

## ABSTRACT

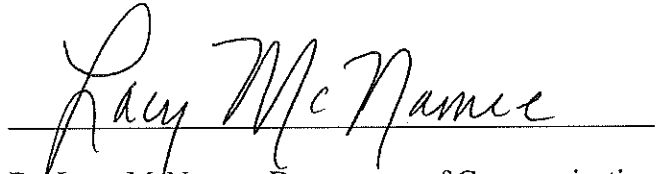
### Family Ties: Examining the Family Identity Metaphor in Short-Term Organizations

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This research examined the nature of the “family” identity metaphor in short-term organizations and also explored how this metaphor shapes members’ organizational identification, roles, attachment, conflict, and transition. Qualitative data in the form of in-depth interviews was gathered with undergraduate students involved in short-term organizational groups including Greek like leadership, summer camp staff, and study abroad cohorts. Through grounded, interpretive analysis, a four-part typology of family experiences was developed and explained using examples from the data. This study provides scholarly and practical insight into the development of healthy and unhealthy family cultures in organizations and seeks to increase understanding of the difficult transition that often follows membership in such meaningful, family-like environments.

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ORGANIZATIONS

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This thesis originated from a desire to help members of short-term organizational experiences enjoy their membership to the full, build relationships that remain, and transition well. I am thankful for those I consider my own "family," whose friendships were formed in the context of organizations yet remain apart from them. I would also like to thank all those who participated in my research. I cannot express appreciation enough for the time and insight you shared with me. Finally, I am also grateful to my actual family members as well as my dear friends who have encouraged and spurred me on during this process. Thank you for your constant interest in this labor.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Perhaps one of the most critical aspects of any organization is its culture and identity as a collective whole. How is the group defined? By what norms or values do its people unify together? Though organizations are often thought of as systematic groups that operate in competition with one another, every organization has an identity that may easily be taken for granted. By creating a sense of identity and, thus, purpose for its members, an organization joins its people together and motivates them through a single thread. Identity critically influences lives, both individually and collectively, personally and organizationally. One's sense of self deeply affects how he or she functions, and when organizations tap into this reservoir of understanding, they can powerfully affect the dynamic of their group culture and direct their people's functioning in specific directions.

In order to develop unity and direction, organizations often utilize *identity metaphors* to link their members. These metaphors solidify purpose, connecting individual identities to the whole and, thus, deepening personal and collective commitment. Arguably, organizations that feel like a "family" cultivate some of the most close-knit, interdependent networks of people. Feeling "at home" within an organization stirs up sentiment, loyalty, and dedication to fellow employees or members, as well as to tasks and responsibilities. This family metaphor also influences multiple interpersonal dynamics in an organization, such as conflict, closeness, attachments, roles, identification, and membership transitions.

Though research on identity metaphors and their functions in organizations is prevalent, there is far less research on the dimensions and implications of these metaphors in *short-term organizations (STOs)* (Davis & Myers, 2012). Specifically, there is scarce research on how family metaphors affect individual and group identification with, functioning within, and eventual exit from these STOs. This line of inquiry relates to both the social psychology and communication fields, including psychological studies on personality, emotions, identity, and relationships and communication-based research on organizational systems. Understanding the defining qualities and recurring relational dynamics of close-knit STOs will benefit members of these groups, allowing them to prepare for and thrive amidst the difficulties and rewards that come with membership in these organizations.

Short-term, family-like organizational groups offer the possibility of intense, hyper-involvement. Whether disconnecting from familiar routines, people, and environments or investing more time and effort than is typical for most organizational memberships, individuals in these environments are highly predisposed to concentrated involvement due to the nature of the organizations and the membership roles themselves. At the same time, this intensity is short-lived and anticipated by each member, thus providing a unique context for studying organizational identity and commitment. These institutions thus a represented form of total organizations, as individuals experienced “encompassing membership experience[s] based on beliefs that were “fundamental to the member’s life” (Hinderaker, 2015, pp. 93-94).

