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Socialization to Student Affairs: Early Career Experiences Associated with
Professional Identity Development

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Abstract

In this study, the authors propose and test a model of professional identity development among early career student affairs professionals. Using survey data from 173 new professionals (0-5 years of experience), factor analysis revealed three dimensions of professional identity: commitment, values congruence, and intellectual investment. Multivariate analyses found significant associations of age, master's program characteristics, and influential people and experiences (e.g., interactions with professional colleagues and associations) with the dimensions of professional identity. Findings indicated key socialization experiences during and after graduate school were associated with the development of professional identity. We conclude with recommendations for practice and research.

Socialization to Student Affairs: Early Career Experiences Associated with
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In some career fields, attaining a requisite credential is sufficient to be eligible for employment. For occupations that can be characterized as a profession or semi-profession (see Becker, 1962; Goode, 1969), novice members must also participate in social exchanges with more seasoned members. This professional socialization is the process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a field (Merton, 1968; Tierney & Rhoads, 1994).

For decades, researchers have considered the processes of socialization in academe (see Austin, 2002; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Socialization in graduate school refers to the methods through which students “gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills” (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001, p. iii). Whereas faculty members typically enter their careers after securing a terminal degree, student affairs professionals enter their field through myriad academic paths, such as graduate work in student affairs and higher education administration, counseling, and other fields, related or not. With no single agreed-upon standard for entering the field or preparing professionals for their roles, diverse pathways exist.

The purpose of this study was to understand early career professionals’ (0-5 years) perspectives of their socialization process in student affairs and its relationship to professional identity development. A goal of professional socialization is to promote a sense of professional identity among individual members, implying a shift and transformation of personal and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Trede, Macklin, & Bridges, 2012). To foster professional identity development, nascent professionals need to engage in authentic experiences

that heighten self-awareness and a deeper understanding of themselves as practitioners in the profession. Such development requires novices to actively participate, learn, and reflect to make meaning of their experiences (Trede et al., 2012). Asking early career professionals about their experiences during curricular and work environments offers an individual-level analysis to understand the relationship between early socialization experiences and the formation of professional identity. Two primary research questions framed the study. First, what are dimensions of professional identity in student affairs? Second, what student and master's program characteristics and types of influences (people and experiences) in student affairs are associated with professional identity development?

PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION AND IDENTITY

One of the most important outcomes of professional socialization is an evolving professional identity (Bucher & Stelling, 1977; Weidman et al., 2001), a complex construct with several factors. For the purposes of this review, we examine both socialization and professional identity—the former being a process that can lead to the latter, an outcome. Professional identity is “an attitude of personal responsibility regarding one’s role in the profession, a commitment to behave ethically and morally, and the development of feelings of pride for the profession” (Bruss & Kopala, 1993, p. 686). This identity occurs by developing a sense of self who “thinks, feels, and acts” as a member of the profession (Merton, Reader, & Kendall, 1957, p. 7). Individuals who perceive that their professional work is related to their own sense of self will characteristically take a personal approach to their future profession and “actively integrate their learning with other aspects of their life” (Reid, Dahlgren, Petocz, & Dahlgren, 2008, p. 735).

Unfortunately, new student affairs professionals face major challenges in creating a professional identity (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), and little is known about what experiences

promote its development. A recent systematic review of higher education literature revealed a dearth of research that explores the development of professional identity (Trede et al., 2012), and of the twenty articles reviewed, eighteen were qualitative research studies. Understanding the factors that comprise professional identity and examining what socialization experiences relate to professional identity development among new student affairs professionals contributes to the knowledge base and may lead to recommendations to improve rates of satisfaction with and persistence in the field.

Professional identity and commitment are “virtually inseparable” concepts (Bucher & Stelling, 1977, p. 215). To develop professional identity, one needs to feel some measure of confidence in the knowledge and skills gained to become a competent practitioner in the field. Acquiring the knowledge and skills reflects a dedication to the work, one of the markers of commitment. A second dimension of commitment is the intention to maintain one’s membership in the profession. Weidman, Twale, and Stein’s (2001) socialization model of graduate and professional students in higher education proposes knowledge acquisition, investment, and involvement as the core elements that lead to professional identity and commitment.

