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The purposes of this study were to identify factors of midlevel student affairs administrators' professional identity and to examine the association of those factors to career commitment, career entrenchment, and demographic characteristics. Principal axis factor analysis derived 3 dimensions of professional identity: career contentment, community connection, and values congruence with the profession. Regression analyses conducted on 377 survey responses revealed that 3 of 4 demographic characteristics, all 3 career commitment subscales, and all 3 career entrenchment subscales were significantly associated with at least 1 of the professional identity subscales. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Knowing one's identity is critical; it influences all we do both personally and professionally (Young, 2007). Clear values, a well-defined sense of identity, and self-directedness, combined with adaptability and flexibility, have considerable influence on career success. These attributes are also helpful in an unstable job market. In this study, we examined the factors of professional identity that were salient for midlevel student affairs professionals. By understanding the professional identity of midcareer professionals in higher education, administrators can shape environmental factors that facilitate longevity in the field.

A recent report detailed state budget cuts to public colleges and universities in 48 states. Cuts often occur even as enrollment increases (Oliff, Palacios, Johnson, & Leachman, 2013). In response to decreased budgets, campus leaders raise tuition and cut costs, often resulting in layoffs, furloughs, hiring and salary freezes, and eliminated positions. Given the uncertainty caused by restructuring, reorganization, and layoffs, relying on a single institution to sustain one's career may be unwise.

Little is known about how student affairs administrators shape their professional identity and their commitment to their careers and institutions during unstable times; therefore, the purposes of this study were to identify factors of midlevel student affairs administrators' professional identity and to examine the association of those factors to career commitment, career entrenchment, and demographic characteristics. As professional identity changes over the lifespan (Ibarra, 1999), this study extends prior research on new professionals (Hirschy, Wilson, Liddell, Boyle, & Pasquesi, 2015). We focused on midlevels, a group critical to accomplishing institutional goals that is understudied in higher education (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Young, 2007), to examine how professional identity may differ for midlevel professionals. Because many

new professionals leave the field (Rosser & Javinar, 2003; Tull, 2006), an understanding of professional identity for those who stay in student affairs is critical.

MIDLEVEL PROFESSIONALS

Midlevel professionals can be classified as middle-line managers on the organizational hierarchy between those who perform basic services and those who provide vision and direction for the organization (Mintzberg, 1989). They may be distinguished by their position on an organizational chart, span of authority, control of resources, and complexity of programs and services supervised (Young, 2007). Midlevels may represent one of the largest areas of administrative personnel growth in higher education (Rosser, 2004). In the student affairs context, Fey and Carpenter (1996) defined *midlevel* as reporting directly to the senior student affairs officer or being one level removed from the senior officer and overseeing at least one student affairs function or supervising at least one professional staff member. Their function is primary to institutional success, as midlevels serve in key roles to interpret institutional direction and priorities to frontline employees, while communicating those frontline concerns up the ladder (Mills, 2009). They may have the greatest potential to influence collaboration and change within institutions (Young, 2007).

Midlevel professionals are integral to the vitality of higher education in their support of its educational goals that enhance student life and learning (Rosser & Javinar, 2003). They manage directions from supervisors while providing daily support and guidance to staff members (Rosser, 2004) and enforce policies that affect both employees and students. Midlevels hire new staff and cultivate their careers (Mills, 2009), yet have role complexity as they supervise multiple layers

of staff while fostering their own professional identity (Roper, 2011). Failure to develop a professional identity may result in low morale, career discontentment, and/or a desire to leave the field (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000).

Several studies describe factors influencing the career satisfaction of midlevel professionals, most having to do with environmental attributes, the nature of the job, and the quality of supervision. Austin (1985) found that female and older administrators were more satisfied with their careers than their male or younger counterparts were; autonomy, variety, feedback, a cooperative and caring workplace, and highly involved coworkers contributed to greater satisfaction. Volkwein, Malik, and Napierski-Prancl (1998) found that teamwork contributed to satisfaction, while interpersonal stress was associated with lower satisfaction. The influence of institutional type on satisfaction is unclear; while both public and private administrators were most satisfied with the intrinsic rewards and least satisfied with the extrinsic rewards of their positions, private institution administrators were significantly more satisfied with extrinsic rewards than public administrators, but those differences did not affect overall satisfaction (Volkwein & Parmley, 2000).

