did not include instances of emotion without judgement (e.g., I am sad/angry, but I am uncertain of a reason) nor did Solomon include when our emotions and our judgements are in misalignment (e.g., I am anxious about flying, but I know that traveling by plane is relatively safe). Maiese (2011, 2017) noted that there is danger of emotions and affectivity skewing learning and reinforcing false/unrealistic assumptions based on our own biases. As such, Maiese accepts that cognitive reasoning is important to mitigating false, unrealistic, and/or irrational emotional responses to our environment. "Just as cognitive processes are constituted, in part, by affectivity, the sort of affective framing patterns that a person develops are shaped by reflective thought processes" (Maiese, 2017, p. 213). Dirkx (2001, 2012) and Maiese (2017) provide an understanding that emotional learning and reflective learning cannot be altogether distinct from one another. They work in tandem, and therefore emotional learning should be equal to reflective learning in future scholarship on meaning making.

Experiential Learning

The scholarship I reviewed in the previous subsections by Mezirow (1991), Dirkx (2001; 2012), and Maiese (2011, 2017) informed my understanding of transformative dimensions of adult learning. The reflective and emotional aspects of transformative learning theories are important to develop a framework for studying how supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise, and how their experiences with previous supervision influence their supervisory practice. Reflective and emotional learning happens in response to experiences with the broader environment, and both concepts appear in the scholarship on both transformative learning and

experiential learning. Transformative learning theories stem from experiential learning theories, however, they are considered separate bodies of scholarship. For example, in Merriam and Baumgartner's (2020) book, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, the authors separate transformative learning and experiential learning into separate chapters, denoting that they are distinctive subjects while also recognizing that scholars of transformative learning cross dimensions into experiential learning scholarship. That said, researchers of supervisory learning in student affairs (e.g., Holmes, 2014; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016) make clear that supervisors primarily learn from direct, on-the-job experience. Thus, it is important to briefly explore experiential learning as part of my conceptual framework.

Experiential learning is described simply as the process of acquiring knowledge through life experience (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Scholars of andragogy have a fundamental understanding that experience and reflection on experience is vital to learning in adulthood. Kolb (2014), for example, explained that learning is a reflective process of creating knowledge through the transformation of experience (p. 49). Much of the existing scholarship on experiential learning models and theories stems from the early work of John Dewey (1938), who was an important scholar on learning from life experiences. Dewey (1938) pointed out that, while learning comes from experience, some reactions to experience can produce miseducation—e.g., the reinforcement of false assumptions as discussed later by Maiese (2017). Dewey (1938) also posited that learning from experience is done on a continuum, with past experiences intermingling with new experiences to create new or compounded knowledge. This notion is pervasive in experiential learning literature (e.g., Boud & Walker, 1991; Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983, Usher et al., 1997). As such, reflection is an integral part of learning from experience.

Along with Dewey, Schön (1983) is considered one of the foremost scholars of the reflective aspect of experiential learning. Schön developed two significant concepts of reflection: (1) reflection-on-action, which is the reflective process of thinking about an action after it has happened; and (2) reflection-in-action, which is a quicker reflective process that encompasses how individuals think about their actions as they act. Schön's concepts are considered influential over several following works by other experiential learning theorists (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

While reflection has an important place in experiential learning models and theories, emotional learning has been less examined. As Dirkx (2001, 2012) critiqued, some authors have centered negative emotions or unconscious desire as obstacles to overcome in order to learn (e.g., Boud et al., 1985, 1996; Fenwick, 2003), while others assert that effective learning is dependent on helping learners develop their self-esteem and interpret their experiences positively (Beard & Wilson, 2018 as cited in Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). The works of Dirkx (2001, 2012), Maiese (2011, 2017), as well as Kuk and Holst (2018) help highlight the need for further studies that include emotional aspects of adult learning as significant mechanisms for making meaning from experiences. Certainly, emotion, reflection, and experience are important lenses for this study.

Emotional and Reflective Learning as a Framework

Supervision in student affairs is highly relational (Brown, et. al., 2020), and emotions naturally underpin the supervisory learning behaviors professionals engage in when interacting with both supervisors and supervisees. Moreover, supervision is an emotional relationship that encompasses more than just supervisor and supervisee(s). It includes the work culture, institutional culture, individual and community identities, job expectations, the overall

environment, as well as the outside-of-work expectations, responsibilities, and environment supervisors and supervisees carry with them. As such, understanding how supervision is learned requires a framework that examines how learners understand themselves, the way they are influenced by others and how they influence others.

Literature related to supervisory learning in student affairs suggests that supervisors' emotional experiences of previous supervision are highly influential on how they learn to supervise (Holmes, 2014; McGraw, 2011; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016). Maiese (2011, 2017) asserted that reflective and emotional learning are inherently connected mechanisms for meaning making and should be used together to further understand phenomena related to experiential and transformative learning. As such, reflective and emotional learning can be used as a framework for helping supervisors in student affairs reengage with the emotions and experiences they have had with their past supervisors and as supervisors so that they can better describe how those experiences influenced their supervisory learning journeys. Therefore, my study included interview questions that gave participants an opportunity to describe their emotional responses to past experiences with supervisors and explain how those experiences influenced their supervisory learning (see Appendix A: Interview Protocol). In this way, I applied my conceptual framework to better understand how supervisors in student affairs describe how they learned to supervise and how past supervision influenced that learning journey.

Chapter Summary

This literature review enhanced my knowledge of the field of student affairs, its professionals, its supervisors, how supervision is learned, and of how adults engage emotion and reflection in learning from experience. The many tensions that exist in the field, specifically those related to the siloed community and the diversity of the credential backgrounds of its

professionals, helped illuminate possible reasons scholars have found that supervisors in student affairs report little to no opportunities for formalized education or training related to learning supervision (Holmes, 2014; Blimling, 2001; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2015; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). While outside the scope of this study, future studies should gather data related to current professionals' academic and professional backgrounds to continue building the field's knowledge of any significant gaps in foundational student affairs related education (e.g., student development theory, supervision, academic governance, standards and competencies).

In the following chapter, I provide an overview of how I approached my study on supervisory learning journeys in student affairs. Important elements of my research design are explained, including my positionality and paradigm as the researcher, my chosen methodology, and specific information related to how I implemented my research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how supervisors in student affairs describe their supervisory learning journey. This study was guided by two research questions: (1) How do supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise? (2) How do supervisors in student affairs describe the influence of previous supervision on the development of their supervisory practice? The focus of these questions was on how participants describe their learning experiences and the influence of others on those experiences. As discussed at the end of Chapter Two, reflective and emotional aspects of adult learning theories provided a conceptual framework for which to understand supervisory learning journeys.

This chapter introduces the generic qualitative methodological approach I used for this study. While a generic qualitative approach is characterized by its flexibility and lack of allegiance to any one established qualitative methodology (e.g., phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography) (Kahlke, 2014), it is my responsibility as the researcher to address four key areas of credibility in my research design as described by Caelli et al. (2003): (1) my theoretical position; (2) congruence between my chosen methodology and methods; (3) strategies I employ to establish rigor; and (4) the analytic lens through which my data are examined (p. 9). I endeavor to achieve this through the thoughtful organization of this chapter. I begin with my theoretical positionality as a researcher and follow with an explanation of the research paradigm that informs my methodological choices. The research paradigm leads into a description of the generic qualitative approach including benefits and limitations of using such an approach. I include in my description an explanation of what epistemological nuances, theoretical assumptions, and appropriate techniques and procedures I intend to borrow from established qualitative methodologies (Kahlke, 2014) and how they align with the focus of my research as

well as the paradigm and conceptual framework guiding my study. Methods are discussed at the end of the chapter. Throughout this research design I strive to consider and explain the interpretive presuppositions that I bring into my analysis of the data (Caelli, 2003).

Positionality Statement

I see that truth and knowledge can be found through multiple methods of inquiry, and that the question being asked is influential over how we should approach finding truth and knowledge. I approach ways of knowing pragmatically. I see paradigms less as firmly positioning oneself as a researcher, and more to reflect on oneself and be mindful of the assumptions one goes into a new project with. A hallmark of qualitative research is that the researcher is inherently *part* of the study and gains understanding *with* the participants, not apart from the participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Stenbacka, 2001). Approaching this study of how supervisors in student affairs learn supervision, I am aware that I have assumptions about how supervision is taught and/or learned in the profession based on my background as a graduate of a higher education/student affairs (HESA) master's program and the several years of professional and paraprofessional experience I have in student affairs. I also acknowledge that I have never been a direct supervisor, and therefore, I go into this topic with the perspective of a supervisee. Moreover, my observations and the conversations I have had with colleagues leaving the profession, as discussed in the introduction to Chapter One, has shaped my knowledge and beliefs about the role supervision plays in influencing professional learning and job satisfaction for student affairs professionals.

Understanding my own assumptions about the topic allows me to consider my position regarding how I believe the answer to my question should be acquired. Coe, et al. (2017) explain that the two ends of the epistemology continuum are positivism (direct knowledge can be

obtained through direct observation) and interpretivism (direct knowledge is not possible, context matters to understanding phenomena). From a pragmatic worldview, both perspectives are valid, depending on the construction of the research question. However, for the purposes of this study and to continue to challenge my assumptions about this topic, a constructivist interpretivist approach is the appropriate choice. As such, allowing participants to describe their learning journey from their own perspective will provide a richer understanding of how supervisory learning is acquired, and the influence previous supervision has on that learning journey.

Research Paradigm

Qualitative research, by nature, is concerned with the way individuals interact with the world and how that interaction influences socially constructed meaning (Merriam, 2002). It is naturalistic (concerned with studying participants in their natural setting) and interpretive (focused on using description and analysis to make sense of the social world) (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). For this study, I used a generic qualitative methodological approach (Caelli et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015), which included using a social constructivist interpretivist paradigm (Merriam, 2002). A social constructivist interpretivist qualitative study is one that tries to "*understand the meaning* people have constructed about their world and their experiences; that is, how do people make sense of their experience?" (Merriam, 2002, pp. 4–5). Engaging in the constructivist interpretivist side of the ontological and epistemological continuums required that I employ ideographic, hermeneutic methodology (Coe et al., 2017). Ideographic inquiry is focused on studying the particular through detailed analysis (Spiers & Smith, 2019) and suggests that "individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator(s) and respondent(s)" (Coe et al., 2017, p. 18). Heuristic inquiry is concerned

with discovering “unarticulated knowledge that derives from experience” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 17) through interpretation of data. Through a social constructivist interpretivist lens, I endeavored to better understand how supervisors in student affairs describe and make meaning of their supervisory learning journeys. I further explore and explain my methodology and research design in the following sections.

Methodology: Generic Qualitative Approach

This study utilized a generic qualitative methodological approach to understand the supervisory learning journeys of supervisors in student affairs. This is an approach to qualitative research and not considered a distinct, established methodology (Caelli et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014). A generic qualitative approach enabled me to borrow appropriate nuances and traditional methods associated with established methodologies (e.g., phenomenology) without aligning myself with all the philosophic assumptions of a methodology that did not fit my research questions (Kahlke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015). This approach also aligned with my positionality statement in that it is a pragmatic choice for conducting qualitative research (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). Kostere and Kostere (2021) posited that the generic qualitative approach is appropriate for studies that seek to understand human experience, use qualitative procedures, and that have designs consistent with qualitative paradigms (p. 3). Thus, my approach was appropriate as my study explored the experiences of supervisory learning for individual supervisors in student affairs, I used qualitative methods, and my design was guided by a constructivist interpretivist paradigm.

Qualitative research is a learning experience with the purpose of generating knowledge in a natural, real-world setting (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Merriam (2002) explained that “all qualitative research is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher

as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and a richly descriptive end product" (p. 6). Qualitative work is interested in the general lived experiences of people and their natural environments, and qualitative researchers endeavor to respect the unique perspectives of each participant (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Merriam and Grenier (2019) further explained that qualitative research tries to understand how people make meaning of their lives and how they experience the world, and that goal of a generic qualitative study "is to uncover and interpret these meanings" (p. 35). Hallmarks of qualitative inquiry include the methods by which data are collected (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Merriam and Greneir (2019) noted three main sources for collecting data in qualitative studies: interviews, observations, and documents/artifacts. "The data collection strategy used is determined by the question of the study and by determining which source(s) of data will yield the best information to answer the question" (p. 14). In the next section I explain which qualitative methods I plan to use to conduct this generic qualitative study.

Methods

The nature of my research methodology choices and the focus of my research questions indicated that using qualitative methods to collect and analyze data was also a logical choice. Qualitative methods are appropriate to understand from individuals how their context shapes their learning of supervisory skills. This study employed qualitative data collection strategies such as semi-structured guided interviews (Coe et al., 2017; Rossman & Rallis, 2017) and a guided reflective writing exercise. These methods are detailed in the data collection subsection below.

Sample Selection

This study examined supervisors' descriptions of how they learned supervision in student affairs and the influences on their learning. Purposeful, criterion sampling was used to identity a sample of eleven participants. Participants had to meet the following inclusion criteria at the time of the study: (a) must work in student affairs at a U.S. institution of higher education;[6] (b) must have >2 years of professional experience in student affairs; (c) must have >1 year of professional experience as a supervisor in student affairs; (d) must supervise at least one full-time professional student affairs practitioner (non-graduate assistant, non-undergraduate); and (e) must have a direct supervisor.

Given the diversity of supervisory positions and my interest in how supervision is learned across the lifespan of a student affairs career, I was purposely loose in defining some parameters of my population. As such, my participants were supervisors in student affairs with varying years of experience as supervisors, from different functional areas of the field (e.g., residence life, academic advising, student activities, orientation), from different institutional types (e.g., research institutions, community colleges, private non-profits), with diverse titles related to their role (e.g., coordinator, director, assistant director) and who oversaw a varying number of supervisees.

I initially limited my participant search to supervisors working in student affairs in the state of Florida because I was interested in scheduling all interviews in person to potentially increase rapport building opportunities. To begin my sample selection process, I collected emails of leaders and divisions of student affairs from Florida college and university websites. I sent

[6] Sometimes someone who identifies as a student affairs professional (e.g., an academic advisor) may work in a department that is housed under academic affairs instead of student affairs. Professional self-identification as a student affairs professional will thus be taken into consideration for participation in this study.

several emails with a call for participants to complete a volunteer form via Qualtrics and a request to forward the email to wider distribution lists at those institutions. This resulted in only three participants meeting the criteria for selection. As a result, I developed a call for participants flyer with a QR code to complete the volunteer form via Qualtrics. I broadened my search to a national level, and used LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram to disseminate the flyer. I also sent the flyer to colleagues at various institutions with a request to forward the flyer to wider distribution lists at those institutions. This resulted in 13 additional volunteers. I evaluated volunteers to ensure they met the criteria for participation and eliminated five volunteers for not meeting the criteria. I was left with eleven participants.

Participant Information

My study included eleven participants who were interviewed between May 1 and August 25, 2023. My participants completed a volunteer Qualtrics form where they had the opportunity to provide their preferred pronouns and gender identity along with information about their professional title, their institution, and their supervisory experience. Participants were also asked to upload a resume in the Qualtrics form. Eight participants self-identified as woman/female, two participants self-identified as male, and one participant self-identified as greygender. Participants were not asked about identity related to age, race, nor sexual orientation. That said, two participants self-identified in interviews as women-of-color: one as a Black woman and one as Latina woman. One participant self-identified in an interview as queer. A summary of my participants' educational background, supervisory experience, and professional titles in connection with their pseudonyms is located in Appendix B of this study.

Participants self-identified as supervisors in student affairs. They ranged in years of experience from 7–20 years in the field of student affairs, and from 4–16 years of experience

supervising student affairs professional staff. Participants supervised from 2–14 student affairs professional staff at the time of their interviews. Three participants were directors of housing and residence life. The other eight participants held the following titles: Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Education; Assistant Director for Academic Advising and Coaching; Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs; Associate Director for Student Development and Academic Support; Director of Academic Resources and Services; Director of Academic Engagement; Executive Director for Advising and Student Success; and Vice Dean for Student Success.

Participants' educational backgrounds were gathered from their resumes and CVs. Participants had bachelor's degrees in a range of academic disciplines including humanities, social sciences, liberal arts, education, and engineering. Six participants earned master's degrees related to higher education and student affairs (HESA). Of these six participants, two had additional master's degrees: one had a master's in near eastern studies and the other had a Master of Business Administration and, at the time of this study, was pursuing a third master's degree in history. The other five participants had master's degrees in fields like educational leadership, curriculum instruction, psychology, and engineering. Of my eleven participants, five had terminal degrees in higher education and/or leadership related disciplines – three had Ed.D.'s and two had Ph.D.'s. Three participants were progressing towards terminal degrees in higher education and/or leadership related disciplines at the time of this study.

This study was not limited to an institution type or geographic region other than institutions in the United States of America. The type and size of institutions did not influence the design of the study, but I include a short summary of institutional demographics here in case it is of interest for future research. Ten institutions were represented by participants, and the descriptive terms that follow were sourced from The Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of

Higher Education (n.d.). Four institutions were public research four-year universities, one institution was a public exclusively baccalaureate college, one was a public associate college, two were private not-for-profit baccalaureate institutions, and one was a private not-for-profit research university. Participants represented several regions of the United States: 3 Midwest; 2 Mid-Atlantic; 1 East Central; 4 Southeast; and 1 Southwest.

Data Collection

"Interviewing, observing, and studying material culture are the primary ways to discover and learn in the field" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 146). For this study, I used semi-structured, guided interviews, field notes, and a guided reflective writing exercise as my main sources of data collection. I also collected resumes/CVs from participants to help me confirm inclusion criterion and to analyze for educational background information (e.g., HESA or non-HESA degree, inclusion of attendance at conferences, seminars, trainings, etc. related to supervision). Participants were given a consent form addressing confidentiality to sign and return to me via email before we scheduled our first interview. I modified an informed consent template from Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program (n.d.) which explained the study's purpose, my approach to maintaining confidentiality, and participants' rights. I had no participants withdraw from the study.

Each participant took part in two 60-minute interviews and completed one reflective writing activity in between interviews. Three participants had their initial interview in person: two in their professional offices and one at their home office. These interviews were recorded with an audio recording app on my personal password and facial-recognition-protected mobile phone. All other interviews were conducted via Zoom and audio/video recorded with Zoom's

recording software and the recordings were stored on my personal laptop which requires a password or fingerprint scan to unlock.

All interview recordings were uploaded to Kaltura MediaSpace where I used the auto-transcribe feature to create an initial transcript. Media files on Kaltura MediaSpace were saved as "Private" and require my encrypted university credentials to be accessed. All electronic documents (e.g., transcripts, writing exercise responses, evaluation forms) were stored on my personal laptop which requires a password or fingerprint scan to unlock. Participants were assigned a pseudonym and all documents related to the interviews/reflective writing activity, file names, and transcriptions were masked with the appropriate pseudonym. Potential identifying features such as college/university names, office titles, position titles, and names of others mentioned by the participant were also redacted or otherwise modified.

The conceptual framework I discussed in Chapter 2 guided the formulation of the semi-structured, open-ended interview questions as well as the reflective writing exercise. I used a table to map how interview and reflective writing questions helped to answer my research questions, as suggested by Anfara et al. (2002) (see Appendix A). The structure of these questions allowed participants to reflect and to express their experiences with their own words.

The first interview was designed to build rapport with my participants through introductions, scaffolding the intensity of questions from low intensity to moderate intensity, and active listening. The questions in the first interview focused on how supervisors describe how they learned to supervise. After the first interview, participants were given a reflective writing exercise asking them to reflect on and describe emotional responses to interactions with their supervisors (past or present). This writing exercise was designed to take between 30–60 minutes to complete, and participants completed the writing activity in their own time without my

presence so that they could engage with the questions in comfort and provide their most authentic answers to the questions. The second interview focused on collecting data related to reflections on important influences on participants' supervisory learning and how participants' knowledge and beliefs about supervision changed over time.

Data Analysis

During interviews I wrote copious detailed notes which I analyzed after each interview and for each participant individually (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). Transcripts for all interviews were printed and I used a color-coded system to analyze the transcripts, reflective writing activity responses, and my case notes for repeated or similar words and phrases that I used to develop a code. Coding is a data analysis practice qualitative researchers use to organize the emergence of significant, salient words and phrases that can be used to categorize data and discover themes (Coe et al., 2017; Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). I used a combination of different elemental and affective coding techniques, including open, initial coding, In Vivo coding, and emotion coding (Saldaña, 2021).