Bucher and Stelling (1977) examined the process of preparing new professionals for roles and careers. They found the professional socialization process involves two sets of social variables, structural and situational. Structural variables include characteristics of the profession into which the neophytes are being inducted (e.g., the type of professional organizations, their staffs, shared values) and the nature of the training programs (e.g., curricula and experiences) for new members to the profession. Situational variables address the kinds of socialization processes that occur within a particular setting, such as role-playing (or work), role models, coaching and criticism, peer group influence, conversion experiences, and status passages (or

transitional points). In this case, role-playing refers to the practice of the discipline, such as assistantships, practica, and internships. How mentors coach and criticize new professionals influences the socialization process, and peers serve as a “comparative reference group” (p. 114) to help learn about and evaluate one’s perspectives, experiences, and competence.

Weidman et al. (2001) presented a conceptual framework for understanding graduate and professional students’ socialization that includes four interactive, overlapping stages. In the first (anticipatory) stage, neophyte members of a profession become aware of “behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive expectations” through pre-socialization experiences and begin to commit to a career path (p. 12), filtering their perceptions through unique backgrounds and predispositions. Throughout the second (formal) stage, newcomers are inducted through instruction, gaining access to professional knowledge and experiences not available to the public; they begin to take on professional roles and acquire clearly stated normative expectations and guidelines about professional behavior. Through role-playing experiences and feedback exchanges from faculty and supervisors in formal settings (e.g., coursework, assistantships, internships, study tours, conference presentations), role incumbents determine their degrees of fit with the profession. In the third (informal) stage of socialization, newcomers observe interactions with faculty, supervisors, colleagues, and peers to learn role expectations. They discern clues about what are acceptable professional behaviors, develop collaborative communities of support, and appreciate diverse colleagues. In the final (personal) stage, early professionals deepen the integration of personal and professional roles, internalize ethical practice, and create an evolving professional identity. Each of the four stages includes three core elements: ways that new members increase their information base of the profession (knowledge acquisition); commitment of time, energy, and resources (investment); and participation levels and intensity (involvement).

Tull, Hirt, and Saunders (2009a) highlighted the growing interest in the field of student affairs on the socialization process. In their guide for new professionals and supervisors, they examined the influence of contexts such as institutional type and student characteristics and strategies to enhance the socialization of new professionals. Socialization is particularly important for new professionals transitioning into full-time employment from graduate preparation programs. “Effective socialization is perhaps most important in helping new professionals develop a rewarding quality of work life, thus reducing attrition among practitioners in student affairs” (Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009b, pp. 218-219). Past studies of new professionals and recent graduates in student affairs have reported attrition rates ranging from 32% within the first five years (Wood, Winston, & Polkosnik, 1985) to 61% within the first six years (Holmes, Verrier, & Chisholm, 1983). More recent literature on retention in student affairs focuses on intentions to leave, levels of morale, and job satisfaction (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Strayhorn, 2009; Tull, 2006). Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) argued that attrition amounts to “a loss of talent and training in the field” (p. 320).

Renn and Hodges (2007) examined the adjustment of new professionals and found they were concerned about new relationships with students and colleagues and sought mentors from whom they could seek advice. Participants also identified challenges of personal and professional fit and confidence in their competencies in their first job. Building on previous research, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) examined the transition to full-time work and reported four major challenges faced by new professionals: creating a professional identity, navigating a cultural adjustment, maintaining a learning orientation, and seeking sage advice.

Graduate preparation programs are assumed to be a primary socialization agent for scholars and practitioners in student affairs. Young and Janosik (2007) described professional

preparation as necessary for securing full status as a member of a profession and providing service to the profession itself. Liddell, Wilson, Pasquesi, Hirschy, and Boyle (2014) examined new professionals who were enrolled full-time and held graduate assistantships during their graduate training. They found that out-of-class experiences (such as internships, practica, and assistantships) were perceived as more influential in understanding institutional culture, political landscapes, and professional expectations, as well as expanding professional networks and developing career goals. In-class experiences were perceived as significantly more influential in getting involved professionally and modeling ethical practice.

All of these findings point to a need to better create seamless curricular partnerships between graduate programs and work sites. Particularly for individuals early in their student affairs career paths, we need to better understand the journey toward professional socialization, especially ways in which new members can gain insights into how they can integrate their personal and professional identities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws from earlier sociology of work literature such as Bucher and Stelling's (1977) outcomes of socialization and Thornton and Nardi's (1975) conceptions of role acquisition, models of socialization in higher education (e.g., Tierney & Rhoads, 1994; Weidman et al., 2001), and more recent scholarship on socialization to student affairs in particular (e.g., Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Tull et al., 2009a). We build upon these concepts looking particularly at the socialization of student affairs professionals throughout their master's degree programs and initial entry into the field to better understand their relationships with the outcome of professional identity.