In addition to fostering a unique environment during active membership, STOs also represent a unique type of transition and exit. Because planned exit is stipulated from

the outset, members anticipate this transition but may still experience it abruptly. Further, when the family metaphor is ingrained into the organizational culture, leaving may feel more like losing family members and pieces of one's self, rather than just separating from an organizational system. For this reason, it is pertinent to study transition experiences in these settings, so that the individuals who undergo them may process them more constructively. Likewise, with broader knowledge of these dynamics, organizational leaders may better facilitate these individuals' entrance, involvement, and exit.

The current study examines traditionally college-aged students who belonged to STOs at some point during their undergraduate experience. Though many college students undergo these types of organizational experiences during their undergraduate education, there is little communication research in this vein (cf., Davis & Myers, 2012). Anecdotal evidence suggests that despite having many opportunities to participate in commitment-intensive STOs, some students may fail to adequately anticipate and prepare for the realities of these lived membership experiences.

Especially in organizations where one's personal values overlap with organizational values, over-identification with roles may arise as members take on the principles of the group in a deeply personal way (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Hinderaker, 2015). Instead of investing mere time, money, or skills, members invest their entire lives. However, when the time comes to leave, the member may find it difficult to release his or her obligations, for their title and/or affiliation has provided purpose, fulfillment, meaning, and expression of the member's deepest values (Hinderaker, 2015). In addition, shared sense of purpose in family-like, STOs often fosters closeness and vulnerability because of the depth of shared experiences that members encounter. Then,



as the finite experience comes to a close, members may struggle to transition into different environments with people who didn't share in the "family's" common values, purpose, and intimate experiences.

### *Three Contexts for Examining Family-Like STOs*

Three short-term, family-like organizational contexts were examined in the present study. Collectively, they centered on ministry, education, and social interaction, with each organization featuring a selective application or recruitment process, intense membership experiences, and planned exit after a pre-determined period of months or years. In-depth interviews were conducted with undergraduate students at a four-year university who had completed membership terms in study abroad programs, Christian summer camp staff, and leadership groups within Greek life organizations. Sampling from multiple types of organizations facilitated the identification of rich patterns across a spectrum of family-like groups but also elements that were potentially distinctive to socially-, educationally-, or spiritually-focused contexts.

The first context, study abroad programs, consist of finite international educational experiences in which a group of college students travels together to take classes and experience another culture. Students studying abroad together often must depend on one another in many ways, as they are deciphering international culture and traveling to see wonders of the world, while simultaneously fighting exhaustion and travel stresses. Studying abroad also provides an all-encompassing experience, where students tend to put their normal life routines and commitments on hold and experience society through a new lens, a new pace of life, and with a specific group of people. Study

abroad groups often spend ample time together, develop inside jokes, navigate conflict stemming from living in close quarters, and cultivate bonds based on their shared experiences. In addition, they undergo a quick transition, with merely a plane flight separating their international adventure from their usual daily routines. For these reasons, study abroad groups serve as a fitting case for study.

The second context examined in this study is staff roles at summer Christian camps. The leadership of these camps is typically composed of undergraduate college students who devote their summer months to working full-time as camp staff. Christian summer camp organizations employ thousands of students every summer in a short-term contract, and they are a quintessential setting for examining family identity metaphors because their leaders typically endure an intensely emotional, spiritual, and physical experience that fosters close friendships, deep attachment, and meaningful life change. With the exception of one day per week, many staff do not have access to their phones while campers are onsite and only communicate with those outside of camp via letters. This creates an all-encompassing environment as staffers are essentially on duty 24 hours a day, day in and day out. In addition, staffers are often motivated to work at Christian camps by the same core spiritual values and evangelistic visions of those organizations, which often facilitates organizational identification and deep commitment. Nonetheless, camp staffers often experience emotional exhaustion as they serve and minister to campers who often come to camp with heavy personal burdens (e.g., family instability; depression, eating disorders). However, staffers often do not undergo any formal way of preparing or processing these intense experiences, and then when they finish their terms at camp, leave abruptly without any formal disengagement or exit transition processes.

Finally, collegiate fraternity and sorority organizations served as the third fitting case for this study on multiple accounts. After graduation, members are granted alumni status in perpetuity and may remain connected with the organization in various ways. Greek organizations often include secret rituals and traditions, and offer involvement in service, leadership, leisure, friendship, and professional growth opportunities. Further, leadership groups formed within the larger membership offer a microcosm of the Greek organization that comes with significant responsibilities aimed at promoting its culture and values.