My conceptual framework helped me develop preliminary deductive categories, and the table mapping my interview questions to my research questions (Anfara et al., 2002; see Appendix A) guided some of the initial coding process. Deductive categories included words that related to feelings and emotions. For example, a code may include a phrase such as "made me feel…" and subcategories could include words such as "angry" or "needed" or "respected." I took a primarily inductive approach to coding, remaining open to inductive categories that emerged from the participants and from the data (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). As my conceptual framework guided the development of my interview and reflective writing activity questions, my framework was also significant in the codes,

categories, and themes that emerged during the analysis. While I read through transcripts and reflective writing activities, I highlighted instances when participants demonstrated reflecting on experiences and—as described by Mezirow (1991)—I noted whether participants' reflections had elements of intentional, critical reflection (i.e., challenging prior knowledge and values) or unintentional, reflexive thinking. I also reviewed the data for the emotions that participants connected to their experiences. As such, several codes emerged related to participants' experiences, emotions, and reflections. This aligns with a theoretical analysis of the data (Kostere & Kostere, 2021).

The coding and categorizing process helped me discover themes, which helped me understand and make meaning from the data. I used categorical and phenomenological methods of theming data to help me identify and interpret subject matter and meanings from the transcripts (Saldaña, 2021). Following the coding, categorizing, and theming processes, I used code mapping techniques to help me construct concepts and make inferences from my data. These practices resulted in several categories, themes, concepts, and assertions (Saldaña, 2021, p. 342) that prepared me to develop conclusions from my data analysis.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was obtained through several means. By conducting multiple interviews and having a written reflection exercise I developed a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Rossman and Rallis (2017) describe this credibility strategy as prolonged engagement: "being present for a long period in the setting…helps ensure that you have more than a snapshot view of the phenomenon" (p. 55). I used active listening skills to summarize and repeat participants' responses during interviews to allow participants to help validate collected data through member checks (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). While this study relied heavily on interviews, triangulation

was acquired through multiple interviews, participants' written reflections, and the review of participant resumes. Finally, I greatly value the contributions of my scholarly community, and I used peer debriefing, the use of a trusted peer, to review my work and engage with me in critical discussions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) as a final strategy for establishing the trustworthiness of my study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined my methodology, methods, and data collection strategy as well as my approaches to establishing trustworthiness for my dissertation study. The employment of qualitative methods to study how supervisors in student affairs describe their learning journey and how previous supervision influenced their supervisory development provided an additional layer of depth to the understanding of student affairs professionals. In Chapter Four I explore the significant findings that emerged from the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study explored how supervisors in student affairs describe their supervisory learning journey and was guided by two research questions: (1) How do supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise? (2) How do supervisors in student affairs describe the influence of previous supervision on the development of their supervisory practice? My research was guided by a conceptual framework informed by reflective and emotional aspects of experiential and transformative theories of adult learning. I posited that emotion and reflection work in tandem for supervisors to make meaning of their experiences and inform their supervisory learning journey. Through multiple interviews and the collection of a reflective writing activity from each participant, I found that participants' interactions with previous and current supervisors permeated every aspect of the learning process, which indicated that the supervisory relationship is highly influential on the learning and development for supervisors in student affairs.

In this chapter, I present my research findings by first examining how my participants described the influence their supervisors had on their supervisory learning. I then delve into the experiential ways in which participants reported learning supervision. I follow with an overview of learning methods that were evidential in the study but less significant overall to my participants. I conclude with a summary of chapter four.

Supervisors as Influences on Supervisory Learning

Participants universally acknowledged that the supervisors they encountered throughout their careers were highly influential over their supervisory learning journey. When participants were asked what they would describe as the most important influence over their supervisory learning journey, nine of my eleven participants indicated that their supervisors made the most significant impact on their journeys overall, and all participants provided evidence of the

influence supervisors had on their learning. Myra said, “I’d say prior supervisors. That’s really been impactful – seeing what’s gone well, what hasn’t worked, what has worked, what type of feedback did I particularly need, enjoy, want to experience, not want to experience, et cetera.” Naomi answered, “It’s been both my own supervisor and then other supervisors.” Cheryl shared, “I probably go back to the supervisor I had when I became an advisor.” Andra noted, “Over the years, you know, I’ve been given the opportunity to interact with really dynamic supervisors…pulling from the best of, if you will, things that I wanted to imitate.” Spencer offered, “The most impactful and important would be those supervisors that I have worked with my entire career. Whether it was a supervisor that I aligned really well with or a supervisor whose approach was very different from mine.”

Experiencing being supervised was important to my participants’ learning supervision over time. In this section, I review the parts of the supervisory relationship that participants found significant to their learning of supervision, including mentorship, supervisory support, professional feedback, and what participants described as “bad” supervision.

Supervisors as Mentors

Participants often mentioned wanting to be a good mentor to their supervisees. Moreover, they reflected on their relationships with supervisors who they considered mentors. Seven participants considered at least one of their supervisors to be a mentor. While participants did not differentiate what made one supervisor a mentor over another, through their descriptions it became apparent that supervisors labeled mentors took an active role in the professional development of their supervisee by giving expert advice for supervisory challenges, including supervisees in important meetings and on special projects, and serving as a model of supervision to which my participants aspired to imitate. Wanda, for example, had two supervisors she

considered mentors, both of whom invited her to meetings and took the time to discuss their decision-making processes with her. Wanda felt that these mentors helped her initiate her supervisory learning, and that, by giving her their time and attention, her mentors were saying, "I want you to learn this because I see potential for you to become a supervisor."

Supervisors that participants had in their early career and paraprofessional work were often described as mentors by participants. Myra, James, Lydia, and Naomi spoke of supervisors as mentors they had when they were undergraduates working in student affairs. James worked in a learning center as a tutor when he was an undergraduate, and then became a tutoring coordinator in that center when he was a graduate student. He found mentorship in the director of the learning center, and shared an amusing anecdote related to her influence on his choice to work in higher education. James shared,

> She was pretty pivotal in my experiences. I often will joke that the reason I did it was because of the advice that she gave me. I'm someone who drinks a lot of water and therefore I often have to use the restroom. And she jokingly said, "If you're a teacher, you have to get permission and get someone to cover your classroom anytime you have to use the rest room. But if you're in higher ed, you can just go whenever you want."…She definitely played a big role in helping me get to this place.

Like James, Linda's mentor, who supervised her as an undergraduate student working in residence life, encouraged her to pursue a career in student affairs. Linda does not describe herself as a naturally empathetic person but learned a lot from her mentor about being an empathetic supervisor. She shared, "I think I'd probably get most of [my empathy] from him. Like, he was very caring. He took time, he was individualistic." Linda noted that her mentor's individualistic approach could sometimes be viewed as favoritism, however, and she described

striving to emulate the empathy she learned from her mentor while also making sure her supervisees recognize that she is fair and respectful of everyone equally.

Naomi's mentor from her undergraduate student affairs experience was the director of the Honor's College. He inspired many of Naomi's aspirations regarding her supervisory development. She explained,

> He was one of the most developmental people I have ever worked with…As I think about who I want to be as a supervisor—the way he brought the team into things and he was not afraid to bring people into things they weren't ready for and teach them along the way—I think [he] is definitely somebody I model [my supervision] after.

Naomi also stated that this mentor demonstrated honesty and transparency that she did not often experience with other supervisors. She noted that her mentor modeled an ability to be transparent and to advocate for the things that mattered, and that those are qualities Naomi tried to emulate in her supervisory practice.

Both Naomi and Teresa had mentors who supervised them most of their professional careers, and therefore, largely influenced their approaches to supervision. Both participants ruminated over the important role these mentors played in their supervisory learning and development. Teresa reflected that many of her strengths as a supervisor came from the mentor-supervisor she had for over ten years, and often repeated language and phrases she attributed to her former supervisor. Teresa said, "Her leadership, her practices—I think I've really modeled a lot of what I do on that, some of the phrases that she says." Like Linda, Naomi and Teresa noted that their mentors were not without flaws, and shared examples of their mentors' behaviors or certain decisions their mentors made that taught Naomi and Teresa what not to do as supervisors.

Teresa expressed a lot of appreciation for her mentor-supervisor, but also recognized that her mentor contributed to a delay in Teresa's career growth. Teresa shared,

> [My supervisor] promoted all these people without making it a competitive process and kind of left me in the dust…When my current supervisor did a reference check and talked to her, she had told my current boss that I should have been an assistant director a long time ago. I'm like, well, who had control over that?

Teresa reflected that she made personal choices that also caused a stall in her career advancement. That said, over time Teresa learned that supervisors have an ability and responsibility to help their employees develop and advance in their careers and also realized that mentors are not infallible.

Naomi described her mentor-supervisor as a workaholic, which influenced her dedication to prioritize her personal life over work and to encourage her supervisees to do the same. She shared, "I love my job and I love my students, and I love my coworkers. But if I leave here tomorrow, they will replace me. My husband cannot replace me…my mom and dad cannot replace me…I want my staff to feel that way."

As participants progressed through the description of their career development, they had fewer examples of supervisors they labeled as mentors. Paul, Myra, Cheryl, and Wanda all made a similar observation that opportunities for supervisory learning and development opportunities, especially from direct supervisors, became scarcer as they progressed in their student affairs career. Paul, a housing director, noted, "Especially as I've gotten higher in my titles, that opportunity has completely evaporated…How I run the department now is with an overwhelming amount of autonomy." Wanda, a vice dean, said, "My current supervisors are not very interested in my development…My current supervisors probably don't know what I do

most days, because [at my level] there is a different level of distribution." Participants seemed to suggest that supervisors from earlier in their careers were more likely to influence supervisory learning than those who supervise mid- or late-career professionals.

Supervisory Challenge and Support

Every participant had an example of a supervisor who supported their professional learning. Additionally, several participants attributed their career advancement to the influence of past supervisors who encouraged them to take on professional challenges and supported them through the undertaking. Participants provided several examples of times when a supervisor tasked them with a professional challenge that enhanced their professional learning, development, and overall confidence in their supervisory roles. Moreover, participants reported that feeling supported by supervisors contributed to their confidence in their ability to advance into supervisory roles.

Andra had supervisors and other campus leaders who supported her supervisory learning journey by bringing her onto special projects, encouraging her to get involved in professional organizations, and devoting time to her supervisory development. Andra shared of one supervisor, "She spent time actually coaching me on how to supervise other people…She spent that time cultivating my supervision skills prior to even supervising professionals." Andra was also invited to chair campus committees and represent the campus in professional organizations such as NASPA. Andra developed confidence in her role as a supervisor through the opportunities that supervisors gave her to take on leadership roles, and she greatly benefitted from the intentional coaching she received from supervisors. Andra explained, "Having supervisors come alongside me in my supervisory learning journey—to coach me through or be

sounding boards to decisions…Coaching, I would say, was heavily [influential]. I know that many of my colleagues were not coached."

Like Andra, Wanda had supervisors who she felt contributed to her learning journey by inviting her to join meetings with campus leaders. They also intentionally took time to guide her through their decision-making processes as supervisors, and even nominated Wanda for an executive coaching program to help her develop supervisory and leadership skills. Wanda shared,

> Two supervisors at [my previous institution] specifically identified me as someone who had potential to supervise, and then they helped me develop those skills by nominating me for the executive coaching program and directly working with me to talk through supervisory issues on a regular basis.

Wanda reflected on whether other people in a similar position received comparable encouragement from supervisors and noted that voicing interest in her own professional development was a contributing factor in receiving opportunities from her supervisors. Wanda said, "I can think of a few examples…of some supervisors who were new to [supervising] and were floundering and they were not getting help, but they also were not seeking help necessarily… I was very clear that I was seeking those opportunities." That said, Wanda also noted that some supervisors were not interested in helping her develop, despite communicating she was looking for such opportunities. Moreover, as a supervisor, Wanda shared that she does not offer the same opportunities for development to every employee. Wanda explained, "When we start seeing, like, competence that rises above…or someone expresses direct interest, we do [give attention to their career development]."

Spencer, Naomi, and Cheryl also benefitted from being noticed by supervisors as employees worth developing. Spencer and Naomi received exclusive invitations for promotions from supervisors who had faith they could take on significant challenges. Spencer, for example, was asked by the provost to take an associate provost role and take over a dysfunctional student services department. Spencer said, "I'll never forget that. I asked her, I said, 'Why me?' and she said, she's like, 'You're the only one that can turn this ship around.'" Spencer then received additional support from the provost to help him learn new skills he needed to successfully supervise and revitalize the student services department. He shared,

> She did a great job of just kind of slowing things down, helping me understand like, you've got to just pick one or two things at a time… She kind of taught me the value of controlling your day and not letting your day control you…She always had time for me, regardless of what was going on, she always made time…so, I think that just making time and helping me grow meant the world to me.

Spencer noted that the challenge and support he received from this supervisor helped him learn several supervisory skills, including patience and delegation. She also supported Spencer in attending conferences and getting professional development related to student affairs departments he was overseeing but less familiar with, such as Financial Aid, so that he could better support his supervisees.

Cheryl was encouraged by a supervisor to test the boundaries of her comfort zone by presenting at conferences. Cheryl shifted from a career as an adjunct professor to a second career in academic advising and student support. As such, Cheryl explained, she had not had a lot of hands-on supervision prior to working in academic advising. It was meaningful for Cheryl,

therefore, to encounter a supervisor interested in her growth and professional development. Cheryl said,

> [My supervisor] really challenged me to step outside my comfort zone. So, she identified a skill or a strength that she felt like I had, and she gave me, you know, a task that kind of stretched me outside the norm of my job… Her taking the time…and mental energy to identify that strength and then figure out a way in which she could help me grow by pushing me to use that and stretch me a little bit more professionally—I think it was probably a very impactful time that a supervisor did that for me.

Cheryl gained confidence in her supervisory learning journey through the challenge and support received from this supervisor, and she mentioned this supervisor often as being particularly influential on her overall growth as a student affairs professional and supervisor.

The Significance of Feedback

All participants discussed feedback as a significant aspect of their supervisory practice. In their discussions, participants often focused on their dedication to providing direct and meaningful feedback to their employees in a timely manner. Seven participants also examined the impact that feedback, or the absence of feedback, from their supervisors had on their supervisory learning. Participants noted that their experiences with feedback from supervisors ultimately influenced their own supervisory learning.

Spencer, Myra, and Andra reflected on feedback practices learned from their supervisors. Spencer noted that feedback provided role clarity and helped him feel more confident as he transitioned from K-12 education to higher education. He shared,

> The feedback was constant, right? There was this constant sense of, not only validation, but sometimes kind of course correction. But there wasn't any ambiguity in terms of,

> well, am I doing a good job? Or am I meeting the expectations? Or how am I helping? What's my purpose or what's my place?

Spencer, then, learned that providing supervisees with constant feedback, and creating a space where they can also provide him with feedback was invaluable when creating a healthy team atmosphere. Spencer developed a monthly team check-in where he set an expectation for his supervisees to create and implement an agenda of important items to cover. Moreover, Spencer explained that constant feedback included addressing issues quickly and directly.

> I'm very thoughtful of monthly one-on-ones, but if there's issues or concerns, I address it right there in the now. The same is true—and I take a lot of pride in really doing this—is also, when I overhear or I see small little interactions with students or with colleagues that I find to be very powerful and meaningful, I acknowledge that right away.

Myra spoke of feedback frequently and addressed how it assisted her growth as a supervisor. Myra had a significant experience with the supervisor she had in her first full-time role, explaining,

> That supervisor…was really good at providing direct feedback. Like, he knew I was a new supervisor. He knew I like to give people autonomy, and he'd be like, "But this person that you're supervising is continually not meeting the goals you have for them. So, what are you going to do about it? Here are some suggestions I have."…I felt like he gave me good feedback that propelled me to know that it's okay to hold people accountable.

As a self-described "feeler," Myra reflected that she initially found it difficult to balance her empathetic nature with communicating critical feedback with her employees. However, by receiving critical feedback from her own supervisor, she learned that she could both care about

her team and hold them accountable when they were not meeting expectations. Myra shared, “I could really see that example, then, of how can you do both, right? Because you do have to hold your team accountable. You do have to try to help them get better.” Myra shared that the feedback lessons learned from her first supervisor influenced the expectations she has for her staff and their delivery of direct and timely feedback to their supervisees.

> I want all of our teams to be providing consistent, ongoing feedback to staff. Your evaluation should not be the time at which you're like, “Oh my gosh, I totally suck at a thing, and nobody has ever told me along the way.” So, when I'm doing my one on ones with my team…my approach is…every week, there should be some element of feedback that doesn't have to be tough. Great. Whatever that feedback needs to be, that's your time to provide the coaching, the feedback, the redirection…That's really important to me.

Like Myra, Andra and Naomi also experienced receiving critical feedback that demonstrated to them that giving tough feedback could be done with respect and compassion. Andra had several supervisors that she felt provided her with meaningful, critical feedback throughout her career that influenced her learning. She said,

> I felt like my supervisors were really accessible. And I also felt like I was open to feedback. And I benefited from having supervisors who did have to have crucial conversations with me early on – who, in my perspective, delivered hard news with dignity and respect. So, I knew that it was possible that, you know...to handle situations or have conversations privately so that...you could yield the best results in your relationship with your supervisee moving forward.

Andra described her supervisors as role models for providing feedback in a respectful and caring way. Like Myra, Andra specifically benefitted from the first supervisor she had as a new

professional in student affairs. Andra shared a feedback practice she learned from that supervisor that she continues to use as a supervisor now:

> [My previous supervisor] would type out what she wanted to say and would share it in print with me first, let me read through it on my own and then would schedule time to meet with me to discuss. And it was more co-drafted in a way, right? Because usually you have to write your own component and then your supervisor writes their own component. And that was something that really meant a lot to me. That my contribution or my perspectives may actually influence the way that she answers certain questions was really helpful. But also, that she explicitly asked for feedback, similarly – even though it wasn't something that HR required but was something that she wanted for her own professional practice. And that's something that I still utilize to this day. I was really lucky to have her so early on in my professional journey.

Some participants noted that they do not often receive feedback from their supervisors outside of mandatory annual reviews. Paul said, “There's supposed to be a review that I get annually. That can happen or sometimes it doesn't happen…Right now, the details of my feedback are minimal. I will get ‘you're doing a good job’ and that's…as far as it goes.” Penny noted, “Usually not critical types of feedback [from my supervisor], but I also am evaluated yearly, and I also have goals.” Teresa reflected that some of her supervisors provided vague feedback that led to confusion and made it difficult to learn to improve her performance. She shared,

> I feel like I've had instances where I needed to be told that maybe I wasn't up to snuff on certain areas, but I didn't get that information or I didn't pick up on it, so it wasn't transparent to me…There have been times in my career where I've received critical

> feedback and I have not understood that there's a problem that I need to fix because I wasn't told directly, "You need to do this this way because it's not working the other way."

Teresa learned that supervisors who give confusing or vague feedback will not see the expected improvement in their supervisees' performance. As such, Teresa developed values and skills related to direct and transparent communication with her supervisees. She explained,

> I try to be very clear about is if somebody is not meeting my expectations…As a supervisor, I try to be more direct without being hurtful. I'll use language like…'this is a performance concern.' I do try to be very deliberate in saying that so that they understand the mistakes of not changing what needs to be changed.

Like Teresa, participants commonly indicated that providing clear, direct, and timely feedback was an important value related to their supervisory practice.

Participants largely indicated that the experience of receiving critical feedback from their supervisors was significant to their supervisory learning journey, especially as it related to developing skills in giving feedback to others. That said, participants were also asked if they have processes for receiving feedback from their supervisees. Participants said they did not often receive genuine critical feedback from supervisees, and feedback they did receive was often informal. Furthermore, participants noted they must intentionally seek out feedback from their supervisees if they are interested in learning ways to improve. For example, in response to my question about formal feedback procedures, James said, "[From my] supervisor? Yes. Employees? No…I like to think I ask for feedback from my employees informally along the way, but there's no [formal process]." Likewise, Wanda said,

> I've asked for [feedback from my supervisees] in like, 'Is there anything you wish I was doing or not doing?' or 'Is there another way that you would like support from me?' but, at least the supervisees I have at the moment, do not regularly offer feedback to me unless I ask for it.