We developed the *Early Career Student Affairs Socialization Model* based on Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Output framework (see Figure 1). Designed to assess student outcomes in an educational environment, Astin's I-E-O model is appropriate for investigating the socialization experiences of student affairs professionals during formative graduate school and work settings as they learn about the field and develop their professional identities. The framework also acknowledges that individual student characteristics may have both direct and indirect relationships with the environment and outcome variables. Variables within the model were drawn from the literature, specifically the models of professional socialization presented by Bucher and Stelling (1977) and Weidman et al. (2001). The input variables included student characteristics of gender, race/ethnicity, age, and undergraduate anticipatory socialization experiences.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 1: *Early Career Student Affairs Socialization Model*

The environment variables address early professional experiences, such as master's program characteristics and influential people and experiences during and shortly after a master's program. Finally, the output variable is professional identity, which includes a global score of professional identity and three subscales that represent the dimensions of commitment, values congruence, and intellectual investment. Our test of the model is described below.

METHOD

This section first describes the *Survey of Early Career Socialization in Student Affairs* (SECSSA), including the development of the professional identity scale, the dependent (output) variables in the model. The description of study participants follows.

Instrument

This study utilized a cross-sectional, quantitative research design using a 20-minute, web-based survey. Participants completed a survey developed by the investigators with 41 multiple-part items. The purpose of the survey was to understand entry-level professionals' perspectives of their socialization process in student affairs, with an emphasis on what characteristics and experiences are associated with professional identity development. The SECSSA includes sections of items on participant demographics, undergraduate experiences, master's program characteristics and experiences, employment and professional development experiences, and professional identity. A limited number of open-ended questions conclude the instrument.

Regarding participant characteristics, gender is measured by categories of men, women, transgender persons, and non-respondents. Race/ethnicity categories include African American or Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, multiracial, Hispanic or Latina/o, White or Caucasian, and non-respondents. Age is a continuous variable. Undergraduate anticipatory socialization experiences is a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 6 experiences (i.e., participate in a formal mentoring program, attend a careers in student affairs program, hold a formal internship in student affairs, serve as a member of a student organization for aspiring student affairs professionals, hold a paid job in student affairs, or serve as a student organization leader).

Two sets of environmental variables consist of master's program characteristics and influential experiences with socializing agents. The master's program characteristics include an individual's responses to single items that follow the stem "The following characteristics describe my master's program." Response options are on a 4-point scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Items consist of (a) theory-based curriculum, (b) high expectations of ethical behaviors, (c) collaborative peer culture, (d) diverse peer group, and (e) diverse faculty. The second group of environmental variables include a participant's

assessment of influential various agents of socialization. Response options are on a 7-point scale: -3 = very negative influence, 0 = no influence, +3 = very positive influence. Items include (a) my professional colleagues, (b) my involvement in professional organization, (c) my master's program curriculum (course content, etc.), (d) my master's program faculty, (e) my master's program peers, (f) my master's program experiential opportunities, and (g) the supervisors of my master's program experiential opportunities.

Because no professional identity scale existed for student affairs, we developed the scale based on the literature. Sample items include "I see myself working in higher education until retirement," "My values are consistent with the student affairs profession," and "I am interested in the problems of this profession." Exploratory factor analysis (using principal axis factoring with oblique rotation) determined factors of professional identity. The initial item pool included 17 items and the number of participants was 170, resulting in an acceptable 10:1 subject-to-item ratio (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The Kaiser-Guttman criteria determined the initial number of factors extracted. Six factors had eigenvalues greater than 1; however, three of those factors were excluded as trivial, with fewer than three items loading above the critical value. Three factors remained with structure matrix item loadings of .4 or greater. An examination of the scree plot confirmed the number of factors. Factor 1 was identified as Commitment (3 items); Factor 2 as Values Congruence (3 items); and Factor 3 as Intellectual Investment (4 items). Commitment refers to an individual's level of satisfaction with and connection to the profession. Values congruence indicates the degree to which an individual's beliefs align with those espoused by the profession. Intellectual investment connotes efforts by an individual to increase one's professional knowledge and skills.