This chapter has introduced the key settings and themes examined in this research, and explained both the significance and relevance of exploring the areas of interest analyzed. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature on organizational identification, identity metaphors (including the family metaphor specifically), and organizational transitions. Chapter Three explains the methodology behind the research project, outlining specifics of the qualitative data collection processes employed. Chapter Four offers an analysis and synthesis of the data compiled, using samples of data to articulate conclusions and propose connections. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study with a discussion of overarching thematic patterns and scholarly implications, acknowledgments of the study's limitations, and a practical proposal for how to best prepare members of short-term, family-like organizations for their experiences and transition.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### *Section One: Identity*

##### *Personal Identity*

To understand how organizational identification develops through identity metaphors, one must first consider personal identity and the concept of self. Identity responds to the question, “Who am I?,” and personally defines one’s specific concept of self (Ashforth et al., 2008). Socially, identity correlates to the aspect of an individual’s sense of self that develops from his knowledge of his belonging to a social group. Whereas multiple people share social identities that differentiate groups, individuals hold personal identities that differentiate each person.

As Ashforth and colleagues (2008) articulate, researchers often divide identity into three rings: the core, the content, and the behaviors. The innermost essence of identity is rooted in three ideas: “I am” (one’s self-definition), “I value” (what is important to someone,” and “I feel” (how something affects that person). The middle ring of identity entails people’s values, goals, stereotypical characteristics, skills, abilities, and beliefs, qualities that are “the central, distinctive, and . . . enduring attributes that constitute identities in organizational contexts” (p. 330).

The third ring specifies behaviors, as action derives from the core and content of one's identity. Identity explicates why people form certain perspectives of their environments and why they behave the way they do in those surroundings. Additionally, identity influences why people participate in or leave particular groups, as well as why they approach work the way they do. The core of identity also drives why and how people interact with others in various contexts, such as within an organization. As people slowly define themselves through identification, their self-concept dictates perceptions, interactions, and behaviors.

#### *Narratives and Social Identity*

In order to create a self-concept, individuals construct narratives that help them “organize and make sense of the world” (Herrmann, 2011, p. 248). Personal narratives, which Herrmann refers to as the “cornerstones of our identities,” exist at the micro-level. (p. 248), and he goes on to say that, “understanding aspects of lived . . . experience is integral in excavating personal narratives,” for “narratives are not simple reproductions of personal life experiences, but are reconstructions, interpretations, and reinterpretations of past events” (p. 249). Thus, instead of simply recounting experiences, narratives seek meaning in the past while connecting this to the future.

The concept of a narrative implies the involvement of others' stories, as well. Thus, however personal one's narrative seems, identities are always relational and settled within the surrounding social-economic-historical environment. Herrmann (2011) describes identities as socially constructed, mutually responsive, and interrelated in

cultural settings. The interconnected and relational nature of personal identities demonstrates how identity never exists in isolation. Further, when tied to membership in a group, personal identity extends into the context of organizational identity, thus opening a whole new realm of narrating, sensemaking, and belonging as an organized whole.

## *Section Two: Organizational Identity and Identification*

### *Organizational Communication and Identification*

Ashforth et al. (2008) defines organizations as “highly differentiated systems” in which relational identifications can form and then develop attachment (p. 347). Communication in the form of narratives constitute the organization, the members’ activities, and the members’ identification with the organization. These narratives also allow groups to produce cultural identities at the macro-level, organizational identities at the meso-level, and personal identities at the micro-level. By organizing daily activities into narrative plots with stories and predictions for the future, organizations can influence “internal and external audiences” and “create organizational identity and member identification” (p. 248).

Organizational identification addresses the question: how do individuals become a “part” of larger wholes and connect their personal identities to the shared meanings of the group? Ashforth et. al (2008) describe organizational identification as “viewing a collective’s or role’s defining essence as self-defining” (p. 329). Identification links the individual’s perception of him-/herself as belonging to the greater whole, as he/she notices overlap of values between his/her self-concept and the organization’s

characteristics (2008). Researchers categorize identification as either *self-defining*, meaning that, an individual changes self-concept to become more like the group or organization, or *self-referential*, meaning that the individual sees the collective as similar to him-/herself and therefore gravitates towards it.