Teresa and Cheryl discussed watching for non-verbal cues from their supervisees as an indication of dissatisfaction with their supervision, which prompted them to follow up with their supervisees to discuss any perceived issues. Only two participants, Spencer and Wanda, mentioned having 360-evaluation processes.

"Bad Supervision"

Supervisors were largely described by participants dichotomously, broken into categories of "good" and "bad." Good supervisors were described by participants as mentors, supporters, and cheerleaders. These supervisors also had traits and characteristics that participants reported as desirable in a supervisor, and they expressed wanting to integrate those traits into their own supervisory style. Bad supervisors were those whose behaviors the participants deemed negative, using words such as unsupportive, toxic, abusive, disconnected, and micromanager. Participants noted that experiences with bad supervisors taught them about supervisory traits, characteristics, and behaviors they should avoid in their practice.

Paul described his first supervisor in his professional career as "negligent in their role." As an early-career supervisor in student affairs, Paul noted that he needed a lot from his supervisor but realized that his supervisor was burnt-out and disconnected from the work. Paul shared,

> There were a lot of identity and equity issues that were salient to [my supervisor's] identities, and I think I was very empathetic to the fact that their experience at that school

> was horrendous. But they would show up to one-on-ones and be like, 'Everything's okay, yeah?'… or they would say, 'I have a hair appointment in 20 minutes.' So those messages were like, 'whatever it is that you need, don't bring it up.' E-mails didn't get responded to. There'd be moments where [my supervisor] would have a one-on-one scheduled and I would walk over to the central office and be like, 'Hey, like, are we meeting?' and they're like 'Oh, yeah, I forgot.'…[my supervisor] neglected things so much that I'd never want to be in that space.

Paul's experience of bad supervision taught him the value of being responsive, present, and reliable for his supervisees.

Wanda noted that experiences with bad supervision influenced the development of her supervisory style. She described feeling unsupported by her first supervisor as a new professional. Wanda shared, "I did not find her to be competent. I did not receive much direction from her, and I continued to express what I thought were creative, innovative ideas. I had a lot of energy and she dismissed many of my ideas." This early experience of feeling dismissed and unsupported taught Wanda that employees who feel happy and supported will want to stay and want to contribute to the organization. As such, Wanda described looking for ways to help new, young professionals channel their energy and enthusiasm into appropriate and impactful ways to contribute.

Penny experienced what she described as an abusive relationship with a supervisor for over two years.

> I was actually in an abusive relationship with [my supervisor]…It was basically the cycle of abuse. I never knew what her mood was going to be on any given day. Her strange reward structure publicly, lots of, like, public shaming. It was my first ever experience

> professionally where someone wasn't 400% thrilled with my work. She always found a way to...nitpick things. She would hold information back and expect me to know it. It was a truly awful experience.

Penny felt on edge with this supervisor, noting that, "It was always dangerous and felt unsafe to go and ask her a question." However, Penny also felt that the experiences she had with this supervisor taught her a lot about supervision and how she wanted to be perceived as a supervisor. Penny shared, "That [experience] informed a great deal of my approach to supervising my staff moving forward…I never want people to feel like this—like she made me feel. That, to me, was very helpful in forming my identity."

More than any of my participants, Linda described experiencing a significant amount of trauma from bad supervisors across her career in student affairs and higher education. She reflected,

> I've had a lot of bad supervisors; I'm not going to lie. I've had probably ten supervisors in my [student affairs] life and I've been doing this for 16 years. I've had, if you don't count my RA life, two good supervisors. That's bad. Yeah, for me that's bad. If it was half, I'd be okay with that. But to have two good supervisors?…so I learned a lot about what I did not want to do, what I did not want to create…I learned a lot from the people who didn't do good supervising. And that's sad because I think a lot of my hurt and trauma from supervision came from those people and still reflects on how I articulate myself in my first go-around with new supervisors.

Linda's first professional position in student affairs was in residence life at a university in the rural south where she said, "I was the first woman of color, first woman who was Black ever to work there. And I was 22 years old." Linda explained that the work environment was hostile and

overtly racist, noting that, “I was called the N-word almost daily by my co-worker.” Linda explained that this co-worker also displayed oppressive behavior to Linda’s supervisees. Despite Linda filing complaints, no action was taken by her supervisor or her university against the employee. This was a traumatic and salient learning experience for Linda. She shared,

> [I realized] your supervisor can make or break your success by how they, what they tolerate in a space, right?...[My supervisor] never stood up for me, never told that person that, that behavior is not tolerated. That showed me, as a supervisor, you’re not a safe person for me. So for me, understanding that, I had to become the safe person.

Linda went on to explain that this first experience with supervision in her early professional career taught her about being an advocate for herself and her employees, but it also instilled a need to guard herself from building relationships with colleagues, supervisees, and supervisors. Moreover, this experience in conjunction with other negative experiences with subsequent supervisors led Linda to develop a fierce independence. She shared, “If nobody wants to walk with me, nobody supports me, that’s fine. I’m walking. I’ve walked this journey for 16-plus years by myself, and I’m going to keep walking it by myself.”

Participants’ interactions with bad supervision taught them how they did not want to behave as a supervisor and how they did not want their supervisees to feel about interactions with them. Throughout the “Supervisors as Influences on Supervisor Learning” section of this chapter, a common theme that emerged is the impact supervisors have on the supervisory learning of early-career student affairs professionals. Several participants reflected that their early experiences with supervisors were salient to their supervisory learning and development. In those reflections they noted wanting to be like the supervisor they felt was supportive and “good,” or otherwise wanted to be different from the supervisor who was “bad.”

Emotional Learning & Supervisory Influence

All participants completed a reflective writing activity where they described one positive and one negative emotional reaction they had to an interaction with a supervisor. Participants were also asked how the interaction with a supervisor influenced their supervisory learning journey. The most frequent positive emotions reported by participants were feeling appreciated, validated, and affirmed by their supervisors. Other significant positive emotions included feeling confident, acknowledged/recognized, a sense of pride, joy/happiness, trusted, supported, and cared for. The most common learning outcomes from positive interactions with supervisors included developing values related to supporting the career and professional development of their supervisees, acknowledging supervisees for their contributions and achievements, and being present with their supervisees through communication and feedback.

Linda, Cheryl, and Wanda described times when a supervisor gave them additional projects or responsibilities which led to increased feelings of self-confidence and of being trusted by their supervisors. For example, Linda expressed a goal to her supervisor to develop a full employee manual for their office. Her supervisor supported the goal and indicated that, “it would help move this department for years to come.” This interaction made Linda feel proud, cared for, supported, and trusted. Given she experienced so much trauma in the workplace earlier in her career, Linda importantly reflected, “I felt someone saw me for my value not just for my race, or as a token, but as someone who was knowledgeable.” Linda explained that this interaction taught her to make space for staff at all levels to have opportunities and challenges that help their professional development. Linda said, “Even when they don’t want to, [my staff] are challenged to see the trust I have in their vision.”

Wanda was tasked by a supervisor to absorb the recruitment and enrollment team into her student success unit. Wanda noted that this was not a request, but that her supervisor did want Wanda's input before implementing changes. The supervisor praised Wanda's work in other areas and explained they felt Wanda's leadership would be beneficial to this team and the college. Wanda felt "flattered and proud" that her supervisor considered her for this responsibility. She also felt trusted, reassured that she would have her supervisor's support during the transition, and she felt included in an important decision-making process. Wanda shared, "I also felt comfortable and reassured that if I wasn't able to handle the increased workload, I would not be judged or at risk of termination." For Wanda, this interaction instilled a wish to be inclusive of her employees in her supervisory practice. Wanda explained, "This interaction made me realize that I can give the accurate impression that I have the final say on the decision but that I truly want to be sensitive to [employees'] feelings and reactions to any decisions."

Myra, Spencer, James, and Teresa described situations in which they were recognized by a supervisor for excelling in their role. Myra's supervisor worked for months to convince leadership that Myra deserved a promotional title change from associate director to director in residence life. While there were organizational reasons the promotion made sense, Myra noted that her supervisor was also adamant about honoring Myra's work and successes at the institution. Myra shared, "My favorite part was [my supervisor's] incredibly kind email to the department and campus partners announcing the promotion. He shared stories of the ways I have improved the department and campus and was genuinely excited in his tone." This interaction elicited feelings of joy, respect, and appreciation from Myra, and she explained that this interaction influenced how she works to celebrate her team. Myra is sure to share her teams'

successes with campus partners, but also shared, “I have to go to bat for our staff with HR to work through raises, updated job descriptions, and so on, and I am happy to do this if it means helping to support [employees’] career development.”

Andra, Naomi, Paul, and Penny provided examples of when they felt seen by their supervisors. They described these interactions as humanizing and reflected feeling valued and cared for by their supervisors. Naomi nervously shared news of her pregnancy with her supervisor, noting that her due date was not an ideal time of year to be on maternity leave for 12 weeks. While Naomi was nervous about what her pregnancy meant for her office, she was elated when her supervisor’s first reaction to the news was excitement and support. Naomi shared,

> [My supervisor’s] initial response to telling him was to start jumping up and down and clapping. He shared how excited he was for me and my family…In that moment, I felt supported by his response. He did not jump to the work aspects of the job and focused on me as a person.

This interaction reminded Naomi that her supervisees should be treated as whole people “and that the worry about the impact can wait.” It has become increasingly important to Naomi that she be present and celebrate milestones with her staff, noting that the work will still be there.

Andra described her supervisor as a person who often took time to authentically check-in with her staff, which allowed her supervisor to easily recognize someone’s “poker face.” When Andra was having a challenging day and masking her emotions, her supervisor brought her a meditation about mindset and a prayer for strength and clarity. Andra shared,

> [My supervisor] read both the mediation and prayer, and I started to cry. It was precisely the message that I needed in the moment. She gave me a hug and asked how she could support me during the challenging scenario. Just her asking to help gave me strength. Her

> knowing that I needed a supportive colleague and supervisor gave me strength…She showed me how much she cared.

Her supervisor's demonstration of care and support deeply affected Andra's development as a supervisor. Andra explained that, "it's vital that I get to know my supervisees." As such, she spends purposeful time doing personal check-ins and looking for ways to support them. She said, "I want [my supervisees] to know that I personally care about their personal and professional growth. It doesn't mean that there won't be difficult scenarios. And I want them to know I'm here in the ups and downs."

It is clear that participants developed positive relationships with their supervisors and with their institutions when interactions with supervisors involved feeling recognized, acknowledged, supported, and trusted. Participants described these emotions as feelings they wanted to replicate for their supervisees, and therefore, strived to demonstrate care for their supervisees on a personal level and respect them as professionals.

In the second half of the reflective writing activity, the most frequent negative emotions reported by participants were feelings of anger and embarrassment. Participants also reported feeling guilt/remorse, confused, and discouraged by their experiences with supervisors. The most common learning outcomes for participants included developing values related to being clear and open communicators, providing direct, timely, and relevant feedback to supervisees, establishing healthy professional boundaries, and creating safe spaces for supervisees.

Spencer and Paul gave examples of when they felt undermined by a supervisor, which led them to feel disrespected and to lose trust in their supervisor. Spencer, with his supervisor's support, put an employee on a performance improvement plan (PIP). After weeks of documenting concerning behavior, and the employee not meeting the terms of their improvement

plan, Spencer shared with his supervisor that he intended to terminate the person's employment. However, he met resistance from his supervisor. Spencer relayed,

> My supervisor stated that she would not support termination and that I needed to supply additional coaching and retain the employee. She went on to say that she would not support, at anytime, me terminating an employee and that I needed to 'make it work.'

This interaction with his supervisor was jarring for Spencer, as he had felt he had gone through all the necessary and appropriate protocols, including working with human resources, to do what he felt was right for his team: terminating a disruptive employee. The employee was allowed to retain their position at the institution and Spencer noted, "Unfortunately, their presence continued to cause great chaos within the team and remained a source of frustration for the remainder of my tenure." Spencer's supervisor's lack of support and intolerance of extending the conversation further led to Spencer feeling his trust had been irrevocably violated. As such, he decided to actively look for employment opportunities elsewhere. Spencer reflected, "This interaction made me much more aware of the value of open communication and trust between supervisor and supervisee."

Paul experienced a similar situation with a supervisor. After two undergraduate resident assistants that Paul supervised violated employment and student conduct policies, Paul decided to terminate both student employees. However, after the parents of the two students got involved, Paul's supervisor decided to overturn Paul's decision to terminate their employment. Paul described feeling anger, confusion, and humiliation among other negative emotions. He explained, "My supervisor overturning my decisions inadvertently gave all of the remaining RAs permission to ignore the expectation set by our department…My supervisor's decisions decreased the validity, reputation, and rapport of me and my office with the student staff." In

addition to losing trust in his supervisor, Paul lost respect noting that his supervisor displayed hypocritical behavior that was not in alignment with department values nor with statements the supervisor previously gave regarding terminating unsatisfactory student employees. Paul was thus influenced by this experience to uplift and support decisions his supervisees make. Paul reflected,

> I know I can't be perfect in my decision making, but I learned that it's essential to support the important, logical, effective, and best decisions made by your employees. Your reputation, morale, and credibility depend on it. Sometimes convenient decisions have a negative impact on those that report to you. It's important to stand with them on certain issues and hear their justification before making any decisions that heavily impact them.

Both Spencer and Paul demonstrated that trust is fundamental to the supervisor-supervisee relationship and that relationship is lost when trust is violated.

Teresa, Myra, Wanda, and James described situations in which they were given untimely negative feedback by a supervisor. Subsequently, these participants felt embarrassed, shamed, and resentful. Teresa was given a slightly negative performance review that she was not expecting. In addition to shame and embarrassment at being poorly assessed, she felt angry that she had been given no indication about poor performance prior to the performance evaluation. Teresa shared, "I feel strongly that the performance evaluation is not where an employee should be learning about issues the supervisor has with them for the first time." Teresa explained that this interaction led her to develop "self-regulation/self-assessment skills so that I could better recognize if my performance was dropping." Moreover, she recognized the importance of being a clear communicator with her supervisees.

James received a sternly worded email from his supervisor on a Friday before a three-day weekend stating the need to speak with James as soon as they returned to the office the next week and provided no additional information. As such, James felt anxious about the meeting throughout the long weekend. When he finally met with his supervisor, James was reprimanded for something he said during a group interaction that included the supervisor. James shared, "She told me that she felt I was disrespectful to her the week prior…She did not highlight the specific interaction and, since several days had passed, I could not recall what exactly had been said." James felt remorse, confusion, and frustration from this interaction, explaining,

> I felt remorse because, despite my lack of intention and lack of understanding of what had happened, my actions caused someone to feel disrespected, which goes against my core value of respecting others. I felt confused because it was not clear on what I had done wrong; while I said I would be more mindful moving forward, it was difficult to know what exactly to be mindful of to avoid a similar issue in the future. I was frustrated because of how the issue was approached.

This experience taught James the value of delivering clear and timely feedback and assuming goodwill on the part of his employees when they make a mistake. He strives to never make his employees feel the anxiety and confusion he felt in his interaction with his supervisor.

Penny, Linda, Andra, and Naomi described times when they felt unsafe or powerless at work, which impacted their confidence. Penny was shouted at by a supervisor in a staff meeting for not knowing a common idiom. She shared,

> We were at a staff meeting talking casually among the group before the meeting started, and someone said, "you don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater." I had never heard that before and laughingly said so. My supervisor angrily screamed out,

> "How do you not know that? Did you grow up under a rock? I'm just baffled at how you survive in this world without knowing these basic things." All conversation stopped and everyone stared at her in surprise. She was truly agitated with me. I did not respond to her question, and she eventually started the meeting.

Penny described her relationship with this supervisor as toxic and abusive. In this instance, Penny regretted thinking her casual conversation was held in a safe space with this supervisor in attendance. Penny felt shamed by her supervisor, and angry for being embarrassed in such a way. She learned the value of creating safe environments for staff to be themselves in both group and individual settings.

Andra worked in a department she described as feeling "like a prison." Andra explained, "We were not encouraged to take lunch or breaks. It was expected for us to remain in the office unless we told the whole team where we were going and for how long." She provided an example of a time she needed to get an oil-change during the lunch hour and would be gone from the office for less than 30 minutes. Five minutes after she left the office, Andra received a group Teams message to the entire department from her supervisor asking why she stepped away from the office while others were in a meeting. Andra shared,

> I was livid. I was embarrassed. I felt trapped. I easily worked 60 hours a week every week for the team with little-to-no acknowledgement of my work. And my supervisor called me out in front of both students and professionals. My supervisor made me feel less professional. My supervisor made me feel like my performance at work was not good enough. I felt devalued and used.

This experience influenced Andra to focus on establishing healthy boundaries for work, both for herself and for her supervisees. Overall, Andra described wanting to develop relationships with

her supervisees in which they feel valued and supported. Andra reflected, “I want my supervisees to know their worth, to know the importance of setting professional boundaries, to know how to navigate crucial conversations, and to know what an appreciative work environment should look like.”

As discussed in the previous subsection (see “Bad Supervision”), Linda described working in an incredibly unsafe and traumatic work environment as a Black woman in the rural south. Linda reiterated her experience of being called “the Black one” and the N-word by an abusive co-worker, and noted, “When I brought this to the attention of my supervisor, he stated that was just an easy way to describe me…I was the only Black person in the office, so there was no need to make this clear.” Linda described feeling unsupported and uncared for by her supervisor and institution. As such, she felt fear and anger, and that her workplace was both toxic and dangerous. Linda explained that this experience developed her advocacy skills, and that she learned to directly address any time the workplace develops toxic characteristics. Linda said, “When I hear about things from all levels of staff, I take it very seriously. Because this happened to me, and I was left alone without a support system.”

Participants showcased that the way an interaction with a supervisor made them feel was significant to their learning journey. The positive emotions described by participants were feelings of support and recognition, and that these were emotional responses they wanted to replicate for their supervisees. In contrast, negative emotions described were embarrassment, anger, and a loss of trust in their supervisors. As such, participants learned the skills they needed to develop to avoid ever replicating those negative emotions for their supervisees. In both cases, participants learned to be better communicators, to value their supervisees as whole people, and to create safe and supportive workplace environments.

Throughout this section, participants provided several salient examples of the importance of the supervisor-supervisee relationship and its influence on how participants learned supervision. In the following section, I provide evidence of how participants' practical experience and their reflections on experiences that influenced their supervisory learning journey.

Learning Through Experience and Reflection

Overwhelmingly, my study participants indicated that practical experiences and their reflections on those experiences were a significant influence on their learning of supervision. Participants focused on their own observations and instances of trial and error in practice as the primary experiential learning methods used to learn supervision. They also described using a "community of peers" as a mechanism for sharing experiences and learning supervision from others in the field. Finally, participants indicated that learning supervision is a continuous process of experiencing, reflecting, and adjusting.

Observation and Emulation

Eight participants stated that observation of past and present supervisors and other campus leaders was a prevalent way they learned to supervise. While all participants provided examples of how experiences with supervisors influenced how they learned to supervise, observation stood out as a singular type of experiential learning. Participants described observation primarily as the action of watching a supervisor's behavior and then judging the supervisor's actions as good or bad. Participants then recognized what to emulate or not emulate in their own supervisory practice. Participants were attuned to their emotional reactions to these observational interactions. As Paul noted, "For lack of better terms, it's like monkey-see,

monkey-do, or like recognizing what not to do and like how certain things made me feel as the supervisee." Similarly, Andra shared,

> I first observe. That is my first real influence—is observing the players and observing the contexts. Observing actions and behaviors, and even feelings of, you know, perceived feelings…observation has always been really important to me, and I've seen it definitely play out in my supervisory learning journey.

As another example, Wanda stated, "One [way of learning] is direct observation. So again, looking at supervisors—my own supervisors, and also other people who are leaders—and, you know, taking the time to think about what I liked, what I didn't like, what did I respond to?"

Participants most often described their observations as either positive or negative experiences and described how those observational experiences turned into lessons in supervision. Positive observations influenced them to adopt certain traits, characteristics, and habits of their supervisors. Teresa, for example, had a supervisor for about ten years who she described as a mentor and a person she continues to emulate.