Four scores were calculated for each participant. The three subscale scores represent the means of the items of the respective subscales, and the global professional identity score was calculated by averaging the values of the ten items comprising the subscales. To address missing values for items within a scale, we used a 60% threshold. For example, if a participant answered at least 60% of the items on a subscale, we substituted the mean score of the participant's other responses on that subscale for the missing items. Using this method, we replaced less than 1% of the data. The internal consistencies (Cronbach's coefficient α) of the scales on the three factors ranged from .708 to .738. The global professional identity measure had a Cronbach's coefficient α of .812. Table 1 presents the items and factor loadings associated with each subscale.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Participants

The American College Personnel Association sent the SECSSA to 708 of its members who had identified themselves as new professionals. The response rate was 24.7%. We excluded two respondents without a graduate degree, analyzing data on 173 respondents.

The possibility of nonrespondents differing from respondents is likely to be greater when the response rate is lower (Dillman, 2000). To estimate the effects of response bias, we conducted a mailing wave analysis. *T*-tests on the professional identity subscales were used to compare participants who responded after the first mailing ($n = 100$) compared to those from the third ($n = 30$). We found no significant differences between the groups; thus, there is a high degree of confidence that respondents were reasonably representative of nonrespondents.

Table 2 shows that the sample over-represents White and female individuals when compared to the population of entry-level members of ACPA and that the sample participants were more forthcoming about reporting their race or ethnicity. For analyses, we combined

several categories due to low responses, as we determined that we had too few participants within some sub-categories. For example, gender was measured as a dummy variable reflecting women as the reference group compared to a combined category of men, transgender persons, and non-respondents. We used race/ethnicity as a dummy variable denoting White or Caucasian as the reference group, and the comparison group combined African American or Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, multiracial, Hispanic or Latina/o, and non-respondents. Eighty-eight percent of respondents attended their master's programs full-time. Regarding the incoming master's program class size, 39.3% of participants had a cohort size of fewer than 20 students, 28.3% were in cohorts of 20-29 students, 26.4% were in cohorts larger than 30 students, and 6.4% did not know the size of their cohorts. Ages ranged from 24 to 59 years (mean of 28.18 years), 9.2% attended a community college, and 23.1% attended a religiously affiliated undergraduate school.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

DATA ANALYSIS

To test the model in Figure 1 and determine significant associations with professional identity, we conducted three hierarchical blocked multiple regressions—one for each subscale—examining commitment, values congruence, and intellectual investment separately. Finally, we conducted a hierarchical blocked multiple regression to predict global professional identity, which includes all ten of the items from the three subscales. To screen the data for multivariate outliers, the standardized residuals from the regressions were plotted against the standardized predicted values. The visual inspections suggested that the variables reasonably satisfy the assumptions required for multiple regression. Aligning with Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Output framework, we conducted the regressions with each block of independent variables in the hypothesized temporal order. The two blocks included student the demographic

characteristics (input) and the early professional experiences (environment), which incorporated the characteristics of the master's program and various influential people and experiences during and after graduate school. We entered the environmental variables in one block, acknowledging that they can interact and overlap (Weidman et al., 2001). We refrained from claiming causation among variables, as not all mediating variables are accounted for in the model.

Four limitations of the study follow. First, this study used a non-probability, purposive sample of early career student affairs administrators who were current members of a particular professional association. As such, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all early career administrators in student affairs. ACPA members who completed the survey may have been more likely to report higher levels of socialization than non-respondents, although a mailing wave analysis mitigates this concern. Second, as this an exploratory study, the instrument may need further refinement and testing. Third, as noted above, our sample was skewed in terms of race/ethnicity and gender, although less so than in Taub and McEwen's (2006) study of 300 students enrolled in 24 master's programs in college student personnel/higher education in which 89% of respondents were White and 74% were female. As in their study, the low number of people of color among the respondents limits our conclusions and demonstrates the need for studies dedicated to such populations of graduate students and early career professionals. Fourth, while our model includes individual and program characteristics, it omits institutional characteristics. We acknowledge that the culture of an institution can be an important socializing agent for early career professionals, yet determining the magnitude of those influences given the institutional mobility of many student affairs professionals is beyond the scope of this study.

RESULTS

Regarding our first research question, principal axis factoring (detailed in methods) resulted in three dimensions of professional identity of early career student affairs staff: commitment, values congruence, and intellectual investment. We used these three subscales and a fourth, an overall professional identity scale, as dependent variables to test the early career socialization model presented in the conceptual framework. Thus, our second research question focused on identifying early socialization experiences in student affairs that are associated with professional identity development. Findings indicate key socialization experiences during and after graduate school were associated with the development of professional identity, yet not all variables in the model were significant. Table 3 displays the intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations of all variables in the model. A summary of the four hierarchical multiple regressions conducted is presented in Table 4 and described below. Each column represents a separate regression model.