Although retention studies in the field are sparse, one national study of midlevel professionals in higher education examined how work–life issues affected morale, satisfaction, and intent to leave student affairs work. Using a structural equation model, Rosser and Javinar (2003) found several quality of work life factors had a significant negative effect on morale, including longevity at an institution, especially if employees perceived the institution as discriminatory. Although working at the same institution for many years may look like loyalty, they found that administrators reported feeling less loyal and committed to schools that were less fair

and less caring. They did not feel valued as workers and lacked a sense of common purpose. Rosser and Javinar concluded that midlevel student affairs professionals who were satisfied had higher morale and lower intentions to leave their positions, their likelihood to stay was more a function of previous years and commitments, and variables significantly associated with their satisfaction were recognition, working conditions, and perceptions of their career support.

However, a generational shift in intent to stay may begin to emerge. The oldest of the Millennial generation (those born 1982–2002) are in their early thirties and in or on their way to midlevel positions. The Pew Research Center (2010) reported that Millennials were more likely to change jobs and switch careers than members of other generations. With turnover in student affairs already relatively high when compared to other areas in higher education, understanding the relationship between longevity and other variables is important.

The optimal balance between employee retention and turnover is not clear. High turnover can result in lower efficiency, consistency, and quality (Rosser & Javinar, 2003). In contrast, opportunities for promotion, career mobility, and organizational restructuring may emerge from turnover. Jackson, Moneta, and Nelson (2009) encouraged internal promotions as they increased morale, motivated employees, and reassured them that the organization invests in them. Enhancing professionals' satisfaction and morale may influence them to stay and better serve students (Rosser & Javinar, 2003).

Despite institutional efforts to retain staff, career mobility is a central norm in academic professions and it facilitates the careers of student affairs professionals (Rhoades, Kiyama, McCormick, & Quiroz, 2008); yet not all have the desire or ability to be mobile. In a classic article, Gouldner (1957) addressed mobility by describing two reference group orientations: *cosmopolitans* have lower institutional loyalty (i.e., stronger commitment to the profession than an institution), higher commitment to specialized professional skills, and a more external reference group (i.e., found within professional groups vs. inside the institution); *locals* have higher institutional loyalty, lower commitment to specialized professional skills, and a stronger internal (to the institution) reference group. However, Rhoades, Kiyama, McCormick, and Quiroz, (2008) challenged some of the culture-bound conceptions embedded in mobility: "They reflect the culture of upper middle-class Anglos but run contrary to rural, working class, and various ethnic cultures, which value connection to place, family, and community" (p. 218). This concept of locals and cosmopolitans promotes a richer understanding of career mobility and possibly the development of a professional identity in student affairs.

Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) urged researchers to study professional identity development. Exploring the relationships between professional identity, career commitment, and career entrenchment promotes understanding of midlevel leaders' longevity in the field.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study of midlevel student affairs professionals is informed by three constructs: professional identity, career commitment, and career entrenchment. *Professional identity* refers to the porous boundaries between one's personal and professional self, and the adoption of professional behaviors, values, and norms that become second nature. *Career commitment* refers to the motivation for midlevel professionals to work in student affairs, while *career entrenchment* focuses on

issues of immobility that make it difficult to change careers once invested in the profession. Motivation and immobility may inform how midlevel professionals shape their professional identity and navigate boundaries between their personal and professional selves.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

The first major construct of this study—the dependent variable—is professional identity, which is the "internalization of the norms of the profession into the individual's self-image . . . [and] the acquisition of the specific competence in knowledge and skill, autonomy of judgment, and responsibility and commitment to the profession" (Bragg, 1976, p. 11). A complex construct, professional identity is "the formation of 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). *Professional identity* is the commitment to values and practices of the profession plus investment of personal resources (e.g., time, money, effort) that emanates from an internalized congruence between one's personal and professional values (Hirschy et al., 2015).

Student affairs administrators make meaning of their experiences through professional roles and memberships. The professional associations and institutions to which they belong provide one context for professional identity. In this context, values, ethics, and standards are articulated, thus helping professionals find individual and intrinsic meaning for the work they do. Failure to acquire a professional identity may limit access to or effectiveness in professional roles; therefore, it is important to understand this process of development (Ibarra, 1999). While the development of professional identity has

been studied in graduate students and new professionals (Collins, 2009; Liddell, Wilson, Pasquesi, Hirschy, & Boyle, 2014; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), less is known about midlevels' professional identity.

In a previous study (Liddell et al., 2014) we examined key socialization experiences that contribute to new professionals' professional identity development during and after graduate school. Through exploratory factor analysis, we identified three salient components of professional identity for new professionals: career commitment, values congruence with the profession, and intellectual investment. Purposeful involvement with peers, supervisors, faculty, colleagues, and professional associations via intentional experiences such as coursework and internships all contributed to professional identity development. Because so little is known about midlevel professionals' identity, this became the dependent variable for the current study.