> When I stepped into the coordinator role, I really looked to [my supervisor] as a mentor. So I learned a lot through observing her and seeing how she navigated things…I think, you know, watching how she supervised was really how I learned to supervise. And I hear myself saying things she used to say. So I'm kind of like, you hear that from your mom, but it's my supervisor [I hear] as I'm talking and doing supervisory things in this role.

Linda learned about the importance of collaboration and establishing relationships from a supervisor. She reflected on how observing this supervisor, a white male with 40 years of experience in student affairs field, helped her gain agency as a woman of color in the field.

> He taught me that every collaboration, every partnership, there's an opportunity to grow and there's an opportunity to create a long-lasting relationship that will help you…I think I do that very well now because of the years I spent watching him negotiate his space as a man, and as a white man—especially in realizing, like, I could do this to as a woman of color, and teach my staff to do that.

Another observation that participants described as positive was supervisors who modeled authenticity in their role, and who encouraged employees to be their authentic selves. Authenticity was defined by participants as an act of bringing one's "whole self" to the workplace. Teresa had a supervisor who modeled many supervisory traits she did not want to emulate, but she appreciated that he did demonstrate authenticity. She explained, "He was very much himself. Like, he brought himself into the role. And so, that was kind of when I first started feeling that permission to be a little bit more legitimately me in a professional way." Similarly, James shared about a previous supervisor, "[She] was always, always her full self, and I could see that she brought that with her to different trainings, to different sessions." Observing and emulating authenticity was also mentioned by Wanda, Linda, Myra, Penny, and Andra. For Wanda, authenticity was demonstrated as taking time to allow folks to share about their personal lives in the workplace. "He'll take the time to ask people about what's going on in their personal life. He'll check in and say like, 'hey, before we dive into these serious work topics, what's going on for you outside of work?'" Observing when supervisors allowed others to share parts of themselves not related to work made participants feel comfortable being more authentic themselves and emulating that practice as supervisors.

Negative observations led participants to try and emulate traits, characteristics, and habits that were in opposition to those they judged as negative. James shared, "My first director…was

not a positive role model for me—very micromanager, not very clear in direction. You'd only really hear from her when things were going awry. And I really have tried not to be her in my leadership style." Andra shared that she tries not to emulate any power-related traits and prefers to create a collaborative environment for her supervisees. She explained,

> I've had a very divisive, pushy, ambitious, power-driven supervisor…when people made mistakes, they were fearful to even mention to our supervisor. And I want to create an environment where learning is key, and learning involves making mistakes and taking responsibility for those things.

Paul had a supervisor he described as burnt-out in their role and he observed that they were therefore negligent and disconnected as a supervisor. Paul reflected, "I never want to be in that space, no matter how burnt out I was. I always wanted to be responsive. I always wanted to be present…I never wanted to be somebody who was completely disconnected from the work…where I was unreliable." Some participants also described "toxic positivity," as a negative-associated observed supervisory trait. Naomi shared, "I try not to emulate some of the toxic positivity of the like, 'We can do it all!' We cannot do it all. If we add something, we must take something off." Similarly, Linda said of her supervisor, "He is Captain Positivity, and 'We can do it!...We got this! We're going to take on more tasks.' And I'm like, but how are we going to do that?" These participants learned to be conscious of the additional work and stress that an overly positive supervisory approach had on supervisees.

Several participants discussed observations regarding work-life balance and self-care. Some of these observations were positive in that they witnessed supervisors and leaders modeling or encouraging things like taking paid-time-off (PTO), not working outside scheduled work hours, and prioritizing family/personal life over work. However, others felt negatively

about observations of supervisors who prioritized work over self-care and their family/personal life. In both cases the observed behavior influenced how participants learned to model work-life balance for their supervisees. Those participants who observed supervisors modeling positive work-life balance and self-care behaviors shared that this became a professional value of theirs and described appreciating supervisors who modeled that behavior.

For those who observed supervisors not prioritizing self-care and work-life balance, some realized early on that they did not want to perpetuate that behavior in the workplace. James had a supervisor he really appreciated, but said, "She did not have any boundaries. She worked 20-hour days. She didn't know how to say 'no.' So that's something that I try and…set limits." Naomi described her supervisor as a "workaholic who was there all the time and who could never put his phone down." Yet, she watched as her supervisor was forced to re-evaluate his priorities after the loss of his wife, which cemented Naomi's understanding that supervisors have a responsibility to model work-life balance and self-care for their employees. She shared, "It took something so traumatic to prioritize his life. I think for me, like, that incident is probably the most profound. Who do I want to be as a supervisor and as a person, and how do I want to model that for my staff?"

Other participants described initially emulating poor work-life balance and self-care behaviors as they had learned this was an expectation of the job. Paul and Linda, both professionals in residence life, described getting to a point of burn-out in their careers before realizing that their learned behaviors were having negative effects on their life and career. Paul said, "I worked myself past my limit, right? Like, you're not supposed to work every day of the week for two months…I need to model for [my supervisees] that this isn't your life, this isn't your world. This is an aspect of your day-to-day and you need to balance that."

Overall, the observed behavior of supervisors and leaders in their purview was described by many participants as an important way of learning how they wanted to supervise. Participants' reactions to observations demonstrated that their learning was often connected to how the observation made them feel as supervisees. Moreover, they learned how they wanted to make their own supervisees feel or not feel, which influenced their decisions about how to supervise.

Trial and Error

All participants reflected on mistakes they made in their supervisory learning journey. That said, eight of my eleven participants referred to forms of trial and error as a primary way they learned supervision in student affairs. These participants also used phrases such "learning by doing" and "through my own experience" to describe instances of trial and error in their supervisory learning journey. Myra shared, "A lot of it was learning by doing, a lot of it was by learning through mistakes." Naomi reflected, "Trial and error I think has been a way I've learned supervision. I've done some things and I've sat back afterwards and reflected and been like, 'oh, I did that really bad.' Or I've sat back and been like, 'oh, that was great.'" Paul offered simply, "I think it's just a lot of trial and error for me." Participants revealed that entering new supervisory situations meant they had to experiment and make mistakes to learn. As Spencer explained, "I've learned through trial and error in my failures…I try to be very upfront with our staff that we're going to try some things, we're going to fail. But the only time you really, truly fail is when you get knocked out and you don't get back up."

Trials

Trial was often described by participants as encountering unfamiliar situations and experimenting with solutions to learn from the outcome. Participants discussed their decision-

making processes and varying degrees of preparedness for the situation. Some trials involved fewer errors than others. Andra described an early career hiring decision as a successful trial. She strategically hired a supervisee with significantly more experience than she had in higher education and student affairs with the intention of having an intergenerational office and an employee with a wealth of knowledge related to the community they were serving. Though it can be intimidating for a young supervisor to lead folks with more experience, Andra felt very secure in her decision. She shared,

> I've always been aware that I'm not going to be the expert in all things, and that it's important to surround yourself with folks that do bring more experience or knowledge into a space…you shouldn't be insecure about what other people bring to the table…I personally had just moved from [another state], and so I thought it would be a good blend of like, an outside perspective and then one that's been in the community for many, many years…I saw this person as an asset to the team, and not a threat. And I thought we communicated well with one another, which was really helpful.

Supervising someone with so much experience and competence gave Andra an early opportunity to learn about trust and confidence in her supervisees.

Linda provided an example of a successful trial in her supervision related to implementing new techniques in teaching her supervisees to embrace trial and error as a learning tool themselves. Linda observed that some of her younger supervisees look to her for clear, defined answers to every challenge. Reflecting on generational differences, she said, "I think my generation of professionals were much more like, oh, we'll try something and fail... [My supervisees] don't want to fail. They hate failure. And I'm like, 'What's wrong with failure? Not everything you do is gonna be right the first time.'" Linda saw this as an issue in that her

younger supervisees were less interested in using their own critical thinking skills to develop strategies to help them tackle their professional challenges. As a trial on her part, Linda integrated more open-ended questions in her one-on-ones with supervisees to help them come up with their own solutions. She shared,

> When I meet with my staff, [I say], 'Ok, so that's the problem. I hear what you're saying. So, what do you need? What do you think we need to do or what to do?' And that's the hard part, right? Because what they want is an answer from me. But they won't own the answer. It becomes my answer…Anytime I give a solution or a suggestion, '[Linda] said to do this, so I'm gonna run with it.' No understanding or process of like, 'maybe I could take this, maybe I can think of something different.' ...So now, I pivot when I meet with my staff. [I say], 'I'm not giving you a solution, I want to hear what you come up with first.'

Linda's shift towards putting the onus of solution development on her supervisees has helped them become more independent and allowed her to take on an advisory role. Linda demonstrated that trying something new with staff can lead to learning for the supervisor and the team overall.

The COVID-19 Pandemic was mentioned by all participants as a challenging and unprecedented time in their supervisory learning journey. They responded to the influx of unprecedented needs to varying degrees of success. Some participants discussed challenges of hiring during the pandemic, others gave examples of changes it caused upon their return to campus. Myra shared that she learned during the pandemic that she did not enjoy remote supervision. She proclaimed, "I definitely learned…remote supervision—not my favorite…[I] learned that supervising people during COVID. I was like 'oh, I don't like this. I'm not skilled at

this.'" The pandemic provided many opportunities for participants to develop experimental strategies related to their supervisory responsibilities.

James experienced several challenges during the pandemic, especially as he was new to his supervisory position at the onset of COVID. He reminisced,

> I was only six months into my job, and I was like, go-go-go mode trying to get a plan together for two weeks of being virtual…I was told to develop a plan if the entire university goes remote, if only portions of it [go remote], if only classes are [remote] – develop some contingency plans, because we really didn't know. One of those contingency plans required my staff to still be on site. I was really just thinking about the operations—only about getting the job done. Everyone in the room was like…if you require us all to be here with this deadly virus going around, we are all going to quit. And it was a moment for me like, okay, I wasn't really thinking about the people here. I was thinking about the job and that's it.

This was a salient moment for James. He expressed feelings of guilt in that, in his haste to problem solve during this time of tumult, he abandoned one of his core values: that people come first. Moving forward, James adopted methods of asking for input from both supervisors and supervisees in his decision-making processes.

There were several difficult decisions to make during the pandemic, to be sure. That said, there were other pandemic-related challenges participants had to navigate once their campuses opened back up to in-person work and classes. Cheryl discussed having to make decisions about remote work as the pandemic dissipated:

> Coming out of the pandemic with remote work—that's been a big issue. Our state governance said, 'Oh, no, we're an open state and you are back on campus full-time.' But

> I was noticing that other people [on campus] were still allowed to work remotely, but there really had not been any guidelines on what was allowed, what was the practice…Some of the written [policies] and what's in practice is not the same. So just trying to kind of—which I consider a supervisory part of my role—having to just kind of create some guidelines on my own.

Cheryl found that the lack of clear guidance from her institution and the knowledge that some campus offices provided more remote days for staff than others made her decision-making process and communicating those decisions with her staff more difficult. Cheryl said, "That can be kind of tough…balancing those types of issues, which I consider supervisory kind of issues." Cheryl used campus colleagues as a resource and considered the needs of students and staff in her decision-making process. Cheryl was concerned with consistency and clear communication with her staff and building experimental policies through collaboration. Overall, the COVID-19 Pandemic was universally challenging for supervisors in student affairs, but also included opportunity for developing solutions unique to the needs of staff, students, and the institution.

Some supervisory trials provided many opportunities for participants to make mistakes in their decision-making processes. Several participants, such as Teresa, Spencer, James, Naomi, Linda, and Wanda shared experiences working with dysfunctional teams and difficult staff members. These participants shared examples of gaps in their supervisory skillsets necessary for navigating the challenges, of being naïve about some nuances involved in the situations, of making mistakes, and of finding support in supervisors and colleagues. Spencer, for example, had a promotion opportunity that involved taking over a large, dysfunctional unit. Spencer was hesitant to take the offer as he felt unprepared for undertaking such a challenge. He explained,

> I went from a small staff that got along, we're on the same page. I didn't have a lot of micromanagement that I needed to do. I just let them work their magic and they did it…I then was going to go into a situation…that was the far end of the opposite spectrum. There was a lot of discourse, there was a lot of drama, there was a lot of politics, there were a lot of people that just weren't doing their job.

After accepting the position, Spencer was overwhelmed with the number of challenges he did not foresee and for which he felt unprepared, saying, "I underestimated how big of a job it was. I just saw it in terms of like, staffing challenges." For this trial, Spencer turned to the person to whom he would report in this role for support and guidance. He shared,

> I was very upfront with [my future supervisor] and said, 'This is going to be a really, really big challenge. I'm going to need you to help me through this.' Because I knew that there were going to be disciplinary issues, there's going to be conduct, there's going to be performance plans, there is likely going to be terminations.

Spencer credited this supervisor as a helpful resource as he navigated this challenge. They provided Spencer with advice regarding delegating tasks, managing his commitments, and avoiding making hasty decisions.

Naomi revealed in her second interview that she recently had two employees quit, and said, "They would both say they left, in part, because of me." She went on to explain that there was politicking by an individual in the institution that also influenced her employees' decision to leave. Having worked at this institution for a relatively short amount of time, Naomi reflected that she was underprepared for the politics she encountered in this instance. She explained,

> There's a level of the political nature of [supervision], and I think I'm aware of the political nature. But how I bring my staff into that—like, I've always been one just to

> shield them from it, like navigate it myself. In this instance, I think shielding these young professionals from it meant that someone else wasn't shielding them from it. [I learned that] if I'm not on the forefront of supporting them in that way, somebody else is going to. In my career, that person has always been someone who had the division, the unit, and my team's best interest at heart. This was the first time that I came up against that person who didn't—that had their own selfish gain.

Naomi, then, learned that strategies that may have worked elsewhere do not always translate to a new environment with a different context. She reflected, "There's more politics…I've slowly learned that. And I got a real crash course these last few weeks." This experience led Naomi to feel disappointment with herself and with her colleague who influenced her employees decisions, but she also expressed feeling supported by her team to move forward and address the challenges in the future.

The opportunity to experiment with supervisory decision-making processes provided occasions for participants to learn and grow in their roles. That said, trial is not a learning device on its own. It is a catalyst for success and for mistakes. In the next subsection, I describe my findings regarding errors participants made, and the important lessons they took away from those experiences.

Errors

Participants focused on their errors as significant influences on their learning, many referring to mistakes as defining moments in their supervisory learning journey. These mistakes led to changes in how participants later approached their supervisory challenges. Penny described learning from mistakes when she entered a new supervisory role:

> I would say, making some small mistakes along the way—that I had the best of intentions but just weren't, in effect, the best for the people or team…When I started my job, I would have said, 'I want to treat all staff equally. That's really important, to treat everyone equally.' I still agree with that, but I think I've transitioned to more of an equity mindset. It's more like, no, I'm not going to treat everyone equally because not everyone needs the same thing. I'm going to treat people slightly differently but be open and transparent with the team about why.

In learning from earlier mistakes, Penny was able to develop more transparent communication with her team and was able to make supervisory decisions regarding what was best for individuals' needs and still met the goals of the unit.

Myra, Spencer, James, and Teresa all described making similar mistakes related to not immediately holding supervisees accountable for problematic behavior. Myra shared that she did not initially call out an employee who consistently made inappropriate gender-related comments. She later realized that it was hurting her team. Myra explained, "I certainly let some things slide, and then I got feedback from some of the people on my team—particularly one of the women on my team that was like, 'People shouldn't be talking to you or me like that.'" Myra's initial lack of response and subsequently, being held accountable by a team member was a salient moment to learning a lesson in supervision:

> That is actually a huge thing I feel like I've brought now to my role – is that I don't just let that stuff slide. It's like, if you're saying that stuff, we're either going to talk then in the moment, we're going to go, 'Hold on, pause, not okay. You and I are going to talk later.' Where the previous [Myra] would be like, 'Oh, you meant this,' or, 'Oh, I'll just talk with them individually.' I think I learned in that role that there are times when, for

> the good of the team, it's important to say, 'What you're saying right now is not appropriate.'

Myra learned a lot through this experience about the importance of giving direct, critical feedback early in a supervising relationship, saying, "I learned a really big lesson on not being afraid to give that feedback." She reflected being timid providing feedback earlier in her career.

> I was always, at the beginning of my journey, tentative about providing that tougher feedback and constructive feedback, because I'm a big feeler…So it really would like, eat at my heart to give people that feedback. But then I would then not give them the feedback they really needed to get, whether generally for their growth and development, or literally because they needed it because something went wrong…Those experiences impacted me.

Myra looked to her own supervisors for a model of how to provide constructive feedback to employees. Over time, with errors and with practice, Myra gained more knowledge and confidence in being able to give her staff the feedback they needed for their professional learning and development.

Teresa reflected on a gap in her supervisory skillsets that was eventually detrimental to her relationship with a supervisee. Teresa had an employee she supervised for about seven years. She described this person as a strong worker, one who was reliable and demanded little of Teresa as a supervisor. At a certain point, this stellar supervisee faltered in their work, and Teresa felt underdeveloped in the supervisory skills needed to help the employee manage her professional issues. Teresa relayed, "I didn't have the skillset to help her navigate that professionally, and so I ended up parting ways as far as supervisor and report...I feel like I failed her in a lot of ways…that was a really pivotal time for me to recognize that I had some skill building to do."

This experience and Teresa's feelings of failure and guilt informed how Teresa approached her supervisory relationships moving forward. She shared, "I learned a lot…it informed how I observed my team, how I checked in with my team on an individual basis…I try to keep a better eye on people's non-verbals and I do more reflecting."

While participants shared regrets about mistakes made as supervisors, they also reflected on how important mistakes were to help them learn how to better respond in the future. For example, Spencer shared that he did not initially respond to a strained relationship between two supervisees, thinking the employees would work it out themselves. When dynamics worsened, Spencer realized he needed to confront the situation. That said, he shared that by the time he dealt with the issue, his credibility with his team was damaged, and it took over six months for his team to recover from the tension and dysfunction. Yet, Spencer acknowledged how important this mistake was to his learning journey. He reflected, "I completely failed as a supervisor, and that was on me. But I learned through those experiences…It strengthened me as a supervisor. I committed at that point in time…that I was never going to let something like that sit again." As another example, Andra made an administrative mistake, and she reflected on her ability to be vulnerable about making errors as a supervisor. Andra described using an incorrect procedure to make student referrals to external offices. She explained that being willing to share with others that she had made such a mistake was a change for her as a supervisor, and she recognized that her vulnerability about mistakes allowed her staff to feel comfortable discussing their own mistakes, building trust between her and her supervisees.

Through all the instances of learning by trial and error that participants shared, a common theme that emerged was the understanding that their strategies, successes, and mistakes affected a community of people to whom they felt accountable, such as supervisees, supervisors, and

students. Penny poignantly stated, “I think you learn most by making mistakes, unfortunately. And mistakes are often made with people, so you want to have care and concern with how you treat people.” Participants recognized that their errors as supervisors had consequences for others as much as for themselves; that recognition made the lessons learned particularly salient.

Community of Peers

Seven of my eleven participants said that having a community of peers to reflect with was important to their supervisory learning journey. Participants described their community of peers as folks who work in similar supervisory roles at their institution, at other institutions in their state, or peers they have met through professional organizations. Participants noted that their peer networks are places they can talk through challenging situations, get advice, and also observe how others supervise.

Cheryl explained that having a community of peers was important to her supervisory learning as she made her career change from adjunct faculty to directing academic advising, because she had lacked the benefits of having a supervisor throughout her career. Cheryl shared that she often reached out to supervisors on campus that are her peers instead of her own supervisor because her supervisor had a hands-off approach to supervision. While she appreciated her autonomy and her supervisor’s respect for her, Cheryl also recognized that having peers to bounce ideas off and discuss supervisory challenges was important to her learning and development. Cheryl relayed,

> I think you're learning when you're talking with other people who do similar things or have similar situations that they might—could give you insights to how that worked for them. So, I think that's been important for me to have those colleagues in other places.

Cheryl also benefitted from peers across her state. All public higher education institutions in her state are part of the same system. As such, she was required to participate in a committee related to her functional area. Cheryl noted this was particularly helpful because no one on her campus works in an area directly related to her role.

Similar to Cheryl, Myra described having a community of peers outside of her institution through an external state-wide professional association. Myra shared, “I think those moments of being able to talk through what are other places doing, then, influences me as a supervisor, because it gives me that bigger perspective.” She explained that her peer group meets virtually on a bi-weekly basis and said, “That’s actually super helpful because even though we don’t talk necessarily always as supervision, we certainly talk about what’s going on in [our state] and how does that impact our team. Which then…affects what I do.”