[INSERT TABLES 3 AND 4 ABOUT HERE]

All of the hierarchical regression models were significant overall, and each reveals a unique combination of significant variables. The first regression analysis was conducted to determine the degree to which the commitment subscale of professional identity development could be explained by the master's program characteristics and the influential people and experiences after controlling for the demographic factors. The linear combination of independent variables was significantly related to commitment, accounting for 21% of variance in the subscale. Findings revealed two statistically significant environmental variables: influences of involvement in professional organizations ($\beta = 0.27, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [.06, .25]$)

and professional colleagues ($\beta = 0.21, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.02, .21]$). No demographic variables were significantly associated with the commitment dimension of professional identity.

The regression model results for the professional identity subscale values congruence was statistically significant and accounted for approximately 23% of the variance in values congruence. Age was the only demographic variable significantly related to values congruence ($\beta = 0.16, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.00, .03]$). As for the environment section of the model, findings revealed three significant relationships with values congruence: the master's program's high expectations of ethical behaviors ($\beta = 0.22, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [.03, .28]$), the influence of the master's program curriculum ($\beta = 0.21, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.00, .17]$), and the influence of the master's program experiential opportunities ($\beta = 0.18, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.00, .17]$).

In the regression model to explain the variance of the intellectual investment subscale of professional identity, findings revealed a statistically significant association, explaining about 24% of the variance. No demographic variables were significantly related to the intellectual investment dimension of professional identity. Significant environmental independent variables included involvement in professional organizations ($\beta = 0.22, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [.03, .16]$), the influence of master's program peers ($\beta = -0.22, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.15, -.01]$), and the influence of professional colleagues ($\beta = 0.21, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.02, .15]$). All relationships were in the expected direction (positive) except for the master's program peers.

Finally, the regression model for the global scale of professional identity was statistically significant, accounting for approximately 29% of the variance in professional identity. Once again, the sole significant demographic variable was age ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.00, .03]$). Additionally, two environmental variables showed significance. Involvement in professional organizations indicated the strongest relationship in the model ($\beta = 0.28, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI }$

[.05, .16]), followed by the influence of professional colleagues ($\beta = 0.23, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [.02, .14]$).

DISCUSSION

In this study, we sought to understand early professional socialization in student affairs and professional identity as one outcome of that process. The three dimensions of professional identity identified in this study – commitment, values congruence, and intellectual investment – contribute to an understanding of professional socialization. Given our findings, we propose that definitions of professional identity include a strong connection to the profession, alignment between one's own and the field's values, and ongoing professional development. Each of these dimensions is explained below.

First, commitment is a sign of satisfaction with and connection to the field, confirming Bruss and Kopola's (1993) notion of commitment as an intention to remain in the field. Next, understanding and acting upon the profession's ethical principles and standards is an aspect of values congruence. This dimension is also consistent with their inclusion of the dedication to behave ethically and morally as a component of professional identity. Finally, efforts to increase professional knowledge and skills, markers of intellectual investment and a key aspect of professional socialization, are also consistent with the literature (Bruss & Kopola, 1993; Weidman et al., 2001). In other words, professional identity development requires commitment, congruence, and an investment in specialization and advanced knowledge and skills.

We also examined which demographic characteristics, master's program characteristics, and influential people and experiences were associated with professional identity. Age was the only significant demographic characteristic in the model, tied to values congruence and the global professional identity score. Older professionals may be clearer about their values and be

able to evaluate their congruence with the field's espoused values, particularly if they had prior career experience.

Weidman, et al. (2001) noted that new members filter their perceptions through their prior experiences; however, the only student input characteristic significantly related to professional identity was age. Gender, race/ethnicity, and undergraduate anticipatory socialization experiences did not reveal significant relationships in our sample. Taub and McEwen (2006) cited multiple anticipatory socialization experiences that influence individuals to enter student affairs, including undergraduate employment in a student affairs area, holding a student leadership position, and participation in a student affairs fellows program. Although anticipatory socialization experiences may influence an individual's decision to enter the field, in this study, those experiences did not wield a significant influence on early career professionals' professional identity after they entered graduate school. In other words, anticipatory socialization experiences may be more valuable in introducing prospective members to the field than in explaining their professional identity later.