CAREER COMMITMENT

The second major construct under study is career commitment, one of two independent variables. It is a psychological link between people and their occupation, based on their affective reaction to it (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000). *Career commitment* refers to one's motivation to work in a specific vocation or career field (Carson & Bedeian, 1994; Kidd & Green, 2006). These commitments can best be understood by examining the investments people have made in their careers, the cost of stepping away from them, their affective or emotional attachments, and the obligations they may feel to stay put (Kidd & Green, 2006).

Fu (2011) highlighted potential links between career commitment and work performance. Consistent with Blau (1989), who found that people with high career

commitment spend more time on skill development and have lower intentions to leave their jobs and careers, Fu argued that career commitment helps professionals stay long enough to develop specialized skills and cultivate relationships. He found that career satisfaction was the most important determinant of career commitment, while others found commitment was related to skill development and job performance (Carson & Bedeian, 1994), job satisfaction, and commitment to one's workplace (Lee et al., 2000); commitment is negatively associated with turnover (Carson & Bedeian, 1994).

For this study, we utilized Carson and Bedeian's (1994) view of career commitment in their Career Commitment Measure (CCM) that was designed to assess three dimensions regarding one's motivation to work in a chosen field: career identity, career planning, and career resilience. Career identity reflects the importance of one's work to a sense of self and the emotional connection to it. They found that career identity correlates significantly with age, longevity in the field, and education. Heightened identity leads to increased involvement, stronger ties to organizational goals, and higher career commitment (King, 1997).

Career planning, the second dimension, represents a thoughtfulness about advancing one's career and having both purposeful goals and strategies for achieving those goals in one's work, exemplified by advanced training (Carson & Bedeian, 1994). Finally, the third dimension, career resilience, refers to the flexibility and hardiness one has in the face of career challenges or setbacks. It is the opposite of being fragile or vulnerable. Resilience can aid professionals in effectively assessing career barriers and developing constructive coping strategies appropriate to the situation. Carson and Bedeian (1994) found that resilience correlates positively with age.

Together, these three dimensions—career identity, planning, and resilience—contribute to a greater understanding of career commitment. Kanter (1989) argued the importance of studying commitment to both the organization and profession, since low commitment to an employer does not necessarily indicate low commitment to the profession. By looking beyond job satisfaction of midlevel professionals, insights into more complex developmental issues associated with career contentment and longevity in the field may be gained. These insights may be helpful to both professionals and the institutions that employ them.

CAREER ENTRENCHMENT

The third major construct, another independent variable, is career entrenchment. In contrast to commitment, career entrenchment refers to the immobility that emerges from economic and psychological investments that make it difficult to change careers (Carson, Carson, Phillips, & Roe, 1996). Carson, Carson, and Bedeian (1995) described symptoms associated with entrenchment, including a sense of inertia, an unwillingness to give up career-associated status, and fear about future earnings. There are two types of entrenched workers: *entrapped workers* are entrenched and dissatisfied with their careers (Carson et al., 1996) and may become organizational liabilities (Carson et al., 1995); *contented workers* have high entrenchment and high satisfaction and are satisfied with their careers and unwilling or unable to move. Those with other opportunities, low investment, or few emotional or interpersonal attachments are not entrenched and are therefore mobile (Carson et al., 1996).

Carson et al. (1995) defined three dimensions of entrenchment and developed the Career Entrenchment Measure (CEM) to

assess them. The first dimension, career investments, reflects the accumulated career investments that would be lost or worthless in a new career. Higher investments may lead to entrenchment. Second, emotional costs are affective attachments representing the nonfiscal price of new pursuits, including loss of social capital, status, and work-related friendships. Higher perceived emotional costs may lead to entrenchment. Finally, the limitedness of career alternatives refers to the perception of diminishing options for new careers; this reflects stronger organizational commitment than career commitment. According to Carson et al. (1995), entrenchment increases the longer one stays in the field.

In summary, the literature points to professional identity as a particularly salient variable to understanding longevity in, commitments to, and contentment with one's career. We sought to explain what constructs are related to that sense of identity in midlevel professionals.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was designed to examine the professional identity of midlevel student affairs professionals. Two primary research questions framed the study: (a) What factors are associated with professional identity of midlevel professionals in student affairs? and (b) What demographic characteristics and dimensions of career commitment and career entrenchment are associated with professional identity?