Spencer also noted the importance of having a network of colleagues throughout higher education and across the country. He shared, “I think there’s a lot of value in having…colleagues and friends that I can lean on and say, ‘Hey, I ran into this, how would you handle it?’…Basically, where have you failed on this, so I don’t repeat your mistakes?” Likewise, Linda noted that she built relationship with colleagues through conferences and often leans on them for advice. Linda said, “I've also done a lot of talking to people and mentorship and asking them about how do you deal with this? How do you make this conversation?” Both Spencer and Linda explained the benefits of being able to hear how others handled similar supervisory situations and what those peers would do differently.

Some participants described developing a community of peers in their own institutions. Penny shared,

> Talking to other colleagues has been really important. There's a group on campus of advising directors and we all have, I would say, very similar jobs. And each college is like its own little island. There are some comparable situations and not, depending on which island you're on. But it's good to have a group of people who, by and large, understand what may be happening on your staff.

Andra developed relationships with colleagues in her office who she could talk through situations with. She explained,

> In the past, it was really just my supervisor that I've talked to. Now, our leadership team, I have my direct supervisor and executive director. There's also an associate director in our office and a director in our office. I don't just need to go to my direct supervisor for advice or support. I have a unique space now where I can really talk to other leaders who are in the learning organization.

Andra also shared that she has professors from her Ph.D. program with whom she can share supervisory challenges, as well as friends in the field. She said, "We may see each other at conferences and, and talk about trends that are talking about specifics without talking about who the person is and get guidance that way too."

Wanda noted that conversations within her community of peers were cathartic and offered a space for reflection. Wanda offered,

> But the other [way I reflect] is in conversations with my peers. I have a couple of peers who are also supervisors who I will call on my drive home and say either, 'can you believe that this is what happened today?' or 'Wow, I had a really terrible experience with so-and-so, but here's how it went. Like, what do you think I could do differently or better? How would you have handled this?' Having that network of other people who

> supervise and understand supervision, and they're people who I've watched how they supervise, and I want to emulate them.

Wanda and other participants, therefore, used their community of peers as a learning mechanism to both process their experiences and learn from others best practices moving forward.

Supervising as Lifelong Learning

Throughout this study my participants were reflective of their learning and their practice as supervisors in student affairs. A few participants, however, had particularly poignant things to say about their learning journey and the lessons in humanity that they continue to take with them as supervisors.

Paul took a moment to consider how research cannot fully encompass what it is to be a supervisor in student affairs. He began with, "I think just some of the most essential components of human life aren't data driven. I think there's a lot of value for research…in higher ed. But I think the biggest achievements sit in the minds and the hearts of the people that you work with." Paul reflected that the minds and hearts of supervisors and other professionals are constantly impacted by the work being done in higher education and with students, and that is not always reflected in research. Paul further explained,

> That's not something I got from a book. That wasn't something that I learned in grad school. That wasn't something that academics taught me. That's something that life has taught me. No matter how many things you want to research, there are just certain aspects of being a supervisor that are human. And you have to acknowledge the humanity within our day-to-day work. And I think that that matters more than we want to acknowledge or talk about.

Moreover, Paul acknowledged that, the further professionals get in their career in student affairs, the less focus there can be on the humanity of the profession. Paul noted that he carries these reflections with him on his supervisory learning journey and tries to continuously remind himself of the importance of affirming and acknowledging the work that supervisors do to maintain the humanness of the profession. He concluded, "I think, if anything, to affirm and help give the flowers that people deserve…to let your supervisees be acknowledged in the way they deserve."

James reflected on his imperfections as a supervisor and noted that they are a catalyst for learning and improving. James shared,

> Sometimes I have to say I'm wrong. There are some things that I don't do perfectly because I'm a human being and I'm not perfect either…The concluding thought that I have is nobody is perfect. Nobody makes the right decision each and every time. We're all works in progress, and we're all continuing to develop and learn. Whether you're a supervisor or employee or just in general, being conscious of the experiences you have and conversations and dialogue with others and thinking about how those are adding and contributing to that development and being critical of it.

James noted that he has also come to terms with the notion that not everything that happens is a lesson in supervision or in life, and he sometimes needs to just let things go. Teresa made a similar reflection. She explained, "There are always things outside of my control and outside of my purview because we bring our whole selves to work, even when we're trying to pretend like we leave our baggage at the door. We just can't as human beings."

Linda noted a couple of times throughout her interviews that she does not consider herself a good supervisor. Linda shared,

> There is trauma in supervision. I think there's a lot of people who would tout themselves as great supervisors. I told my staff, I'm not a good supervisor. I'm an okay supervisor. And they will come back with 'No Linda, you're a great supervisor!' And I'll say, thank you so much, but on good days I'm good, and on bad days, when I'm not feeling good or I'm not in a good space, I'm conscious…there's some days where I'm like, I'm over all of it, and I just know that.

In this way, Linda gave herself the grace to be human in her position as a supervisor, and she provided her employees with a realistic expectation of supervision. Linda went on to reflect, "I continue to do the work. Like, I am not a finished product of supervision. And so, I give myself a little bit more grace now."

In this section of Chapter Four, participants demonstrated that the culmination of their experiences as supervisors in conjunction with reflective practices were instrumental in their supervisory learning journey. Moreover, participants indicated that the learning journey is ongoing and multifaceted. In the following section I provide a brief overview of additional findings related to ways in which participants described how they learned supervision.

Other Influences on Supervisory Learning

Throughout my study, participants offered myriad methods through which they learned supervision in student affairs. Participants also noted that some expected methods of learning supervision were less significant to the learning journey overall. In this section I review some methods of learning individual participants discussed other than those already discussed in previous sections of this chapter. Methods mentioned by participants included: (a) graduate preparation program coursework; (b) theories and philosophies of supervision; (c) supervision training programs; and (d) self-directed learning.

Graduate Preparation Program Coursework

Six of my eleven participants earned master's degrees related to higher education and student affairs (HESA). All five participants who did not have HESA-related master's degrees either completed or were in progress with doctoral degrees in HESA-related programs. When asked if they had formal coursework in their graduate programs related to learning supervision, few participants had significant examples.

Linda recalled having two classes related to supervision during her graduate preparation program in higher education leadership. "I think in my higher ed program we had like two classes on supervision. I learned a lot from the exercise on how to have a tough conversation and how to do an appraisal or how to give someone a disciplinary letter." Wanda noted that she had taken coursework related to supervision in her Ed.D. HESA program. She said, "There was a course on like, higher ed administration…and we definitely talked about [supervision], learned about it. But when I think about it, it feels vague to me. I don't remember any particular like tidbit that sticks out."

Myra and others did not indicate any significant coursework related to supervision. Myra said, "I did not have any coursework on supervision…That's probably why I lean so heavily on the leadership piece, because I took lots of courses on leadership development. Nothing [related to supervision] was offered." Several participants indicated that they focused on leadership coursework in master's and doctoral programs, and participants often conflated leadership with supervision and management.

Theories and Philosophies of Supervision

Participants overall did not have much experience with theories and philosophies of supervision. Instead, they said they learned theories of leadership either in graduate preparation

programs, through leadership training, or through self-directed methods of learning. Myra, for example, said, "I think a lot of my supervision style comes from theories and books that related to leadership versus supervision…I don't know a lot of supervision theories, but I know a lot of leadership development theories." James also described leadership theories he encountered in graduate school such as shared leadership and servant leadership. Cheryl, Paul, and Teresa also mentioned using servant leadership as a guide to their supervisory practice.

Andra, Naomi, Penny, and Wanda discussed Clifton Strengths Finder as a means of thinking through supervision and what folks bring to the organization. Naomi shared, "If there's one thing we intentionally build into our supervision as a division, it's Strengths…I do think as a tool it gives us some really good ability to have reflective conversations with consistent language across supervisors and division spaces." Penny indicated she was a certified Clifton Strengths Coach, and Andra explained that she completed her undergraduate and master's degrees at a Strengths-based institution where Clifton Strengths Finder was built into the curriculum.

Linda, Penny, Teresa, Paul, and Spencer all described theory as lacking relevance when it came to practical situations. Penny felt that theories were too restrictive. She explained,

> Subscribing too much to theories is disingenuous because it puts people in boxes…There's not a lot of theories that I've read and understand that help prepare me for supervising someone who's about to retire, who's caring for their husband, who has dementia, while also simultaneously supervising someone who just got out of grad school, who's learning the ropes and needs a lot of support.

Spencer noted that theories were hard to consider in the moment. Spencer said,

> We could talk about theory all day long, but sometimes, yes, theory is important and yes, it will guide your practice. But when there's situations that are presented to you, the last

> thing you're thinking about, especially when it's crisis situations, is 'what theoretical framework should I lean on right now to help guide me through it?'

Teresa similarly reflected, "I'd read this theory, it would make sense, but then I didn't get the chance to really put it into play and have those difficult conversations… I didn't have the practice to be able to do that and be comfortable with the discomfort." As such, Teresa and others relayed that they learned more from their own experience than they did from theories of supervision.

Supervision Training Programs

There were very few formal training programs in supervision offered by participants' institutions or divisions. Those working in housing or who came from residence life backgrounds, such as Myra, Linda, and Paul, had some training related to supervision early in their careers, but there was less opportunity as time went on. Myra explained,

> A lot of my experience has been in housing and residence life. And whether as a graduate hall director, a first-year advisor, [or] an assistant director, I've had supervision training. I did not [receive supervision training] here. I would say that's partially because there's an assumption that associate directors or directors are ready and good to go with supervision. I don't think that's a faulty assumption. I feel okay with that. But we do provide supervision training to all of the professional coordinators, the assistant residence life coordinators …Onboarding, training on supervision, very specific sessions like what does it mean to supervise student staff? What does it mean to be a supervisor in general? What's your supervision style supervising grads? How can that look different? They get lots of training.

Participants such as Cheryl, Andra, James, and Spencer who transitioned to careers in student affairs without going through a HESA master's degree program noted they did not have training in supervision. Cheryl said, "There's not been a whole lot of—there was, I mean, zero training on 'Oh, now you're a supervisor,' except how to approve time sheets." James shared,

> There was nothing specific at the beginning. You know, there were the university required [trainings]. I had to learn how to navigate the payroll system. I had to learn how to navigate the student employment system. You know, there were the very task-oriented things that needed to be trained on.

Similarly, Spencer said, "Formal supervisory training? Not for this guy…I had no formal training for supervision." Andra shared that she did not receive any formal training in supervision until nine years into her supervisory career.

A couple participants took advantage of opportunities for voluntary supervisory training offered by their institution. Teresa, for example, took a multi-week HR-developed supervision training program offered at her institution. Those participating in the program discussed different topics related to supervision, including communicating with employees with different identities, formal assessment and the feedback process, and handling challenging situations. Teresa reflected,

> Basically, it was a full curriculum of how to be a strong manger. And I think that gave me some of the basics. But then as I was going through that [program], I was a brand-new supervisor with one direct report where those stakes actually came into play because [the program] was not directed at a supervisor for graduate assistants or student workers. So, I didn't get a lot of hands-on practice outside of the, like, the role plays that we did. So, I think that's where that disconnect happened.

Wanda was offered some webinar supervisory training at one institution. She said, “I did do that webinar series that was on the basics of supervision, like ‘how do you do a performance evaluation?’ ‘Hiring and firing.’ Like, ‘what is our disciplinary procedure?’” Wanda noted that this was not required training, and she took advantage of the opportunity because it was available.

Naomi and Wanda discussed training programs they participated in outside of their higher education organization. Naomi participated in a mid-level manager’s program offered by a professional organization and found it helpful. Namoi shared, “I think that was really good for me to be around other people who were in seats that I wanted to be in…We spent a lot of time talking about what supervision means and what we wanted to be as supervisors.” Wanda was given an opportunity to participate in a year-long executive coaching program where she worked with an individual executive coach discussing different types of supervisory-related scenarios. This program was significant to Wanda’s development as a supervisor, and she described how important it was to her learning to have a non-biased coach help her think through challenging supervisory situations she was dealing with at work. Through this experience Wanda was introduced to Tuckman’s Stages of Group Development, which became a cornerstone of her supervisory practice.

Myra, Paul, James, and Cheryl felt that they did not receive training in supervision because it was assumed by their departments that they were already knowledgeable in supervision and did not need training. Cheryl said, “Maybe they assumed that I had [training]?” James felt that the thoughts from his hiring department were, “‘You’ve got the leadership experience coming in, so, therefore, we don’t need to worry about [training you] as much.’” Participants, then, who wanted training in supervision were responsible for finding it.

Self-Directed Learning

In addition to taking advantage of elective supervisory training programs, some participants discussed engaging in self-directed methods of learning supervision. Several discussed reading academic journals and books and listening to podcasts to learn more about best practices in supervision. Myra shared,

> One of the things that I have done since I graduated from grad school is every week, I block off an hour for [professional development] reading…That's one thing that I do because I think, no matter what it is that I read or experience, it'll have a trickle-down effect on my team.

Wanda described herself as a frequent podcast listener. She mentioned Brené Brown's podcast as particularly influential, but also shared,

> I listen to [a podcast] called *Work Appropriate*. They cover so many different topics that, sometimes when I'm in a particular issue, I will look for that topic, scroll through, and see if there's something…I found podcasts to be a great resource to at least start generating ideas about my own team.

Cheryl, who did not have a background in student affairs when she transitioned to advising and student success, engaged in self-directed learning such as reading journals to fill her gaps in student development theory. She said, "When I got into the advising role, the piece that I knew that I was missing personally was that student development theory." Cheryl eventually pursued a graduate certificate in academic advising to further advance her knowledge of the functional area she supervised.

Participants mentioned going to conferences and getting involved in professional organizations as a method of self-directed learning. For example, Andra served as a coordinator

for a summer student leadership institute with a professional organization where she trained and mentored facilitators. Spencer described going to financial aid conferences after he took on an associate provost role over student services and realized he was not knowledgeable enough on financial aid to be an asset to his team. He shared,

> I didn't have enough of a basic understanding of the packaging component of financial aid…So that was part of the supervisory mentorship that my provost did with me…She was able to dig, and we found a bevy of resources and conferences that I went to.

James indicated that he seeks out conference sessions related to training and supervision, saying, "I go to conferences every year and there's always at least a session on leadership and management that I go to. Some are good, some are not." Linda used conferences early in her career to escape her abusive work environment and to learn new things to become more marketable for career moves. She shared, "If I could go to a conference, I went to every conference, so I would not have to be at work." Linda was able to learn about supervision through some conferences she attended, indicating, "I've been to…a regional, entry-level institute for new staff and they did a lot of supervision there."

Overall, participants demonstrated that they often made their own opportunities to learn something new about supervision. Participants recognized that they had gaps in their knowledge and sought out the readings, teachings, and advice of others to help fill those gaps.

Chapter Summary

This study explored how supervisors in student affairs describe their supervisory learning journey and was guided by two research questions: (1) How do supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise? And (2) How do supervisors in student affairs describe the influence of previous supervision on the development of their supervisory practice? Participants described

their supervisors and their experience supervising as the most influential ways in which they learned to supervise in student affairs. The supervisor-supervisee relationship was revealed to be important to helping participants gain confidence in themselves as professionals and learn how they wanted to be seen as supervisors to others. Participants developed their supervisory values and practices from what they observed of others, mistakes they made in practice, and through reflection with peers. Participants also acknowledged that their learning is persistent as they move through their careers. Some expected methods of learning such as through graduate preparation programs, theories and philosophies, and supervisory training were less significant to participants in this study. Participants did use self-directed learning methods to fill their knowledge gaps where they could, but this was less significant to them than their relationships with their supervisors and their practical experiences in the field. In the following chapter, I provide my conclusions, implications for the field of student affairs, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, & CONCLUSION

Supervision is essential to job satisfaction and retention of student affairs professionals in higher education (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006, 2009, 2014; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998), yet supervisors in student affairs often lack training in supervision and little is understood about how they learn to supervise (Holmes, 2014; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). This study investigated the supervisory learning journeys of supervisors in student affairs and was informed by the following two research questions: (1) How do supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise? (2) How do supervisors in student affairs describe the influence of previous supervision on the development of their supervisory practice? My research was guided by a conceptual framework that focused on the reflective and emotional aspects of experiential and transformative theories of adult learning. I used a general qualitative design to collect and interpret data which was integral to understanding how participants make meaning of their supervisory learning experiences.

In this chapter I begin with a summary of my findings. I then provide three primary interpretations based on the analysis of my findings: (1) the supervisor-supervisee relationship is significant to learning supervision; (2) learning supervision is a subjective, irregular, and informal process; and (3) supervisory learning is an ongoing process that involves an integrated cycle of experiencing, emoting, and reflecting to make meaning and inform practice. I follow the analysis of my findings with a discussion of how my conceptual framework guided my understanding of ways in which adults learn through experiences, emotions, and reflections, which resulted in a proposed model for emotional-reflective professional learning. I introduce this proposed model and then proceed to discuss implications for student affairs and higher

education. I then review the limitations of my study followed by my recommendations for practice and future research.

Summary of Findings

My study participants were eleven supervisors with 7–20 years of experience in the field of student affairs, and between 4–16 years of experience supervising student affairs professionals. Participants supervised between 2–14 student affairs professionals at the time of their interviews. Each supervisor participated in two semi-structured, open-ended interviews and completed one independent reflective writing activity. My findings indicated that participants' interactions with previous and current supervisors were influential over all parts of the learning process. My study highlighted the importance of supervisory relationships, including mentorship, supervisory support, professional feedback, emotional responses to supervisory experiences, and what participants described as "bad" supervision.

My findings also revealed that participants' practical experiences and reflections significantly influenced their learning of supervision. Participants used observation and trial and error as primary experiential learning methods. They also used a "community of peers" to share experiences and learn from others in the field. My participants reflected that learning supervision is a continuous process of experiencing, reflecting, and adjusting. Overall, my study indicated that learning supervision is a subjective, irregular, and informal process.

Analysis of Findings: Answering the Research Questions

I begin this section of my discussion with a summary of my analysis to answer the two research questions that guided this study. I then provide a more substantial discussion of my analysis in three subsections where I explore the primary interpretations of my findings: (1)

Supervisor-Supervisee Relationship & Learning Supervision; (2) Supervisory Learning as a Subjective, Irregular, and Informal Process; and (3) Supervisory Learning is Ongoing.

At the beginning of this study, I set out to find the answers to two research questions: (1) How do supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise? (2) How do supervisors in student affairs describe the influence of previous supervision on the development of their supervisory practice? I found that the answer to my first question was embedded in my second question. Participants described their supervisors as a primary influence over all aspects of their supervisory learning journey. Relationships and interactions with their supervisors, both past and present, provided my participants with several examples of supervisory practice that were integral to their learning and development. As such, my participants' reflections indicated that the supervisor-supervisee relationship was foundational to their supervisory learning. This relationship is a lens through which my participants made meaning from their observations and experiences of supervision, and ultimately informed the development of their supervisory practice.

Supervisory learning in student affairs was a subjective process for my participants. The participants in my study made decisions about the supervisory characteristics, behaviors, and values they chose to emulate based on subjective observations of the supervisors and leaders they encountered. Learning supervision was also irregular and informal. I found that participants in my study rarely had formal training or education in supervision and that they relied on their observations and instances of trial and error to learn supervision. Moreover, despite participants stating that feedback was crucial to their learning and development, I found that formal assessment of supervisory learning was absent outside of top-down annual employee evaluations. Participants reported that these evaluations became more sporadic as supervisors advanced in

their careers. They also noted they rarely received genuine critical feedback from their supervisees. As such, my participants took on the responsibility for assessing their learning by reflecting on their experiences, their mistakes, and their influences.

Finally, my participants described learning supervision as an ongoing process. Some participants reflected that they are unfinished products of supervision and that their mistakes and experiences are a constant source of supervisory education. I found that this ongoing process of supervisory learning was often accomplished through skills in self-advocacy. My participants looked for opportunities to guide their own learning through means such as webinars, podcasts, books, journals, conference sessions, seminars, leadership programs, graduate certifications, and terminal degrees. As formal, intentional training and education in supervision is scarce in the field of student affairs (Holmes, 2014; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Wilson et al., 2020), my study indicates that supervisors in student affairs are primarily responsible for their own supervisory learning journey.