The only significant master's program characteristic in our model, believing that the master's program had high expectations of ethical behaviors, was significantly related to values congruence. The master's program curriculum and experiential opportunities were the two significant influential experiences. In contrast, neither master's program faculty nor supervisors, overseers of the curriculum and experiential opportunities were significant. This result is inconsistent with Renn and Jessup-Anger's (2008) and Strayhorn's (2009) findings on the importance of supervisors in new professionals' transition to full-time work in the field. In contrast, it supports Bucher and Stelling's (1977) finding that once many graduate students developed a sense of mastery of basic skills, they were more resistant to the assessment, advice,

and direction from others. In addition to helping new professionals develop effective methods of self-evaluation, faculty and supervisors need to create learning environments that offer new professionals constructive criticism that they can respond to productively.

Professional colleagues and involvement in professional organizations were two other significant influences, related to commitment, intellectual investment, and the global professional identity score. This suggests that professional engagement can be a powerful force in fostering development of professional identity, a result also found by Renn and Hodges (2007). That engagement could include having mentors, acquiring an association home, or developing a strong institutional fit. In the formal and informal stages of socialization (Weidman, et al., 2001), professional colleagues likely provide valuable modeling and coaching roles for new professionals as novices grapple with ambiguities, negotiate conflicts, and experience other challenges of professional practice (Bucher & Stelling, 1977). As the study's sampling frame included members of a prominent student affairs professional association, it is not surprising that professional engagement wields a strong influence. That said, through involvement in professional organizations, members can broaden support networks beyond the local campus community, acquire and hone skills and knowledge to be competent in various work roles, obtain ongoing educational and professional support throughout the career span, and establish a formal connection to the profession.

The association of master's program peers to intellectual investment was the only significant negative relationship in the model. Student affairs professionals have sometimes been described as doers, not thinkers (Winston & Saunders, 1991). The factors comprising intellectual investment, including reading current literature in and being interested in the

problems of the field, may be more individually oriented. Perhaps professionals see their peers as “doers” and do not seek them out intellectually.

Recommendations for Practice

Our findings suggest that the experiences contributing to the agency and ownership of one’s career development (those leading to a professional identity) may be the very experiences that promote self authorship, facilitate critical thinking, and foster self-evaluation. These experiences occur in Weidman, et al.’s (2001) personal stage of socialization, during which individuals integrate personal and professional roles. Self-authorship is “the capacity to internally define [one’s] own beliefs, identity, and relationships” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. xvi). In her longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda described the critical role that supervisors can play in promoting the development of self-authorship and therefore identity. The challenge of creating a professional identity was one of the major themes that emerged from Renn and Jessup-Anger’s (2008) study, and they called for explicit attention to this in future research; we concur. Our findings provide a framework in which to discuss what professional identity is and what promotes its development. These conversations should occur with faculty in classrooms, with supervisors of experiential learning opportunities (e.g., assistantships), and with other professional colleagues; even more powerful would be the conversations that reinforce both the curriculum and professional practice. More specifically, mentors can play active roles in encouraging new professionals to reflect on and make sense of the expectations, values, relationships, roles, and responsibilities of their personal and professional identities, thereby promoting a sense of individual agency and self-authorship among new professional members.

Given the importance of colleagues and professional organizations in fostering development of professional identity, graduate students and new professionals should be

encouraged to become involved in professional organizations, and those organizations should create clear pathways for engagement and growth. On campus, promoting interactions with colleagues across the student affairs division is also a recommended strategy, particularly experiences offering opportunities that challenge and support their understanding of what it means to them to be a student affairs professional. Additionally, organizing discussions of current literature and issues outside the classroom may help new professionals view their peers as vehicles for increasing intellectual investment.

The findings of this study also affirm the presence of values and ethics in our practice. Communicating high expectations for ethical behaviors among early career professionals is an important task not only for faculty in graduate preparation programs, but also for site supervisors. Experienced professionals should role model these behaviors themselves and seek opportunities to promote reflective discussions on the ethical implications of work in student affairs. Communicating the shared values of the profession to new members reflects a structural aspect of the socialization process (Bucher & Stelling, 1977). Consistency across faculty, supervisors, and the curriculum sends a powerful message about the importance of ethical practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined some influential experiences that early career professionals report are significantly related to professional identity development, and future research can examine additional outcomes of socialization. As Tierney and Bensimon (1996) and Bucher and Stelling (1977) acknowledged, new members actively influence the socialization process. Little is known about how early professionals manage their interactions with various agents of socialization (e.g., peers, supervisors, faculty, other colleagues). Understanding their effective strategies of learning about student affairs work, negotiating relationships (both personal and professional), and