METHODS
Participants

Invitations to participate in a Web-based survey were sent via e-mail directly by ACPA–College Student Educators International (ACPA) to its 1,348 members who self-identified as midlevel professionals. Sixty-six percent of all members provided a position level; 33% of them identified as midlevel. The invitation included a link to the survey. The response rate was 30% ($n = 403$).

When members join ACPA, they indicate both their number of years in the profession and their position level (e.g., new professional, midlevel, senior student affairs officer-executive); therefore, someone with relatively few years of experience (i.e., 5 or fewer) may still perceive themselves as midlevel, given, for example, their span of control or position on the organizational chart. Because our focus was on more seasoned professionals, we excluded those who had worked in the profession (including work during graduate school) 5 or fewer years ($n = 24$). We excluded two others because they did not complete the career entrenchment items, one of the key measures; therefore, analyses were based on the responses of 377 professionals.

The sample was characteristic of the ACPA midlevel members based on gender and race/ethnicity. Our sample was 67.6% female, 31.6% male, and 0.8% transgender. Using ACPA's categories, 80.6% of participants were White, non-Hispanic; 9.8% were African American or Black; 5.0% were Hispanic/Latina/Latino; 2.7% were biracial or multiracial; and 1.9% were Asian or Pacific Islander. Regarding respondents' level of education, 49.1% had a master's degree, 24.7% some doctoral classes, and 25.2% a doctorate; 1.1% did not have a graduate degree. Most participants (60.4%) had 6–15 years in the field, 31.5% had 16–25, and 8.0% had more than 25 years. Participants' status as midlevel professionals was further confirmed by examining the position to which they reported: 2.9% to a president or provost, 23.9% to a senior student affairs officer, 17.2% to a dean of students or assistant/associate vice president or dean, 42.4% to a department

director, and 13.5% to an assistant/associate director or academic dean.

The cross-sectional survey (described below) was administered online over a 5-week period during December 2012 and January 2013. Two reminder e-mails were sent. We conducted a mailing wave analysis on dependent variables to estimate the effects of response bias. With a lower response rate, the potential for nonrespondents to differ significantly from respondents is greater (Dillman, 2000). In a review of studies of occupational groups about their work, Leslie (1972) noted that data might be biased if responses from early respondents vary significantly from those of late respondents. Based on follow-up with nonrespondents, he found that late respondents were similar to nonrespondents. Based on *t* tests on the career entrenchment subscales, we compared first-wave responders with the third-wave responders; there were no significant differences between groups, ameliorating concern about response bias.

Instrumentation

To answer our research questions, we designed a survey with three major components, described below. Except for demographic items, participants rated their agreement with survey items on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Student Affairs Professional Identity Scale (SAPIS). The SAPIS, tailored specifically for this study, was adapted from the Survey of Early Career Socialization in Student Affairs (SECSSA; Liddell et al., 2014), which focused specifically on influences of graduate preparation and experiences. Exploratory factor analysis on the SECSSA identified three professional identity factors salient for new professionals: career commitment (α = .738), values congruence (α = .708), and intellectual investments (α = .718).

Of the 17 items related to professional identity in the SECSSA, 10 were used in the SAPIS. Because the SAPIS focuses on more senior professionals, the items about graduate school experiences on the SECSSA were excluded and 12 items were added to address midlevel participants' perceptions of their work including career satisfaction, intent to stay, and connections to community and institution. The factor analysis on the professional identity items is described in the results section.

Career Commitment Measure (CCM). The first independent variable, career commitment, was measured using the CCM, a 14-item instrument comprised of three dimensions developed by Carson and Bedeian (1994). Sample items include: "My work is an important part of who I am" (career identity), "I have created a plan for my development in my work" (career planning), and "The costs associated with my work sometimes seem too great" (career resilience, negatively scored). The validity and reliability of the CCM has been reported on in several publications. See Carson and Bedeian (1994) for their discussion of the strong and distinctive subscale factor loadings, and the correlations between expected constructs: career commitment with educational investments, age, career tenure, organizational tenure (all positive), and withdrawal cognitions (negative). The estimated subscale reliabilities from our study, reported in the results section and in Table 2, are comparable to those reported by Carson and Bedeian (α = .79 to .85).

Career Entrenchment Measure (CEM). The second independent variable, career entrenchment, was assessed using the 13-item CEM. Sample items for the three dimensions of the CEM include: "It would be very costly for me to switch my career field" (career investments); "It would be emotionally difficult to change my career field" (emotional costs); and "If I left higher education/student

affairs, I would feel like I had no reasonable options" (limitedness of career alternatives). The CEM is not field-specific, so some items were reworded to replace "line of work / career field" to "higher education / student affairs." The psychometric evidence for the CEM is supported by confirmatory factor analysis and construct validity studies (Carson et al., 1995). Specifically, there were positive relationships between career investments and career tenure; emotional costs, career tenure, and commitments; and limitedness of alternatives with age and career tenure. Our estimated subscale reliabilities are reported in the results and are comparable to those reported by Carson et al. (α = .81).