Supervisor-Supervisee Relationship & Learning Supervision

Supervisors in student affairs are in positions that directly influence how their employees learn and develop supervisory skills (Tull, 2009). Nine of my eleven participants described their supervisors as significant contributors to their learning journeys. Participants' descriptions highlighted three themes related to the significance of the supervisor-supervisee relationship and learning supervision: (1) the supervisor-supervisee relationship was most influential for participants earlier in their career; (2) supervisors were integral to participants' perceptions of safe and inclusive work environments in which supervision was learned; and (3) establishing and maintaining trust was essential to developing positive supervisor-supervisee relationships.

Early Career

The supervisors that student affairs professionals encounter early in their career are particularly important to the supervisory learning journey (Tull, 2009). My findings indicated that participants learned the foundations of supervision as early as their undergraduate experience of student affairs work. James, Lydia, and Naomi were influenced by supervisors while working in student affairs as undergraduate students, and they described these supervisors as mentors. The mentor-supervisors participants encountered in their undergraduate experience influenced them to pursue careers in student affairs and higher education, modeled professionalism, and provided safe spaces for making mistakes and getting feedback. Other supervisors that participants described as early-career mentors spent time building relationships with their supervisees that made them feel trusted, safe, and cared for. These early supervisor-supervisee relationships provided avenues for these student affairs professionals to develop confidence and to learn supervision. That said, not all participants described their early-career supervisors as mentors. Some participants, like Linda and Paul, described having toxic, unsupportive supervisors early in their career. "Bad" early-career supervisory relationships led participants to feel discouraged and unsupported. These experiences impressed upon participants the significant role supervision plays in developing student affairs professionals.

My findings suggest that early-career student affairs professionals benefit from supervisors who adopt mentor characteristics in their supervisory practice. For instance, Wanda had mentor-supervisors who included her in important meetings, which gave her insight into how decisions were made and gave her confidence in her ability to supervise others. My findings indicate that those in student affairs who supervise early career and entry level professionals have a unique opportunity to influence the future of the student affairs profession. Furthermore,

those supervisors who adopt mentor-like approaches may have a more positive impact on supervisory professional development and career sustainability. Tull (2009) described several aspects of positive mentoring relationships that supervisors can pull from, including encouraging social support, clarifying career-role discrepancies, and engaging in career development conversations. Tull (2009) and Renn and Hodges (2007) noted that supervisor and mentor are distinct roles, and not all supervisors are mentors. However, my findings suggest that developing supervisors to include mentorship in their practice could be beneficial to employees overall.

Participants noted that their early career experiences of receiving feedback from supervisors was influential on their supervisory learning. In descriptions of supervisor feedback, it was apparent that most of the feedback participants described as significant happened earlier in their career as student affairs professionals and first-time supervisors. Myra spoke about the significance of feedback often in her interviews and noted that feedback received from a supervisor in her first full-time role was particularly important to learning how to communicate constructive criticism while balancing care with accountability. Several participants struggled giving feedback early in their careers to supervisees because they were concerned about hurting feelings and spoiling their supervisor-supervisee relationships. They credited their supervisors for teaching them to overcome this discomfort through modeling ways to give clear, timely, and empathetic critical feedback. My finding that feedback from supervisors was significant for my participants early in their career is in line with Tull (2006, 2009) and Winston and Creamer (1997) who found that formal and informal feedback early in one's career helps establish organizational goals and opportunities for professional growth.

Participants noted that as their careers progressed, opportunities to receive critical feedback from supervisors declined, which is discussed in a later section. Furthermore,

participants had fewer examples of supervisors that they associated with mentorship. Over time and with career advancement, participants became more independent in their careers as supervisors and relationships with their own supervisors became more distant. My participants' observation that supervision becomes a less interactive relationship over time suggests that those in student affairs who supervise early career professionals and undergraduate/graduate paraprofessionals are more likely to influence supervisory learning than those who supervise mid or late career professionals.

The revelation of when the supervisor-supervisee relationship has the highest impact on supervisory learning in student affairs is significant because of its effect on job satisfaction and career commitment. Several participants described leaving a job in student affairs because of a bad relationship with a supervisor. Their experiences suggest that the relationships supervisors establish with early-career student affairs professionals can influence supervisory learning, employee job satisfaction, and the desire to continue a career in student affairs. This supports literature that claims that supervision is a contributing factor to levels of job satisfaction in the student affairs profession (Marshall, et al., 2016; Tull, 2006; Wilson et al., 2020; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Finding that the supervisor-supervisee relationship is most influential on early-career supervisory learning is also important because it highlighted that mid- and late-career professionals experienced less intentional relationships with their supervisors; for some participants this meant a lack of support and opportunities for development. Cheryl, for example, described her supervisor as "hands-off," and she therefore sought out advice and support from peers rather than feeling able to go to her supervisor. This was significant for Cheryl because she did not come to her supervisory role from a student affairs background and could have used

additional support. Mid- and late-career supervisors in student affairs supervise and influence early-career professionals, yet my findings suggest that my participants may not be getting adequate support later in their careers to be able to supervise effectively. Continued professional development and mentorship for this population of student affairs professionals is important to job satisfaction, career longevity, and achieving institutional goals (Ellett et al., 2020; Langdon & Gordon, 2007; Tull, 2014). As attrition has increased for professionals in supervisory roles in the United States and supervisors have reported higher levels of stress and burnout (Harter, 2021), more attention should be paid to how mid- and late-career student affairs professionals are being supported by their supervisors and how this affects supervisory learning across the career.

Safe & Inclusive Work/Learning Environments

Participants observed that their supervisors strongly impacted the environment in which their work and learning happened. Some participants discussed not feeling safe at work because of "toxic" and "abusive" supervisors and work environments. This harmed participants' feelings of self-efficacy and sense of belonging in the workplace and contributed to their self-described trauma. These participants described learning what not to do as supervisors, but they also learned skills in self-advocacy, developing boundaries, and creating safe spaces for others.

Linda's experience of self-described abuse in the workplace was particularly egregious. Linda, a Black woman, relayed that her supervisor made excuses and refused to support her when Linda reported racist and abusive behavior by her co-worker. This experience led to Linda's salient realization that she had to create a safe space for herself and others as a supervisor in student affairs. Linda's experience is reflective of how the values and behaviors modeled by supervisors can significantly impact office culture and employee development, and how feeling unsafe in the workplace can be traumatic for professionals, especially those with

marginalized identities (Brown et al., 2020; Gilbert, 2021; Wilson et al., 2020). Gilbert (2021) argued that, with the increase in indirect trauma that student affairs professionals incur from their work with students, professionals with minoritized identities are particularly susceptible to the negative impacts of poor-quality supervision.[7] The research on the experiences of people of color working in student affairs has grown in recent years (e.g., Breeden, 2021; Hutchings et al., 2023; Steele, 2018). Steele (2018) noted in her study on retaining staff members of color at predominantly White institutions that supervisors played essential roles in helping participants feel valued, seen, and safe to be their authentic selves at work. Lack of support from supervisors, however, led to feeling dissatisfied, unvalued, isolated, and invisible at work (Steele, 2018, p. 121). Linda was one of only two participants who identified as a person of color in my study, and the only participant who identified as a Black woman. Her experiences indicate that additional research on supervisory learning for people of color in student affairs is needed to explore experiences that are unique to different identities.

Other participants provided examples of how they learned about the importance of creating a safe workplace. Penny described a past supervisor as "abusive" and "toxic" who created a space that was unsafe for staff to be authentic or vulnerable, and Penny felt constantly on edge in her supervisor's presence. Other participants gave examples of "bad" supervision and described not feeling as though their supervisor was approachable or supportive. In contrast, several participants described supervisors who made them feel safe, supported, and included. As such, they developed positive associations with the field of student affairs and higher education and felt more inclined to develop strong, supportive relationships with their supervisees. Andra, for example, described experiences with supervisors who connected with her on a personal level

[7] "*Indirect trauma* refers to the impact that empathic engagement with others may have on those in helping professions" (Gilbert, 2022, p. 168).

and supported her professional development. These experiences influenced Andra's approach to building relationships with her supervisees and instilled in her a value of caring for supervisees as whole people. My participants' descriptions of feeling safe or unsafe in the workplace and how that impacted their confidence and sense of belonging at work indicates that supervisors are responsible for creating safe and inclusive work and learning environments. This supports tenets espoused by recent models of supervision in student affairs developed by Wilson and colleagues (2020) and Brown et al. (2020).

My findings signal that supervisors in student affairs can influence how their supervisees feel and what they learn about good and bad supervision. Perceptions of supervisory support factor into levels of job satisfaction and attrition (Tull, 2006); therefore, it is important that supervisors cultivate a supportive environment for their supervisees to help them feel valued, seen, and safe to be vulnerable and authentic (Wilson et al., 2020). *Creating Safe Spaces* in the workplace is the foundation of the Inclusive Supervision Model (Wilson et al., 2020) which was defined as "the supervisor's ability to intentionally create an environment where supervisees feel comfortable discussing issues of diversity as they may relate to them, the supervisory relationship, and their work" (p. 28). Wilson et al. noted that supervisors are responsible for creating safe spaces to establish guidelines for communication and everyday practices to develop a work environment of respect and honesty (p. 51). Likewise, Brown et al. (2020) argued that the imbalance of power in the supervisor-supervisee relationship means that the responsibility to cultivate a positive and productive relationship lies with the supervisor (p. 3).

Inclusive (Wilson et al., 2020) and Identity-Conscious (Brown et al., 2020) models of supervision underscore the important role that supervisors play in creating safe spaces for employees to grow and thrive. However, no participants mentioned inclusive or identity-

conscious models of supervision when asked about models and theories they use in their practice. Moreover, participants did not mention one of the most effective and well-known models of supervision: synergistic supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997). This suggests that supervisors in student affairs are not being introduced to models or theories of supervision that the field considers effective and significant. As supervisors are responsible for developing safe and inclusive work environments, more attention needs to be paid to formally educating student affairs professionals on models of effective and inclusive supervision such as synergistic supervision (Winston & Creamer, 1997), inclusive supervision (Wilson et al., 2020), and identity-conscious supervision (Brown, et al., 2020).

Significance of Trust

Several participants discussed relationships with their supervisors in terms of trust. When participants were given challenging projects or supported by supervisors to take on important tasks or join important meetings, participants felt trusted by their supervisors. This built self-confidence in their supervisory abilities. For example, when Wanda was asked by a supervisor to absorb the recruitment and enrollment team into her student success unit, she expressed feeling trusted by her supervisor, but she also trusted that her supervisor would support her in the transition. Wanda's relationship with her supervisor and their mutual trust gave Wanda the confidence to take on the challenge. Participants whose supervisors developed mutual trust discussed learning the value of providing their employees with appropriate challenges and support to help them grow professionally. These participants felt supported seeking opportunities for promotions or professional development and expressed wanting to be the type of supervisor who supported their employees' professional goals.

Some participants described having their trust violated by supervisors. Paul and Spencer relayed similar experiences of having their decisions to terminate employees overturned by supervisors. Both Paul and Spencer discussed how these experiences made them feel undermined, which caused them to lose trust and confidence in their supervisors. Participants who felt they were not supported and could not trust their supervisors reported that they ultimately decided to look for job opportunities and support elsewhere. These experiences influenced participants' learning of values related to open communication and showing trust in their employees' decisions.

My findings suggest that building and maintaining mutual trust between supervisors and supervisees is essential to a positive and productive supervisor-supervisee relationship, which is similar to what others have found about the importance of mutual trust in maintaining such relationships (Brown et al., 2020; Holmes et al., 2021). My findings also suggest that trust is a factor in employee job satisfaction and retention. These findings are similar to literature related to organizational trust (Hurley, 2011), where employee trust in supervisors is found to influence employee job satisfaction and the accomplishment of organizational goals. Hurley (2011) argued that leaders and managers who want to establish trust with their supervisees must demonstrate authentic care for employees. Hurley (2011) and Brown et al. (2020) agree that the hierarchical nature of supervisory relationships creates a power imbalance that can affect supervisees' willingness to trust supervisors, and therefore most of the responsibility of establishing trust is on the supervisor.

The participants in my study consistently provided evidence that their experiences with supervisors shaped their supervisory learning journey, including the values, beliefs, and behaviors they chose to adopt as supervisors in student affairs. Their experiences were unique,

yet a common theme was the significance that participants attributed to the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Participants recognized that their supervisors had power and influence over them, and therefore looked to supervisors as models to either imitate or to distinguish from themselves. In the next section, I discuss how my participants' observations and perceptions in addition to a general lack of formal learning opportunities led to subjective, irregular, and informal supervisory learning.

Supervisory Learning as a Subjective, Irregular, & Informal Process

I found that learning supervision was a subjective, irregular, and informal process for the participants in my study. My participants revealed that they learned supervision primarily through informal, experiential methods such as observation and trial and error. These experiential methods led participants to make subjective judgements about the behavior of their supervisors, themselves, and others, which informed their supervisory learning. Participants discussed using observations of their supervisors' supervision approaches to choose behaviors and values they wanted to emulate. Emotional responses to observations were used to guide what they learned from their observations. For example, Wanda expressed reflecting on what she liked or did not like about her observations. Other participants also noted paying attention to how they felt during interactions with supervisors. My findings indicate that supervisory learning is often guided by professionals' emotional responses and reflections on supervisory experiences, which influenced subjective choices on supervisory traits and values.

My findings exemplified how participants' perceptions of their supervisors' traits and values influenced their learning of supervision. The participants in my study paid attention to their emotional reactions and reflected on experiences to make meaning and inform their supervisory practice. Participants reflected on their experiences and made decisions about what

they thought were good and bad examples of supervision based on how the interactions made them feel. My participants demonstrated a desire to avoid causing emotional harm to their supervisees, and reflected on times when a supervisor's behavior made them feel emotions like guilt, embarrassment, anger, and discouragement. Reflecting on these emotions helped them learn about their supervisory values and how they wanted to be perceived as supervisors by their employees. As such, participants learned to emulate the characteristics they appreciated from their previous supervisors and adopted characteristics in opposition to supervisory experiences they did not appreciate.

As noted previously, my participants relied on subjective observations to inform their practice. Observational learning has been pervasively cited as a method for learning supervision in student affairs (Holmes, 2014; McGraw, 2011; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003). Participants' choosing to emulate the characteristics they liked from their supervisors and to adopt characteristics in opposition to those they did not like are similar to Nichols and Baumgartner's (2016) discoveries from their study on the learning journeys of midlevel managers in student affairs. Nichols and Baumgartner found that emotion had an influence on their participants' reflections on the behavior of previous supervisors and how those participants made meaning from their perceptions. The researchers noted that participants discussed supervisory techniques they liked and did not like, which influenced characteristics they decided to adopt and to avoid. Based on my participants' lack of formal opportunities to learn supervision, which I discuss in the next paragraph, it is understandable that observation emerged as a dominant learning method.

Participants indicated that formal opportunities to learn supervision were scarce, especially the further they advanced in their careers. Participants who earned master's degrees

from higher education and student affairs (HESA) programs recalled that their programs focused more on leadership than supervision, and participants who did not have HESA degrees did not mention receiving formal classes in supervision. Furthermore, learning supervision from formal sources (e.g., training programs) differed for participants depending on their functional area of student affairs and institutional experiences. Paul and Myra, for example, noted that they received foundational training in supervision early in their professional careers in residence life, but both indicated that opportunities to continue learning through formal methods were less available for midlevel professionals. Outside of residential life, however, participants were not often offered formal training on supervision from their departments. Cheryl, who transitioned from an adjunct faculty role to academic advising with no background in student affairs, received no formal training in supervision. Despite a lack of formal learning opportunities offered in their departments, participants demonstrated a desire to learn supervision by looking for alternative learning opportunities. Teresa, James, and Wanda, for example, took advantage of formal learning services outside of their departments or institutions. This included seminars and workshops offered by human resources (HR) departments, conference sessions, and an executive coaching program. That said, some opportunities participants were able to find ended up feeling irrelevant to their work. My participants' experiences contribute to the understanding that learning supervision in student affairs is irregular and subject to one's individual work and education context.

An interesting finding from my study is that there is a lack of assessment of supervisory learning and development. Although participants noted that direct feedback significantly contributed to their supervisory learning journey early in their career, they also said that there were few opportunities to receive feedback through assessments and evaluations of their

supervisory skills and development overall. This was especially true as participants advanced in their careers, with some mid- and late-career participants reporting that they only sometimes received annual evaluations and those evaluations were rarely detailed about their skills in supervision. Penny noted, for example, that her annual evaluations were rarely critical, and Paul stated that his annual evaluations sometimes did not happen. Moreover, participants shared they did not have processes to receive genuine critical feedback from their supervisees. Some participants intentionally asked for feedback from their supervisees in informal settings or one-on-ones, but rarely felt that they received sincere responses. My findings indicate that, in addition to a lack of training and education on supervision, there are also no consistent processes for accurate critical assessment to help supervisors understand if their practice is effective. While the literature notes that feedback is important to supervisory development (Tull, 2006, 2009; Winston & Creamer, 1997), assessment of supervisory practice as an aspect of feedback is an area that needs to be explored further.

My findings point to the irregular nature of supervisory learning. Participants in areas like residence life, where professionals often started their careers in supervisory roles, had early opportunities for learning supervision and were offered more intentional training and development. Participants in other areas of student affairs where early-career professionals were in student facing roles (e.g., advising, student success services) experienced less emphasis on formal supervision training. Additionally, because not all participants completed HESA graduate preparation programs, it is unrealistic to expect that these professionals received consistent education in supervision across the board. These findings are congruent with what has been found in the literature. Supervisors in student affairs often lack intentional supervisory training and development (Holmes, 2014; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003).

Moreover, there is inconsistency between HESA programs and the field of student affairs about where professionals are supposed to learn supervision (Holmes, 2014; Wilson et al., 2020). My findings suggest that the lack of consistent commitment from the student affairs profession to provide intentional, formal learning opportunities centered on supervision means that subjective, irregular, and informal learning will continue to pervade the profession.

Supervisory Learning is Ongoing

Despite lacking access to intentional training and education in supervision, my participants demonstrated that learning supervision is an ongoing process that requires self-advocacy and deliberate reflection. Many of my participants looked for ways to improve their supervision when there were no opportunities provided by their offices or departments. Teresa enrolled in an HR-developed supervision training program at her institution. Linda took advantage of funding to go to conferences where she found mentors and a community to support her development. Cheryl completed a graduate certificate in academic advising. Other participants described enacting self-directed methods of learning supervision such as reading journals and books, listening to podcasts, and attending conferences. Participants demonstrated they felt their learning was their responsibility. As such, they developed skills in self-advocacy to find opportunities for learning and to get the necessary support from their supervisors to take advantage of these opportunities. My findings suggest that supervisors in student affairs are often on their own when it comes to their continued learning and development and must rely on experiential learning methods and self-advocacy skills.

Embedded in these findings is the understanding that the onus of learning supervision is placed on the supervisors themselves. This is different from what the literature says about the responsibility for teaching supervision. Researchers (Holmes, 2014; Wilson et al., 2020)

suggested that there is a disparity about where supervision is supposed to be learned, and some argue it is often assumed that the responsibility is with HESA graduate preparation programs (Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Shupp & Arminio, 2012). This disparity has led to the assumption that supervisors in student affairs have the skills necessary to supervise effectively (Wilson, et al., 2020; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998), despite the fact that there is a lack of intentional supervisory training (Holmes, 2014; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Stock-Ward & Javorek, 2003), and that supervisors in student affairs often feel underprepared for their supervisory roles (Holmes, 2014; Nichols & Baumgartner, 2016; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Wilson et al., 2020).

A few of my participants poignantly suggested that their supervisory learning is a lifelong process. For example, Linda noted that she is not a finished product of supervision, and James concluded that he is an imperfect person and must continue developing and learning. Several other participants reflected on their mistakes as supervisors and how those mistakes contributed to their learning. Moreover, participants looked for opportunities for growth from their mistakes. Through their reflections and pursuit of opportunities to learn and grow, my participants demonstrated that their supervisory learning journey is continuous. These findings support an argument by Komives and Carpenter (2016) that student affairs professionals have an obligation to commit to lifelong learning. The authors argued that professional development must be viewed as a daily activity and an ethical one (p. 428). Komives and Carpenter also claimed that this learning is the responsibility of individuals, groups, and organizations within student affairs. As research on supervisory learning and development in student affairs grows, it could be beneficial to better understand how individuals, groups, and organizations are or are not contributing to supervisory learning.