developing professional networks would be useful to future students and their administrative and faculty mentors. Gaining some insights into the various ways students experience different graduate program environments will be helpful in constructing learning communities. This requires additional, in-depth exploration with early-career professionals. More research regarding the socialization experiences of populations underrepresented in this study (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity, and/or part-time students) and other student-level demographic characteristics, such as relationship status, family responsibilities, and community connection (see Brus, 2006; Rhoades, Kiyama, & McCormick, 2008) is needed. As for institutional-level characteristics, variation exists by size, control, level, selectivity, predominant population served, among others. Acknowledging that institutional type sets the context for socialization, Hirt (2009) cautioned that “socialization by institutional type can lead to limited thinking” (p. 63), as each campus provides a particular context for the socialization process. Future research can address the influence of such institutional characteristics as organizational culture on professional identity development and the socialization of student affairs professionals.

Subsequent studies using confirmatory factor analysis can examine how the structure of the professional identity scale compares across other samples of early student affairs administrators, including those who are not ACPA members. As some early career professionals may more closely identify with a particular subgroup of the student affairs profession, such as orientation, housing, or student activities, the scale could be tested on groups of functional areas within student affairs. Additional factors likely contribute to professional identity, so new items may yield more dimensions. For example, new professionals’ lateral roles with family, significant others, and community members likely influence how they negotiate their professional roles (see Rhoades et al., 2008; Weidman et al., 2001).

CONCLUSION

This study examined professional identity development among early career student affairs professionals. Early career professionals and their peers, supervisors, other professional colleagues, faculty, and professional associations all play important roles in the experiences during and after graduate school that are associated with professional identity development. These socializing agents can collaborate to assist students in creating a plan and structuring experiences that will promote needed skills and dispositions and help them understand themselves as practitioners in the profession. For this development to occur, students must intentionally seek opportunities to practice reflection and other professional skills in academic assignments and classroom activities, internships, graduate assistantships, student organizations, and early professional positions, and through involvement in professional associations. This purposeful involvement can promote the development of professional identity.

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Table 1

Survey of Early Career Socialization in Student Affairs Items and Rotated Pattern and Structure Coefficients and Communalities (N = 170)

Factor and Survey Items	Pattern Coefficients	Structure Coefficients	Communalities
<i>Commitment ($\alpha = 0.738$)</i>			
I am satisfied with the way my career is going	0.495	0.508	0.279
I see myself working in higher education until retirement	0.789	0.822	0.591
I think about leaving student affairs work to pursue something different (reverse score)	0.841	0.773	0.615
<i>Values Congruence ($\alpha = 0.708$)</i>			
I understand the ethical principles and standards of the profession	0.784	0.758	0.337
I engage in ethical practice as a member of the profession	0.797	0.778	0.444
My values are consistent with the student affairs profession	0.354	0.52	0.378
<i>Intellectual Investment ($\alpha = 0.718$)</i>			
I take pride in being a member of this profession	-0.391	-0.567	0.521
I am committed to reading current literature in the field	-0.855	-0.859	0.445
I am interested in the problems of this profession	-0.479	-0.564	0.403
I take pride in improving my specialized skills (e.g., advising specific student populations)	-0.327	-0.432	0.337

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Sample versus Population

Demographic Characteristic	Sample N=173	ACPA Population N=708
Gender:		
Female	68.8%	61.3%
Male	29.5%	36.0%
Transgender	0.6%	.3%
Other or not reported	1.2%	2.0%
Race/Ethnicity:		
African American or Black	4.6%	11.3%
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.7%	3.2%
Hispanic or Latino/a	2.9%	4.4%
Multiracial	2.9%	2.3%
White or Caucasian	80.9%	63.1%
Not reported	6.9%	15.7%