Data Analysis

To address missing values for items within a scale, we used a 60% threshold; 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. Data screening suggested that the variables reasonably satisfied the assumptions required for multiple regression. The Durbin-Watson statistics indicated that the assumption of independence of errors had likely been met, and the data were visually screened for homogeneity of variance by plotting the standardized residuals from the regressions against the standardized predicted values. The results of factor, intercorrelation, and regression analyses are detailed in results.

LIMITATIONS

Some limitations are worth noting. While our sample is fairly representative of the ACPA midlevel membership, it may not represent nonmembers. Therefore, our results may not be generalizable to the whole profession. Additionally, the estimates of reliability on our measures are somewhat low, as are the

factor loadings of the new instrument used to assess the dependent variable. This may be explained by the diversity of our sample: these participants are older, comprise a broader age range, and have more time in the field than the early-career sample. The reliability estimates in our study of new professionals were higher, but this sample is larger. Finally, the cross-sectional design allows for a single collection of data; while this is a useful design for exploring new phenomena, it cannot establish causality.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, principal axis factor analysis revealed three distinctive factors of professional identity of midlevel student affairs professionals that were confirmed by the scree plot: values congruence with the profession (α = .63), community connection (α = .67), and career contentment (α = .74). The decision criterion for accepting individual items in the assigned factors was .30. Four of the new items did not have sufficient loading on any of the factors. Table 1 also shows the intercorrelations among the three professional identity subscales. Career contentment was significantly correlated with values congruence (p < .01) and community connection (p < .05).

Those with high scores on values congruence have personal values aligned with the espoused values of the student affairs profession and understand its ethical principles and standards. They are intellectually curious about the profession and committed to staying current on issues and advancing their skills. High scores on community connection indicate a strong commitment to one's current institution and/or geographic area, a locus of connection that is more local than cosmopolitan, and a likelihood to remain in the area. High scores on career contentment reflect a feeling of satisfaction with the progression of one's career and intent to stay

TABLE 1.

Principal Axis Factor Structure Matrix: Dimensions of Professional Identity From the Student Affairs Professional Identity Scale

Survey Item	M	Values Congruence With the Profession α = .63	Community Connection α = .67	Career Contentment α = .74
I understand the ethical principles and standards of the profession.	4.48	.546		
I am committed to reading current literature in the field.	3.89	.515		
My values are consistent with the student affairs profession.	4.50	.506		
I am interested in the problems of this profession.	4.16	.429		
As a member of the profession, it is important to me to engage in ethical work.	4.76	.429		
I take pride in improving my specialized skills (e.g., advising specific student populations).	4.13	.383		
I have mentored someone into the field.	4.11	.343		
I will likely work at my current institution until I retire.	2.36		.684	
For the foreseeable future, I intend to remain working within a 2-hour radius of where I work now.	3.81		−.588	
I feel a stronger connection to my institution than I feel to my profession.	2.46		.495	
If I were to be offered a position similar to the job I currently hold (with similar salary) and that job was at a more prestigious institution, I would likely take it. (R)	2.82		.432	
It is important to me to hold a doctorate in higher education. (R)	3.54		.388	
I get more of my intellectual stimulation from professional colleagues at other institutions than I get from professional colleagues at my institution. (R)	3.46		.381	
My desire to live close to family affects my career decisions.	3.72		.354	
I think about leaving student affairs work to pursue something different. (R)	3.26			−.794
I see myself working in higher education until retirement.	4.07			−.754
I am satisfied with the way my career is going.	3.70			−.521
I take pride in being a member of this profession.	4.34			−.466
Subscale Intercorrelations				
Values Congruence with the Profession			−.056	.362**
Community Connection				.110*

Notes. Response scale: 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). (R) indicates a reverse-coded item.
*p < .05.   **p < .01.

TABLE 2.