This analysis of my findings revealed the important role supervisors in student affairs play in the learning journeys of future supervisors. My analysis also highlighted the subjective, irregular, and informal ways in which supervisors in student affairs describe their learning journey. My conceptual framework was significant in guiding my analysis of my findings and informing my understanding of how adults learn and make meaning from their experiences, emotions, and reflections. In the following section, I discuss how my conceptual framework influenced my analysis, and I introduce an emergent model of adult learning that is informed by my findings.

Emotional-Reflective Professional Learning Cycle: An Adult Learning Model

This study was concerned with supervisors in student affairs, the ways in which they described learning to supervise, and the influences on their learning. The role of "Supervisor" was the primary unit of analysis for this study. That said, my conceptual framework was significant in guiding the development of my interview and reflective activity questions, and subsequently guided the analysis of my findings. Through my interviews with participants and my review of interview transcripts and reflective writing activities, I observed a cycle of learning that my participants were entrenched in as they described their learning journey. My participants used their experiences, emotions, and reflections in tandem to make meaning and inform their practice. Linda, for example, had experienced significant work-place trauma early in her career; however, when she later experienced receiving support from a supervisor for her idea to develop an employee manual, Linda described feeling cared for and valued as a professional, and articulated that this experience challenged her previous understanding of supervision. She expressed reflecting on this experience and her feelings of support and care, which subsequently informed her supervisory practice. In this example, Linda's experience, emotions, and reflection

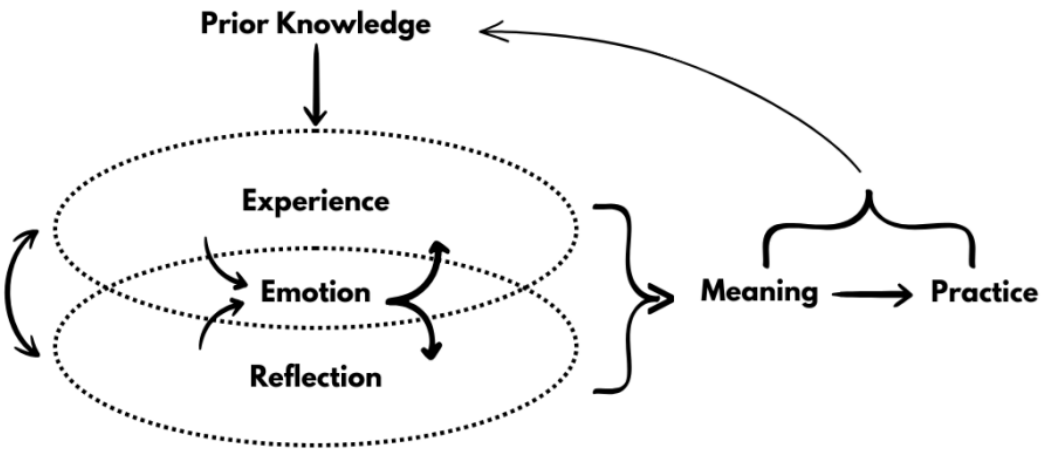
integrated to help her make meaning and inform her practice. Her experience also challenged her to reflect on her prior knowledge to make new meaning. I observed several of my participants using similar learning processes integrating experience, emotion, and reflection to describe how they made meaning and informed their practice as supervisors in student affairs.

During my analysis of transcripts and reflective writing activities, codes, categories, and themes emerged that highlighted participants' descriptions of their learning process. This aligned with my conceptual framework that was informed by Maiese's (2011, 2017) argument that experience, emotion, and reflection work together as a mechanism for learning. Participants in my study demonstrated that their emotional reactions to experiences often drove their reflective process and, as such, was congruent with Maiese's argument and my conceptual framework. This is a unique position, as most relevant literature has indicated that reflection and emotion have often been considered separate from one another in the learning process and cognitive reflection has traditionally been valued over embodied ways of learning (Dirkx, 2012; Kuk & Holst, 2018; Maiese, 2011, 2017; Taylor & Marienau, 2016; Wagner & Shahjahan, 2015).

My interactions with and observations of my participants led to the emergence of an experiential learning model focused on a cycle of emotional-reflective learning (see Figure 1). In the following subsections, I provide an explanation of the individual elements of the model and the influences my conceptual framework had on its construction. In this explanation I focus on its connection to learning supervision and professional learning; however, this model has the potential to expand to various instances of learning in adulthood and across many professions.

Figure 1

Emotional-Reflective Professional Learning Cycle



Elements of the Proposed Model Explained

The proposed Emotional-Reflective Professional Learning Cycle (see Figure 1) depicts learning as a cycle that includes the prior knowledge a professional possesses as they enter a new experience and the interaction of the experience with emotion and reflection which informs how a professional makes meaning and influences their practice. As depicted in Figure 1, Prior Knowledge is located as the top-most element of the cycle. The downward arrow beneath Prior Knowledge indicates that this element informs the professional's learning process of experiencing, emoting, and reflecting. Experience, Emotion, and Reflection are encased in permeable overlapping ovals to emphasize that they are separate elements but are not isolated from one another. The order of Experience at the top, Emotion in the middle, and Reflection at the bottom is intentional and references my original simplified definition of reflection that I provided in Chapter Two (see "Reflective Learning"). That said, the three bisecting arrows that connect Experience, Emotion, and Reflection through the permeable borders emphasize the

interconnections between each element as the professional moves through the learning process. Moreover, the permeable ovals and the bisecting arrows visually showcase that these interactive elements are not completely linear in the way the professional engages in the learning process, and the professional may experience these elements simultaneously, may move from one to the other, or may move back and forth between the elements as they process their learning. The bracket to the right of the permeable ovals pointing to Meaning indicates the process informs how the professional makes meaning of their experience, and the arrow to the right of Meaning pointing to Practice infers that Meaning informs Practice. The bracket above Meaning and Practice with the arrow pointing back to Prior Knowledge indicates that Meaning and Practice become knowledge and that this learning process is a continuous cycle professionals go through as they progress in their careers.

Prior Knowledge

In this model, prior knowledge represents the learning and meaning that individuals already possess when encountering a new experience. Given that this model is concerned with a cycle of professional learning, prior knowledge refers to professional knowledge gained through previous experiences. That said, it is important to note that prior knowledge is also influenced by factors outside of the workplace. This may include academic learning, social, cultural, and environmental contexts, and beliefs, values, and assumptions, among other forms of prior learning. Mezirow (1991) argued that learning in adulthood is dependent on a reflective process of reviewing "what we have learned, how we have learned it, and whether our presuppositions are warranted" (p. 109). As such, our prior knowledge is based on what we have learned in the past and influences how we reflect and make meaning from our continued experiences of the world. In the context of learning supervision, prior knowledge includes the previously acquired

knowledge and understanding that supervisors have of their role, responsibilities, and relationships.

Experience

Experience in this model includes new and similar professional experiences that individuals encounter across their career. Experiences are widely considered by andragogy researchers as foundationally connected to the learning process (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Experiences can be personal, objective, and/or environmental (Kolb, 1984). In the context of my findings and my participants, experience included, but is not limited to, instances of participants giving critical feedback to employees, observing the supervisory practices of their supervisors, navigating dysfunctional team dynamics, supporting supervisees' professional development, and taking on unknown challenges. The process of learning supervision, as demonstrated by my participants, is most often driven by experience. The act of experiencing is a mechanism that engages professionals in the learning process by invoking emotions, challenging prior knowledge, and providing an opportunity for reflection.

Emotion

Emotion in this model represents the embodied affects associated with the supervisory experience. These affects may be psychological, physical, positive, negative, ambivalent, and/or avoidant. A professional is likely to have several emotions related to the experience, some of which can conflict with one another, with one's prior knowledge, or with one's reflective processing. Maiese (2011) and Fenwick (2003) explored how emotions and desires can cause conflict with one's conscious experience, which can then be an important catalyst to intentional, critical reflection and learning. Both authors argued that emotion (body) and reflection (mind) are intertwined in the experiential learning process. Some of my participants described

experiences that invoked emotions like guilt and remorse, but also provided them with opportunities for deep reflection to learn to improve their practice in the future. Emotion, then, adds complexity to the learning process that drives meaning making.

Reflection

Reflection represents the conscious, cognitive process of thinking about and interpreting experiences to make meaning, as defined in my conceptual framework (see Chapter Two). This is a constructivist learning approach centered on a process of reflecting on experience but is intertwined in this model with a more psychoanalytic perspective of using unconscious desires and emotions to learn from experience, as described by Fenwick (2003). Mezirow (1991) argued that true reflection involves critically interrogating prior knowledge as part of a transformative process of learning. In response to Mezirow, Maiese (2017) argued that critical, transformative learning must involve affective dimensions of engaging with emotions and desires as a precursor to critical reflection. As such, while reflection is a singular element within the model, it is also dependent on its integrations with experience and emotion to make meaning and inform practice.

Meaning

In this model, Meaning is the ways in which professionals make sense of themselves in their professional roles. Meaning is a framework of self that involves one's assumptions, beliefs, and prior knowledge (Mezirow, 1991), and affective and unconscious dimensions such as emotions and desires (Dirkx, 2001; Maiese, 2011). The learning process of simultaneously engaging with experience, emotions, and reflection helps professionals make sense of themselves, their professional roles, and their relationships with others in their organization. This is important, because learning is done both individually and within a community; the meaning

that is made by professionals informs their practice and can therefore also affect the learning of others within their community.

Practice

Practice refers to the ways in which professionals choose to show up in their roles and use their knowledge to inform their daily actions and activities. Practice in higher education and student affairs is highly influenced by the standards set forth by the profession through the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education as well as professional organizations such as ACPA and NASPA. I discussed these standards and their influence on practice in Chapter Two (see "Standards and Competencies of Student Affairs Work"). In this model, cognitive (reflection) and affective (emotion) dimensions influence the ways in which professionals understand themselves and their professional world (meaning), which then influences the ways in which professionals approach their practice. All of the participants in this study described ways in which their experiences, emotional responses, and reflections provided them opportunities for learning and growing as professionals, and how that learning informed their practical approaches to supervision.

The results of my study and the development of this proposed model for emotional-reflective learning can inform higher education, student affairs, and other professional industries on the ways in which professionals describe how they learn, and ways in which learning can be improved. In the following section, I provide the various implications of my study.

Implications for Student Affairs and Higher Education

Supervisors in student affairs are integral to accomplishing institutional goals in tandem with developing and supporting student affairs professionals (Tull, 2009; Winston & Creamer, 1997). They are also considered a factor in job satisfaction and retention of student affairs

professionals (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006, 2009, 2014; Winston & Creamer, 1997, 1998). My study utilized reflective and emotional aspects of experiential and transformative learning theories to better understand how supervisors in student affairs made meaning of their learning journeys. This conceptual framework influenced the development and analysis of my study, as well as the introduction of my proposed model for emotional-reflective learning. My study contributes to existing literature on supervisory learning and professional development in student affairs and can also be useful for professional industries outside of the field of student affairs. My findings may also help the several factions of student affairs better understand areas where the field is falling short in supporting supervisory learning over the career. Findings from this study have several implications, which I explore in the following paragraphs.

My study could be beneficial to student affairs divisions in institutions of higher education, graduate preparation programs in higher education and student affairs (HESA), professional organizations like NASPA and ACPA, and to individual student affairs professionals. Komives and Carpenter (2016) intimated that individuals, groups, and organizations all must take an active role in the lifelong learning of student affairs professionals as a matter of ethics. Divisions of student affairs may use this study to interrogate their processes for training and evaluation of supervision. HESA graduate programs could consider putting greater emphasis on supervision in their leadership curriculum. Additionally, HESA programs might integrate reflective activities into internship curricula that encourages students to self-assess their supervisory learning and plan for continuing their professional development in supervision post-graduation. Professional organizations such as NASPA and ACPA have recently acknowledged the growing need for better supervisory learning structures (NASPA, 2022). This study could help inform professional organizations of ways supervisors in student

affairs currently learn supervision to develop programs and educational materials that can fill educational gaps. Moreover, the proposed model for emotional-reflective professional learning could provide higher education and external fields with a tool for understanding the cycle of professional learning. Finally, individual student affairs professionals can use this study to help them reflect on their current state of learning and professional development in supervision and inform them of areas in which they can self-advocate to continue their supervisory learning journey.

This study highlighted two misalignments between the espoused values of the field of student affairs and its professional development practice. First, student affairs in higher education considers itself a field dedicated to learning and development, yet my findings indicate that this dedication does not extend to the learning and development of its professionals across the career lifespan. Second, student affairs promotes that it is a field dedicated to creating safe and inclusive spaces, but several participants in my study provided evidence of mistreatment, negligence, and abuse from supervisors and their workplace. My study indicates that student affairs and higher education has an opportunity to interrogate its supervisory development practices to align its practice with its values. This section explores these misalignments and their implications more broadly.

My participants overwhelmingly shared that experience and observation were the primary ways from which they learned supervision. They also indicated that there were few opportunities to learn supervision formally, either from their graduate preparation programs or from their divisions/institutions. Those who did find opportunities to complete supervision training provided by their institutions felt it was too general and not applicable to their roles. These findings underscore apparent deficiencies in the fields' dedication to lifelong learning.

Participants provided evidence that their learning was supported earlier in their career, especially as students working in paraprofessional roles, but once they crossed the threshold of full-time professional and continued to take on more advanced roles, there were fewer formal and intentional opportunities to continue their learning. The implication is that there is an expectation of supervisors to know, but a lesser expectation for supervisors to grow. As evidenced in my study, the observatory nature of supervisory learning means that this learning has a trickle-down effect—the supervisory practices of senior level administrators are observed and emulated by mid-level supervisors which then influences early-career supervisory learning. Yet, if intentional support of learning dwindles the more supervisors advance, what are the missed opportunities for growth and reflection and how does that impact the development of supervisors at lower levels? Moreover, how does that impact the professional development of supervisees? The field of student affairs is dedicated to learning and development, and it is important that the field improves its approach to lifelong professional learning.

There is an expectation that professionals in supervisory roles know how to supervise and know how to do so effectively, but there is a lack of formal training and assessment of learning in student affairs to ensure that. Few of my participants had examples of formal training or education on supervision received from either their departments or their graduate preparation programs. Several participants transitioned to their careers in student affairs from graduate programs and careers outside of higher education, and therefore, did not have opportunities to take classes in student affairs supervision or leadership. Participants relied on their experiences, emotions, and reflections to learn supervision, which led to subjective judgements about what supervisory qualities and characteristics were good or bad. Experiential learning is a highly effective and important learning method (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020), and I do not trivialize

the important role it plays in helping supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise. Instead, I mean to highlight that the field of student affairs has allowed experiential learning to be nearly the only method accessible to student affairs professionals, and therefore created an absence of measures to evaluate supervisory learning. Several of my participants indicated that there was a lack of feedback and evaluation of their role as supervisor, especially as they advanced in their career. This is a missed opportunity for supervisory learning and development across the career. Furthermore, this indicates an assumption from the field that supervisors are not in need of additional learning support as they advance. The apparent lack of intentional training and education together with the minimal existence of evaluation practices indicates that there is a need to develop intentional education, training, and assessment around supervision. These improved practices should go in tandem with experiential learning to ensure that effective supervision is being learned and practiced in student affairs. This could lead to improved and congruent supervisory practice and can contribute to aligning the fields' values with its practice related to learning and development.

This study highlighted repercussions related to perceptions of poor supervisory practices. High rates of attrition in student affairs are partially attributed to perceptions of poor supervision (Marshall et al., 2016; Tull, 2006, 2009; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Some of my participants described looking for new jobs because of negative experiences they had with supervisors. Others discussed the emotional and psychological harm they experienced from supervisors who were abusive or negligent in their roles. Additionally, some participants provided examples of when they made mistakes as supervisors that resulted in one or more of their own employees' departures. My participants discussed using trial and error as an experiential method for learning supervision, yet their errors often affected their supervisees and their teams. While those

mistakes led to lessons about effective supervisory practices, it was not without a cost. Training and education on supervision cannot completely inhibit a supervisor from making mistakes in their practice, but it can serve as a tool to mitigate some harmful impacts that mistakes can have, especially when it comes to feeling safe and included in the workplace. Student affairs is a field that espouses valuing inclusivity, safe spaces, and ethical practices. To uphold those values, there is a need for intentional and continuous training and education for practitioners at all levels, as well as persistent assessment and evaluation of performance and practice. Moreover, institutions need to examine the current level of inclusivity and safety that professionals experience in the workplace. As such, institutions of higher education and divisions of student affairs should invest in climate surveys, self-studies, and external consultants to uncover problematic behaviors of individuals, units, and departments. Developing a culture that is dedicated to inclusive professional workspaces is a long process that requires stakeholders at every level to commit to organizational transformation.

Supervisors in student affairs help institutions of higher education achieve their goals (Winston & Creamer, 1997), which often center on student success through retention, progression, and completion measures (Kuh et al., 2006). Functional areas of student affairs are most successful at helping achieve institutional goals when they are fully staffed and productive (Winston & Creamer, 1997). However, as stated previously, poor supervision can contribute to rates of turnover in student affairs. High turnover in student affairs means that units are continuously spending resources (e.g., time, money) replacing staff, which detracts from their primary student support responsibilities. For an advising office, as an example, this may mean that students experience delays in scheduling appointments with their advisors because their advisors are participating in staff interviews, or because the advisor's caseload has increased to

accommodate staff shortages. It is important for the field of student affairs to be more intentional about teaching supervision to improve one factor of attrition in the profession. Divisions of student affairs could develop intentional training programs for new supervisors in student affairs that include learning outcomes and assessments. HESA graduate preparation programs could devote some of their leadership curriculum to teaching models of supervision such as synergistic (Winston & Creamer, 1997), inclusive (Wilson et al., 2020), and identity-conscious (Brown et al., 2020) supervision. Additionally, HESA programs that have internships and practicum experiences as part of their curriculum could create learning outcomes related to supervision students must complete as part of their requirement. While not all internships have supervisory responsibilities, students could use observational methods to assess their supervisors, make meaning from their observations, and receive feedback on their assessments from faculty. This could influence professionals overtime to integrate intentional reflective practices into their supervision and professional development.

Kinzie and Carpenter (2016) emphasized that it is unethical for individuals, groups, and organizations in student affairs to not commit to supporting professional development and lifelong learning. Student affairs in higher education is a field dedicated to learning and development, yet the lack of continued professional learning opportunities for student affairs professionals across their careers indicates that there is also a lack of concern for contributing to the learning and development of our educators. My participants' experiences suggest that supervisors in student affairs are currently responsible for their continued learning with little structured, intentional support from their divisions and institutions. Improvements to supervisory learning and therefore to supervisory effectiveness could be made if other facets of the field committed to developing intentional supervisory training, education, and assessment.

Additionally, it should be noted that not all professionals in student affairs advance to supervisory roles, and a lack of advancement opportunities is another contributor to intention to leave the field (Marshall et al., 2016). Career commitment issues could possibly be mitigated if professionals felt there were ways they could grow outside of the career advancement structure, such as more institutional support for getting involved in professional organizations and taking advantage of costly professional development and leadership symposiums. This calls for institutions of higher education and student affairs divisions and its units to prioritize lifelong career learning as an organizational goal, which means, at the very least, interrogating current practices and dedicating resources to make improvements.

Finally, my conceptual framework provides a unique approach to studying and understanding how supervisors learn their practice. This could influence training and development programs in several industries. My framework influenced participants to consider *how* they learned supervisory skills rather than focusing on the skills themselves. As such, experiences, emotions, and reflection were brought to the forefront of my participants' responses, which gave unique insights into their learning journey that have not yet been explored in the literature. My conceptual framework and the findings from my study led to the development of a proposed model for emotional-reflective professional learning which provides a way to understand how adults use their experiences, emotions, and reflections to make meaning and inform their practice. The conceptual framework and subsequent proposed professional learning model can be useful for multiple industries interested in improving career learning across the lifetime. Training and development practices should be informed by adult learning theories to be most effective. This study highlighted that supervisory practice is influenced by adult learning methods such as experience (e.g., observation, trial & error) and reflection, and the

unique examination of affective dimensions of adult learning in the supervisory learning journey indicated the important role emotions also have on supervisory development. Higher education, student affairs, and other industries can use this study to understand how adult learning theories can help develop learning outcomes for future supervisory training and education programs. Those developing training and education programs can include opportunities for critical reflection and space for professionals to explore their emotional responses to their experiences. This could help professionals develop deeper and more critical meaning to inform their practice. Moreover, this may be a lens that future researchers use to explore dimensions of learning across the career in student affairs.