Table 3

Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Variables, N =173

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Inputs: Student Characteristics</i>											
1. Female											
2. White	.05										
3. Age	-.01	.01									
4. Anticipatory socialization experiences	-.09	-.04	-.29***								
<i>Environment: Early Professional Experiences</i>											
<u>Master's Program Characteristics</u>											
5. Theory-based curriculum	.01	.06	-.05	.02							
6. High expectations of ethical behaviors	-.03	-.04	.04	-.10	.17*						
7. Collaborative peer culture	.03	.09	-.04	.05	.18*	.41***					
8. Diverse peer group	-.02	-.01	.04	-.01	.06	.10	.29***				
9. Diverse faculty	-.08	.02	-.05	.07	.22**	.22**	.13	.39***			
<u>Influential Experiences and Experiences</u>											
10. My professional colleagues	-.01	.05	.03	-.05	.26**	.07	-.01	.01	.04		
11. My involvement in professional organizations	-.01	-.10	.07	.02	.09	.15*	-.03	-.05	.05	.29***	
12. My master's program curriculum	-.08	.07	-.10	.10	.19*	.21**	.23**	.20**	.24**	-.02	.11
13. My master's program faculty	-.02	.01	-.11	.13	.19*	.21**	.24**	.24**	.30***	-.07	.07
14. My master's program peers	.05	.11	-.03	.05	.11	.17*	.31***	.23**	.23**	.17*	-.05
15. My master's program experiential opportunities	.05	.10	-.11	.07	.00	.09	.24**	.16*	.08	.07	-.03
16. The supervisors of my master's program experiential opportunities	-.08	.06	-.06	.05	.14	.18*	.24**	.23**	.10	.15	.06
<i>Outputs: Professional Identity</i>											
17. Global professional identity	.03	.04	.13	.06	.15*	.19*	.15	-.04	.06	.32***	.39***
18. Commitment	.03	.05	.09	.01	.06	.02	.06	-.09	-.02	.30***	.34***
19. Values congruence	-.03	.10	.11	.07	.16*	.30***	.19*	.06	.15	.16*	.21**
20. Intellectual investment	.04	-.03	.11	.07	.18*	.17*	.14	-.04	.03	.26*	.34***
<i>M</i>	.69	.81	28.18	2.36	2.35	3.38	3.32	3.05	2.79	2.03	1.62
<i>SD</i>	0.47	0.39	4.52	1.24	0.58	0.60	0.61	0.79	0.72	1.14	1.08

Table 3, continued

Variable	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
<u>Influential People and Experiences</u>									
10. My professional colleagues									
11. My involvement in professional organizations									
12. My master's program curriculum									
13. My master's program faculty	.71***								
14. My master's program peers	.36***	.49***							
15. My master's program experiential opportunities	.23**	.18*	.31***						
16. The supervisors of my master's program experiential opportunities	.23**	.20**	.33***	.53***					
<i>Outputs: Professional Identity</i>									
17. Global professional identity	.09	.04	.01	.13	.18*				
18. Commitment	-.03	-.04	.01	.10	.17*	.81***			
19. Values congruence	.22**	.09	.10	.20*	.14	.72***	.39***		
20. Intellectual investment	.06	.06	-.07	.03	.11	.82***	.44***	.44***	
<i>M</i>	2.00	1.83	1.69	2.42	1.92	3.22	2.97	3.43	3.24
<i>SD</i>	1.10	1.15	1.22	0.91	1.16	0.40	0.64	0.43	0.46

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 4

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results of Professional Identity (N = 161)

	Final Standardized β Coefficients			
	Commitment	Value Congruence	Intellectual Investment	Professional Identity (Global)
Constant	2.10***	1.53***	1.76***	1.79***
Block 1: Student Characteristics				
Gender	.032	-.012	.069	.051
Race/ethnicity	.035	.077	-.024	.041
Age	.098	.156*	.141	.160*
Undergraduate anticipatory socialization Experiences	.030	.123	.108	.102
Block 2: Early Professional Experiences				
<i>Master's program characteristics</i>				
Theory-based curriculum	-.015	.095	.086	.047
High expectations of ethical behaviors	-.104	.215**	.058	.062
Collaborative peer culture	.135	.054	.153	.142
Diverse peer group	-.153	-.040	-.115	-.129
Diverse faculty	.032	.082	.040	.058
<i>Influential people and experiences</i>				
Professional colleagues	.207*	.071	.211*	.225**
Involvement in professional organizations	.265**	.126	.220**	.281***
Master's program curriculum	-.061	.214*	-.014	.023
Master's program faculty	.015	-.175	.110	.012
Master's program peers	-.064	-.016	-.217*	-.134
Master's program experiential opportunities	.050	.182*	.006	.086
Supervisors of experiential opportunities	.158	-.049	.087	.097
<i>F</i>	2.45**	2.68**	2.83**	3.69***
<i>R</i> ²	.21	.23	.24	.29
<i>N</i>	161	161	161	160

Note. Several variables were omitted from the model before analysis because they were highly correlated with other variables in the model, which included both student characteristics (enrollment status) and master's program characteristics (size of cohort, curricular emphasis, academic and social enrichment opportunities, competitive peer environment, face-to-face instruction, faculty availability, study tour participation, and admission selectivity).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.