Percentages, Means, Standard Deviations and Reliability Coefficients for Independent Variables (N = 377)

	% N	α	M	SD
Gender				
Female	67.6			
Male	31.6			
Transgender	0.8			
Race/Ethnicity				
White, non-Hispanic	80.6			
African American or Black	9.8			
Hispanic/Latina/Latino	5.0			
Biracial or Multiracial	2.7			
Asian or Pacific Islander	1.9			
Educational Level Completed		—	4.73	0.87
Years in the Profession		—	14.89	6.39
Career Commitment				
Career Identity		.75	4.06	0.54
Career Planning		.69	3.78	0.62
Career Resilience		.89	3.13	0.98
Career Entrenchment				
Career Investments		.73	3.38	0.73
Emotional Costs		.89	3.32	0.87
Limitedness of Career Alternatives		.76	2.76	0.81

Notes. Education level completed: 4 = master's degree, 5 = some doctoral classes. Career entrenchment and career commitment subscales: from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

in the profession. The percentages, means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients for the independent variables are displayed in Table 2. Variance inflation factors (VIF) for all variables were computed to determine the magnitude of multicollinearity: all were less than 2, indicating acceptable levels.

Multiple Regression Analyses

To determine whether demographic characteristics, career commitment, and career entrenchment were associated with any of the professional identity subscales, we conducted three separate regression analyses. As shown in Table 3, we included demographics (gender, race/ethnicity, education level, and years in profession) plus the measures of career commitment and career entrenchment.

Several significant results emerged for the professional identity subscale of values congruence. Years in the profession (β = .150, $p < .001$); all three career commitment subscales, identity (β = .247, $p < .001$), planning (β = .247, $p < .001$), and resilience (β = −.110, $p < .05$); and two career entrenchment subscales, investments (β = .226, $p < .001$) and limitedness of career alternatives (β = −.142, $p < .05$), were significant. The combination of these independent variables was significantly related to values

congruence, adjusted R^2 = .309, $F(10, 365)$ = 17.78, $p < .001$, accounting for nearly 31% of the variance.

Significant contributors for the second regression on the community connection subscale included race/ethnicity (β = .123, $p < .05$), level of education (β = −.220, $p < .001$), and years in the profession (β = .319, $p < .001$). None of the career commitment or career entrenchment subscales were significant. The adjusted R^2 value was .146, accounting for 14.6% of the variance. The combination of these independent variables was significant, $F(10, 362)$ = 7.34, $p < .001$.

The final regression analysis, career contentment, revealed several significant results. Years in the profession (β = .100, $p < .01$); two of the career commitment subscales, identity (β = .457, $p < .001$) and resilience (β = .301, $p < .001$); and two of the career entrenchment subscales, investments (β = .147, $p < .001$) and emotional costs (β = .167, $p < .001$), were significant contributors. The adjusted R^2 value was .633, accounting for more than 63% of the variance. The combination of these independent variables was also significant, $F(10, 365)$ = 65.77, $p < .001$.

In summary, of the demographic characteristics, only years in the profession was a significant contributor to all three subscales of professional identity. Race/ethnicity and level of education were related only to the community connection subscale. All three career commitment subscales (identity, planning, resilience) and two of three career entrenchment subscales (investments and

TABLE 3.

Regression Summary of Professional Identity Subscales ($N = 377$)

	Values Congruence			Community Connection			Career Contentment		
	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE
Gender (Female)	.032	.025	.035	.068	.100	.072	−.043	−.066	.049
Race/Ethnicity (White)	.007	.007	.041	.123*	.214	.084	.043	.078	.057
Level of Education	.080	.034	.020	−.220***	−.173	.041	.008	.007	.028
Years in the Profession	.150***	.009	.003	.319***	.034	.006	.100**	.011	.004
Career Commitment:									
Identity	.247***	.169	.039	.104	.072	.038	.457***	.330	.026
Planning	.247***	.148	.030	.010	.011	.062	.046	.053	.042
Resilience	−.110*	−.042	.019	−.034	−.043	.079	.301***	.393	.054
Career Entrenchment:									
Career Investments	.226***	.117	.030	−.124	−.117	.061	.147***	.145	.041
Emotional Costs	.072	.031	.025	.047	.037	.051	.167***	.136	.035
Limitedness of Career Alternatives	−.142*	−.066	.026	.105	.089	.053	−.065	−.057	.036
(Constant)	2.541***	.175		2.944***	.357		.008	.243	
R^2	.327			.169			.643		
Adjusted R^2	.309			.146			.633		

Notes. β = standardized regression coefficient. B = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error.

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

limitedness of career alternatives) were associated with values congruence. Community connection was not associated with any of the six subscales. Career contentment was related to two commitment subscales (identity and resilience) and two entrenchment subscales (investments and emotional costs).