Limitations

My study had several limitations. First, the majority of those who responded were women-identifying supervisors in student affairs, and therefore they made up the largest population of my sample. Moreover, I did not ask participants to identify their race or ethnicity, therefore I have little self-disclosed data about such salient identities. Only two participants identified as people of color (both identified as women), only two participants identified as men, and one participant identified as greygender and queer. This limited the scope of diverse voices I could knowledgeably interact with which limited my ability to speak to the experiences of non-white, queer, and non-women identifying supervisors in student affairs. Another limitation was how many areas of student affairs were included. There are many functional areas of student affairs, and my participants represented a very small portion of those areas. Because of the small range of functional areas represented, I am uncertain of the experiences of supervisors in other areas of student affairs and how they would describe their learning journeys; this could be different from my participants' experiences. Finally, my participants all showed a desire to learn

supervision. Furthermore, some participants were pursuing terminal degrees at the time of this study and indicated interest in learning about my experience as a Ph.D. candidate to inform their own research journeys. It is possible that this is a limitation, as the voluntary nature of participating in this study could have excluded participants who were less enthusiastic about their learning and development and were therefore uninterested in participating in a study about learning supervision.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several gaps in the literature when it comes to professional learning and development for student affairs professionals across the lifetime of their careers. My research highlighted many areas for future research. In this section, I focus on six recommendations for future research.

First, additional research studying supervisor-supervisee relationships in student affairs would be beneficial to better understand how supervisors contribute to the experiences of student affairs professionals. Qualitative or mixed-method survey research and case studies could be useful methods to analyze these professional relationships.

Second, there is a need to expand the current literature (e.g., Tull, 2014) on supervisory support for mid- and late-career student affairs professionals. My research indicated that mid- and late-career participants were less likely to have mentor-like supervisors, to receive evaluative feedback from supervisors, or to receive opportunities for continued learning and development. Future studies could focus on how these professionals perceive levels of support from their supervisors.

Third, there is little existing literature that explores the experiences of supervisors of color in student affairs. Lydia's experiences suggest that several studies delving into the

experiences of supervisors of color could help put a spotlight on the unique needs of these professionals and how the field can better support them.

Fourth, future research should explore institutional support for intentional training and continued education for student affairs professionals. The lack of training and development in divisions of student affairs could be related to resources and support from institutional leadership. Research should investigate institutional support for employee development to better understand what barriers may prevent the development of intentional learning programs.

Fifth, little is known about how supervisory learning is assessed and evaluated in student affairs. Future research could investigate assessment and evaluation methods. Models for assessing supervisory learning could also be developed and tested in future research to provide practical applications for learning assessment.

Finally, there is a dearth of existing literature on how student affairs professionals' turnover impacts students in higher education. Future research should investigate how students in higher education may be affected by employee turnover in student affairs. This is another area where qualitative or mixed-method survey research and case studies could be useful research methods.

Conclusion

This chapter presented several conclusions based on the analysis of my findings, which were presented in Chapter Four. This study explored supervisory learning journeys in student affairs by endeavoring to answer two research questions: (1) How do supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise? (2) How do supervisors in student affairs describe the influence of previous supervision on the development of their supervisory practice? My participants revealed that supervisors in student affairs are very influential over supervisory learning, especially for

early-career professionals. My findings indicated that learning supervision is a subjective, irregular, and informal process that encompasses experiences, emotional responses, and reflections to make meaning. This suggested that the onus for learning supervision is primarily placed on the supervisor, and that other areas of the field (e.g., divisions of student affairs, graduate preparation programs) need to develop more intentional training and education for supervision to add to the experiential learning supervisors mainly engage in. Finally, learning is an ongoing process for student affairs professionals, and the supervisors in my study were constantly engaging in learning through experience and reflection. My findings in tandem with my conceptual framework inspired the development of a model for emotional-reflective professional learning as a way to better understand how adults learn and make meaning in the workplace. This chapter concluded with implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

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APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PROTOCOL

This protocol includes the following:

- My proposed form (pre-survey) that will go out with a call for participants email to identified divisions of student and/or academic affairs
- A draft of my invitation to participate email with consent form (consent guide)
- A draft of my protocols for interviews 1 and 2
- A draft of the independent reflective writing activity that participants complete between interviews 1 and 2

Pre-Survey: Participation Interest & Criterion Check

This survey is intended to gather preliminary information to help me screen potential participants for the minimum criteria for participation in this study. Potential participants are asked for their name, preferred method of communication, and information about their professional roles. There are other questions I ask that may provide additional perspectives and information for my study:

- I ask for pronouns so that I am sure to refer to participants by their chosen pronouns in communication (e.g., email, interviews) and thereafter in my analysis and writing.
- I ask for gender identity in case any patterns emerge when I am analyzing data that I want to make note of in my results, discussion, limitations, or implications sections of my study.
- I ask potential participants to upload a resume or CV so that I may review for their educational background, which is important to my understanding of when and where participants may have learned supervision. The resume/CV also helps me confirm and learn about their professional supervisory experiences.

1. First name
2. Last name
3. Please share your pronouns (e.g., she/her, they/them, he/him)
4. What is your gender identity? (Open ended)

5. What is your college/university email address?
    a. Please confirm your college/university email address.
6. What is the best phone number by which to reach you?
7. Do you prefer to be reached by email or by phone?
8. Current professional title
    a. College/university
    b. Office/unit
9. How long have you worked in student affairs as a full-time professional?
10. Are you currently a supervisor of full-time student affairs professional(s)?
    a. How many full-time student affairs professionals do you supervise?
    b. How long have you been a supervisor of student affairs professional(s)?
11. Do you currently have a supervisor?
12. Resume/CV upload

Research Participant Information and Consent Guide

Study Title: Supervisory Learning Journeys for Student Affairs Professionals

Researcher and Title: Maryann Orawczyk, Ph.D. Student

Department and Institution: Michigan State University, Department of Educational Administration, Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education Ph.D. Program

Contact Information: orawczyk@msu.edu; 760-447-1392

Advisor: Dr. Marilyn Amey, Professor, Interim Associate Provost for Faculty and Academic Staff Development (amey@msu.edu)

This research study is intended to investigate how supervisors in student affairs describe their supervisory learning journey. This is an invitation to participate in this study. I am required

to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that your participation is voluntary, to explain any risks and benefits associated with your participation including why you may or may not want to participate, and to empower you to make an informed decision about your participation. Please feel free to ask me any questions related to this study to help you decide about your participation.

Participation in this study involves three (3) parts: two (2) separate 60-minute in-person interviews and one (1) independently completed reflective writing activity, which I estimate will take 30 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time with no penalty for doing so. You may choose not to participate at all, or not to answer some or all of the interview and reflective writing questions. You may ask to review the questions to be asked in the interview and reflective writing activity before agreeing to participate. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. While no specific benefits to participating in this study can be promised, a possible benefit may include contribution to the scholarship on supervisory learning and development in student affairs and higher education as well as future improved practices of supervisory training and education in student affairs.
With your consent, interviews will be audio recorded. While it is my intention to conduct interviews in person, if necessary, interviews may be held on a virtual platform and, with your consent, will be audio and visually recorded. All digital audio and visual recordings will be kept on my password and fingerprint-protected computer. Digital audio recordings of in-person interviews will also be kept on a password and face-recognition-protected cellular device. Digital files will use pseudonyms in the file names. These recordings will be kept until the completion of the study, at which time they will be erased. The information form on which you indicate your

personal identifying information as well as your responses to the reflective writing activity will be maintained by me in a secure password-protected folder on my password and fingerprint-protected computer until the end of the study, at which time they will be destroyed permanently. The reflective writing activity responses will use pseudonyms for file names. Identifying information will be saved in a separate location from recordings and the reflective writing activity responses.

Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of the collected data. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym, if you wish, prior to the beginning of the study. If you do not choose a pseudonym, one will be chosen for you. All identifying information will be removed from transcripts prior to analysis.

If you have questions or concerns about this study and/or your rights as a study participant, or if you are dissatisfied at any point with any aspect of this study, please contact the principle investigator, Maryann Orawczyk, at 760-447-1392 or orawczyk@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____ _____

Signature **Date**

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Audio and Visual Recording

I would like to audio record in person interviews and audio and visually record potential virtual interviews for verification purposes. Recordings will be kept only until the research is concluded and will then be destroyed permanently. Your name will not be connected to your recording in any way. Please indicate below if you agree to be audio and video recorded.

I agree to allow the audiotaping/videotaping of the interview (circle your choice).

Yes No Initials _____

Interview 1 Protocol

Overview of the study:

- Introductions
    - Hello, nice to meet you, I'm Maryann…
- Overview of the interview
    - Before we begin, I would like to go over the purpose of my study, provide an overview of what is expected of your participation in the study, and answer any questions you have.
    - The purpose of this study is to understand how supervisors in student affairs describe their supervisory learning journey. This is a qualitative study that will use interviews and participant reflections to inform my analysis.
    - Your participation in this study includes the following activities:
        - Participation in two interviews – each interview is expected to last about 60 minutes.

- The completion of one reflective writing activity done independently. You will be provided a prompt and a deadline for submitting your response.
- After the completion of the interviews and the reflective writing activity I will provide you with a copy of the interview transcripts and request that you review them for clarity, accuracy, and completeness.

Background/rapport building:

1. Getting started, I would love to learn about your career journey. Please tell me about your career in student affairs.
    a. Why did you decide to pursue a career in student affairs?
    b. Who or what influenced your decision? Please describe the influential [person/situation].
2. Describe your current approach to supervising – how do you supervise? what's your style?
    a. Who or what influenced your supervisory style? Please describe the influential [person/situation].
    b. Do you use any theories or models to guide your supervisory approach? If so, which ones?

Learning supervision:

3. Tell me about how you learned to supervise. Describe your supervisory learning journey.
    a. [PROMPT] Describe the types of formal[8] education that taught you to supervise.

[8] By "formal," I mean education that has been structured for the specific purpose of teaching or training supervision.

i. Examples: classes/lessons devoted to learning supervision in your graduate program, or participation in a formal training program for supervision to prepare for your role.

b. [PROMPT] What opportunities has your employer/previous employers provided you for formally learning supervision?

c. [PROMPT] In what ways have you informally[9] engaged in learning supervision?

d. [PROMPT] In what ways, if any, have you self-directed your learning of supervision? (e.g., reading journals/texts)

Influences on learning supervision:

4. In what ways have your own supervisors, past or present, contributed to your supervisory learning journey?

    a. [PROMPT] What are some characteristics/traits of previous supervisors that you try to emulate as a supervisor to others? Why?

    b. [PROMPT] What are some characteristics/traits of previous supervisors that you try to refrain from emulating as a supervisor to others? Why?

Reflective Writing Activity

This writing activity is an opportunity for you to take your time reflecting on some of your past experiences being supervised, and to explain in your own words how those experiences may have contributed to your supervisory learning journey.

This writing activity may take you about 30 minutes to complete. Please give yourself time to think, process your thoughts, and write a full response to each of the two questions below.

[9] By "informal," I mean learning through unstructured, independent, and/or observational/experiential methods.

My preference is that you complete this exercise using a writing method and medium that best helps you reflect on and describe your experiences (examples include but are not limited to: typing in a word processing document or writing with pen/pencil on paper or in a journal; using concept mapping, note taking, or outlining to organize your thoughts; writing styles such as narrative, descriptive, or in third person).

Though my preference is for you to complete this activity through a writing method, I know that everyone has different ways of reflecting. If it is most helpful for you to reflect out loud, I encourage you to use the "dictate" function on a word processor, or to otherwise record yourself and I will have the recording transcribed. If you have another method of reflecting that you would prefer to use, please contact me and we can discuss your preferences.

Please respond to the following prompts:

1. Describe a time you had a positive emotional response to an interaction with a supervisor (past or present).
    a. What was the situation?
    b. What are the emotions you associate with the interaction? What made you feel this way?
    c. In what ways, if any, has this interaction influenced your supervisory development?
2. Describe a time you had a negative emotional response to an interaction with a supervisor (past or present).
    a. What was the situation?
    b. What are the emotions you associate with the interaction? What made you feel this way?
    c. In what ways, if any, has this interaction influenced your supervisory development?

Please return this reflective writing activity to me via email (orawczyk@msu.edu) by no later than three days before our scheduled second interview. This will give me time to review your responses so that I can follow up with you during our next interview if I need any clarification.

You may submit your responses as a scanned copy attached as .pdf or .doc[x] files.

Interview 2 Protocol

Revisiting the overview of the study:

- Introductions
    - Hi, it's great to be in this space with you again! Thank you, again, for your participation.
- Overview of the interview
    - Before we begin, I would like to revisit the purpose of my study to provide you with a reminder and allow you to ask any questions you may have about the study and your participation in the study.
    - The purpose of this study is to understand how supervisors in student affairs describe their supervisory learning journey. This is a qualitative study that will use interviews and participant reflections to inform my analysis.
    - Do you have any questions about the purpose of the study, or do you have any questions regarding your previous participation before we move forward with our second interview?

Reflective questions

1. What would you describe as being the most important influence(s) over your supervisory learning journey?

    a. How has that [factor/person/experience] influenced your learning of supervision?
2. How have your understandings or beliefs about supervision changed over time?
3. Reflecting on your career, are there any specific instances, moments, or milestones where you can recognize a shift or change to how you supervise? Please describe.

Meaning making

4. What has been the most profound or significant supervisory experience you have had **as a supervisee?** Please describe why this was profound or significant for you.
5. What has been the most profound or significant supervisory experience you have had a**s a supervisor**? Please describe why this was profound or significant for you.
6. Thanks for sharing this. Considering the last two responses, in what ways, if any, do you think these experiences have influenced how you supervise?

Completing the interview

7. Thank you again for your participation. I appreciate the time and energy you have donated to this study. As a reminder, I will provide you with a copy of the interview transcripts and request that you review them for clarity, accuracy, and completeness.
8. Before we finish, do you have any questions remaining for me?

Table 1

Research Questions in Relation to the Interview Questions (Anfara et al., 2002)

Research Questions & Sub-Questions	Interview Questions
1. How do supervisors in student affairs learn to supervise?	IP1.1; IP1.3; IP2.1
a. Through which methods is supervision learned? Formalized education, training, and/or professional development? Observation, trial and error, and/or on-the-job?	IP1.2(a,b); IP1.3(a,b,c,d)
b. What do supervisors credit as influences on their supervisory learning journey?	IP1.1(a,b); IP1.2(a,b); IP1.4(a,b); IP2.1(a); IP2.3; IP2.6
2. How do supervisors in student affairs describe the influence of previous supervisors on the development of their practice?	IP1.2(a); IP1.4(a,b); RWE.1; RWE.2; IP2.4; IP2.5; IP2.6
a. To what extent do supervisors engage in purposeful reflection on previous experiences with supervisors to inform their practice?	RWE.1(c); RWE.2(c); IP2.2; IP2.3; IP2.4; IP2.5; IP2.6
b. Do supervisors' emotions/feelings about previous supervision influence their own practice?	RWE.1(a,b,c); RWE.2(a,b,c); IP2.4; IP2.5

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Andra

Andra identified as a Latina woman and served as a director in academic advising and coaching at a public research institution in the Southeast. Andra had 12 years of experience in student affairs and 11 years of experience supervising in student affairs. At the time of this study, Andra supervised 2 professional staff. Andra came to student affairs from a business academic background and had earned a bachelor's degree in business management and a master's degree in organizational leadership. At the time of this study, Andra was progressing in a Ph.D. program studying higher education leadership.

Cheryl

Cheryl, a woman, was an executive director in advising and student success at a medium sized public baccalaureate granting institution in the Southeast. Cheryl had 9 years of experience working in student affairs with 5 ½ years of experience supervising. At the time of this study, Cheryl supervised 6 professional staff. Cheryl came to her career in student affairs after working as an adjunct professor in engineering. When she started her career in student affairs, Cheryl had a bachelor's degree in biomedical engineering and a master's degree in engineering. After transitioning from teaching to academic advising, Cheryl earned a graduate certificate in academic advising and then pursued an Ed.D. in higher education and leadership.

James

James identified as a man. He served as a director in an academic success unit at a private, not-for-profit research institution in the Mid-Atlantic. James had 8 years of experience in student affairs with 4 years of experience supervising and supervised 2 professional staff at the time of this study. James decided to pursue his career in student affairs while working as a graduate

assistant for an academic success unit connected to a university library. He earned a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in curriculum instruction. During this study, James was pursuing an Ed.D. related to human and organizational learning and development.

Linda

Linda identified as a Black woman working as a director in residence life for a public research institution in the Southeast. At the time of this study, Linda had 15 years of experience in student affairs with 13 years of supervising experience and supervised 10 professional staff. Linda decided to pursue a career in student affairs after working in residence life as an undergraduate student. Linda earned a bachelor's degree in secondary education with an emphasis in history as well as a master's degree in educational leadership and higher education and a Master of Business Administration. During this study she was pursuing a third master's degree in history.

Myra

Myra, a woman, served as a director in residence life for a public research institution in the Southeast. She came to this study with 16 years of experience in student affairs and had been supervising for the same amount of time. She supervised 4 professional staff at the time of this study. Myra decided to pursue a career in student affairs after her undergraduate experience in residence life. She had a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's degree in college student personnel, and an Ed.D. in leadership studies.

Naomi

Naomi, a woman, served as an Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs for a small private, not-for-profit baccalaureate degree granting institution in the Midwest. Naomi had 11 years of experience in student affairs with 10 years of experience supervising. She supervised 4 professionals at the time of this study, although 2 of those supervisees quit mid-way through her

participation in this study. Naomi decided to pursue a career in student affairs after her undergraduate experience working in an honors college program. Naomi earned a bachelor's degree in psychology with a leadership minor, a master's degree in higher education, and a Ph.D. in higher and adult education.

Paul

Paul identified as greygender and Queer. Paul served as a director in residence life for a private, not-for-profit medium sized institution in the Midwest. During this study, Paul had 7 years of experience in student affairs with 4 years of supervising experience and supervised 3 professional staff. Paul worked in residence life in undergrad and earned a bachelor's degree in social work and a master's degree in higher education.

Penny

Penny, a woman, served as an assistant dean in an academic success unit for undergraduate education at a large public research institution in the Midwest. Penny had 20 years of experience in student affairs with 10 years of supervision experience and supervised 4 professional staff at the time of this study. Penny came to student affairs from her undergraduate work in residence life. She earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy and both a master's degree and a Ph.D. in higher and adult education.

Spencer

Spencer, a man, worked as a director in an academic success unit for a large public associates degree granting college in the East-Central United States. Spencer had 19 years of experience in student affairs and 15 years of experience supervising. He was supervising 14 professional staff members during this study. Spencer transitioned to a career in student affairs after working in K–12 education. Spencer had a bachelor's degree in education, a master's degree in education

leadership and policy, and was pursuing an Ed.D. in adult education and leadership at the time of this study.

Teresa

Teresa, a woman, served as an associate director in an academic success unit at a large public research institution in the Southwest. Teresa had 15 years of experience in student affairs and 13 years of supervising experience. During this study, Teresa was supervising 5 professional staff. Teresa came to student affairs after a career change of heart led her to a university tutoring position. She had a bachelor's degree in government and Middle Eastern studies, a master's degree in Near Eastern studies, and a second master's degree in higher education.

Wanda

Wanda, a woman, served as a vice dean for an academic success unit at a large public research institution in the Mid-Atlantic. At the time of this study, Wanda had 10 years of experience in student affairs, 7 years of experience supervising, and supervised 5 professional staff. Wanda had extensive experience in student affairs from her undergraduate career, where she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology. Wanda originally wanted to pursue psychology and counseling as a career. Wanda transitioned back to student affairs after completing a master's degree in psychology, and then earned an Ed.D. in higher education leadership.