DISCUSSION

We designed this study to identify factors of professional identity for midlevel student affairs professionals and to examine the relationships of those factors to career commitment and entrenchment. This research builds on an earlier study of new professionals (Hirschy et al., 2015; Liddell et al., 2014). The professional identity factors for midlevels and new professionals differed somewhat, supporting the notion that there may be developmental differences across the span of one's career (Ibarra, 1999).

Values congruence emerged in both studies as important. Career contentment (midlevel) and career commitment (new professionals) both reflect career satisfaction and may serve as a proxy for intent to remain in the profession. In the new professionals study, intellectual investment reflected efforts to increase professional knowledge and skills, a logical outgrowth of that study's focus on graduate school experiences. In the current study of midlevel professionals, community connection was the third factor, and professionals scoring high on this subscale indicated a strong commitment to their current institution and/or geographic area. Because the midlevel professionals are older with more time in their careers, and may have homes and families, their community ties are understandable. They may have significant personal and financial investments that are difficult to uproot.

Like others (e.g., Young, 2007), we contend that a strong sense of professional identity is helpful in navigating the rocky terrain of a student affairs career. Similar to King (1997), we found a strong relationship between professional identity and commitment. Ibarra (1999) argued that failure to construct a professional identity might limit access to or effectiveness in professional roles. This may help explain attrition from the field. Our findings reveal forces that compromise professional identity and should promote discussions with staff of how to foster it.

The three professional identity subscales were associated with a variety of demographic, career commitment, and career entrenchment variables. Most noteworthy of the demographic characteristics, years in the profession was a significant contributor to all three professional identity subscales, perhaps confirming these professionals' decisions to stay in the field. Those who have left the field may have had different results. Although participants all identified as midlevel professionals, they had worked in student affairs from 6 to more than 30 years. Issues facing professionals across their career are likely very different, and professional and personal identities also shift over a career. Given the relationships between years in the profession and the professional identity subscales, a qualitative study with cohorts of midlevel professionals of similar age may better identify what is salient to professional identity across a career and help generate strategies for fostering satisfaction and retention in the field.

Two additional demographic variables were significant only for community connection: White professionals had higher levels of it and level of education was inversely related to it. Although we asked about connections to one's community, we cannot infer from these data what "community" means to professionals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. For example, in addition to the campus community, which is influenced by institutional culture, what role does the surrounding area play

in cultivating a feeling of connection? This question is especially important for those with marginalized identities who may struggle to find communities they thrive in, particularly in remote locations.

Regarding education level, a doctorate opens new doors for advancement, and greater opportunity for promotion is one reason to pursue the degree. However, career progression may require relocation, so having weaker community connection may be advantageous in this sense. In contrast, those with stronger community connections have lower levels of education (e.g., master's vs. doctorate). Having a partner, children, extended family, and/or a strong social network in the area, for example, may strengthen community connection and these professionals may not desire a doctorate, be able to commit to one, or have access to a program in the area.

Influences of gender and ethnicity, as well as other characteristics not examined here (e.g., partnership and family status), on professional identity, career commitment, and career entrenchment deserve further consideration. In their discussion of midmanagers of color, Massé, Miller, Kerr, and Ortiz (2007) stressed the importance of understanding the inter-sections of race, gender, and career level. They suggested men might feel less constrained than women by internal and external influences that may delay progression to a senior-level position. Austin (1985) also reported differences by age and gender in career satisfaction; however, like Kidd and Green (2006), we found no significant influence of gender for professional identity. Future studies may illuminate these phenomena, and faculty should consider these implications in preparing midlevel professionals for career advancement.

Career commitment and entrenchment subscales were significant for values congruence and career contentment, but not community connection. For example, those with higher career commitments and career investments (e.g., advanced degree), and those who did not perceive themselves to have limited career alternatives had strong congruence with the field's values. These findings suggest a decision to stay in the field based on good fit with the principles driving the profession. Our findings confirm Young's (2007) argument that clear values, a strong sense of identity, self-directedness, adaptability, and flexibility all play a key role in career success, and these characteristics come through in these data. Professionals with a strong professional identity are likely to be committed to their careers and make investments in them, which should lead to their success. Future research could examine the relationship between professional identity and career success.

Two career commitment subscales (identity and resilience) and two career entrenchment subscales (investments and emotional costs) were significant for career contentment. In other words, these professionals had been in the field a long time, were emotionally connected to it, adapted to challenges, put a lot of time and resources into their profession, would lose too much by leaving, and thus were committed to staying in their career. Like Rosser and Javinar (2003) who found that satisfaction was correlated with lower intentions to depart a job, intent to stay was a key component of career contentment in our study. Kidd and Green (2006) found that all three career commitment subscales were significantly related to intent to leave, but career planning had the weakest relationship. Our finding is consistent with Johnsrud et al. (2000), who argued that failure to develop a professional identity might result in low morale, career discontentment, and/or a desire to leave the field. In contrast, those with a strong professional identity were content and have remained in student affairs. By understanding what promotes contentment,

retention in student affairs may be fostered more effectively.

Demographic characteristics were significant for community connection, but not for career commitment or entrenchment. This variable reflects concepts of locals and cosmopolitans (Gouldner, 1957; Rhoades et al., 2008). Participants indicated they get more intellectual stimulation from professional colleagues at their own institution than at other institutions, feel a stronger connection to their institution than the profession, and plan to remain within their current geographic area—all suggesting their reference group is more local than cosmopolitan.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Our findings, combined with Rhoades et al. (2008), raise questions worthy of more study regarding locals and cosmopolitans in student affairs. Participants indicated their desire to live close to family affected their career decisions, and most intended to remain working within a 2-hour radius of where they work now; however, details of their personal lives are unknown. Given their ages, many may be caring both for children and parents, feel tethered by families, or be strongly connected to their communities, and therefore not wish to move. However, career advancement often entails relocation, and many are discouraged from earning multiple degrees from the same school (Rhoades et al., 2008). Rhoades et al. described "local cosmopolitans," those geographically bound or committed to a local community but with a broad focus on the profession, and raised compelling perspectives about the effect of these norms, particularly for underrepresented groups with strong ties to family and underserved local populations.

As noted, relatively little of the variance in the model was explained by community connection. Items in this scale are more personal in nature and subject to variation over time, such as a desire to live near family driving career decisions. This is an area rich in possibilities for qualitative study. For example, professionals with aging parents may strive to live close to help provide care for them, a need that changes over time. Understanding more about how professionals balance community ties (or lack thereof) with career considerations and fostering community connections may be helpful in recruiting and retaining staff.

Furthermore, given Millennials' noted ties to their parents and their reported intent to change careers over their lifetime (Pew, 2010), this model of career mobility may not fit for the coming generation of midlevel professionals. Pew Research Center (2010) reported that most Millennials said their generation's work ethic is inferior to other generations; they are also interested in meaningful work. Therefore, focusing on the values orientation of student affairs work may resonate with Millennial employees, foster values clarification, and strengthen their connection to the profession. Further qualitative study will help to document and understand this phenomenon.

We advise supervisors to examine career commitment and entrenchment. Taking a conscientious and developmental approach to supervision and fostering career identity, planning, and resilience may enhance commitment to the institution and profession. Coaching for purposeful professional development will build specialized skills that can enhance the sense of investment of midlevel employees and will benefit institutions by improving individual performance. Such an approach considers not only mutually agreed-upon goals, but also building skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Winston & Creamer, 1998).

Exploring the nature of entrenchment may be useful in fostering employee development. A staff member may be entrenched but still

satisfied and productive. Entrenched staff may be invigorated by new positions and responsibilities, and effective supervisors can capitalize on these opportunities. For instance, encouraging leadership in professional associations or appointing staff to important campuswide committees are viable ways to counteract negative aspects of entrenchment and revive commitment. Engagement in professional associations where discussions of professional values and principles are commonplace provides important connections to the values congruence factor of professional identity.

Furthermore, entrenchment may be misunderstood as loyalty, but fair and caring institutional leaders foster genuine loyalty (Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Ensuring that career advancement is neither dependent on moving from or staying in the institution may nurture a sense of flexibility. Some employee turnover is expected and can be positive (Jackson et al., 2009). Sometimes, the only opportunity for promotion is at another institution. It benefits the profession when talented employees move to another institution rather than leave the field. Openings create opportunities to bring in staff with new energy and ideas or to promote from within the institution. As Kanter (1989)

noted, low institutional commitment does not equate to low professional commitment.

Our findings also underscore the importance of resilience in midlevel professionals. Resilience is an internal attribute, not an organizational one, and implies an ability to deal with change. Resilience helps professionals persevere in the face of adversity, a desirable characteristic benefitting individuals and organizations. It may play a key role in coping with termination, one outcome of downsizing and restructuring. This warrants further study.

While others have described the process of professional identity development, this study exposes its composition. Values congruence with the profession, community connection, and career contentment are salient dimensions of midlevel student affairs administrators' professional identity. Understanding influences of career contentment and entrenchment aids in fostering a strong professional identity and promoting retention in student affairs, a benefit to employees, institutions, and the profession.

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