From a psychological perspective, there is a cognitive role in identification as well as an emotional engagement of the heart, for “thought without feeling is sterile” (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 329). From this perspective, members of an organization may desire to think of their identification as positive and as aligning with their self-concepts; therefore, they will maintain positive perceptions of their group to avoid cognitive dissonance. Thus, one can “think or feel one’s way into identification, as cognition and affect reciprocally reinforce identification (p. 329). Additionally, an individual will experience stronger identification with a larger whole when this collective shares both his core (I am, I value, I feel) and content (I want, I care about, I do, I can do, I believe) of identity.

From a communication perspective, identification is more often described as a verb. From this view, identification represents the process of becoming connected with an organization by drawing qualities of the group’s identity into his own personal identity (Ashforth et al., 2008). Individuals constantly incorporate elements of the whole “into their sense of self by enacting identities and then interpreting responses to these enactments” (p. 340). This may occur from one of two directions according to Ashforth and colleagues (2008): top-down or bottom-up. In a top-down relationship, organizations affect and change the individual, whereas in a bottom-up relationship, the individual’s feelings and thoughts negotiate the boundaries between the organization and the self.

Members may attempt to define “who they are via what they do,” using the interplay between organization and self to solidify self-concept (Herrmann, 2011, p. 248).

### *Depth of Identification and Convergence*

Researchers classify the depth of identification as *situated* or as *deep-structured* (see Ashforth et al., 2008). Situated identification is a more temporary attachment that occurs when situational cues trigger belongingness between the individual and the organization (2008). Deep structured identification, on the other hand, occurs when a deeper, more fundamental identification takes root between the organization and individual, giving the individual a changed self-concept and a congruence between the concept of self at work and self outside of the collective (2008). Situated identification develops first but becomes deep-seated as the individuals shift from seeing themselves as mere members of an organization, to seeing the organization as part of their very self-concept (2008).

As people identify with organizations, their “cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes... may converge with or generalize to another” (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 356). Researchers have found several types of these convergences. For example, members may become more susceptible to “social influence” from other members, or increase in willingness to self-disclose more of their personal lives. Another convergence occurs when members experience behavioral sensemaking together. This sensemaking develops as a member uses self-consistency processes and self-perception to infer that that he must “be more or less identified” with the role, group, or organization. For example, a teacher



may perceive his work as consistent with the mission of the education system and necessary to the functioning of his own department. Knowing this, he then may lean toward a higher identification with the organization based on his “self-perception and self-consistency processes;” the multiple reinforcements of his identification converge and spur each other on to higher levels (p. 357). As these and other convergences occur within organizations, they demonstrate the interconnectedness that exists within identification.

### *Motives for / Outcomes of Organizational Identification*

Ashforth and colleagues (2008) explored motivations for identifying with organizations, and they found the core motivation being to enhance one’s self-esteem and promote positive self-think. People naturally seek to promote the perception that they are worthwhile, all the while “experiencing identity in a positive manner” and growing to be more like their most valued identity (p. 335). In addition to this, individuals seek self-knowledge (finding and defining one’s self within a context), self-continuity (self’s sense of completeness across time), self-coherence (sense of completeness throughout multiple identities), self-distinctiveness (sense of unique individuality), and self-expression (self’s ability to act upon valued identities) through organizational identification, as well.

Individuals also attempt to fulfill needs such as affiliation, uncertainty reduction, and safety through belonging to organization. Described as “meaning-seekers,” people make sense of the world as they look for certainty through the “deeper meanings provided by the collectives they associate with” (p. 336). Thus, in an attempt to satisfy deep-seated

needs, humans attach and commit to organizations to belong, find meaning, and seek security as a member of the greater whole.

When identification becomes widespread within an organization, it produces collective outcomes that benefit both the member's personal identity and satisfaction as well as the organization's culture and success. For example, studies have shown that organizational identification promotes intrinsic motivation, coordination, job satisfaction, support in stress, cooperation, and effort (see Ashforth et al., 2008). Negatively, however, extremely identified members may remain committed to failing projects or become inflexible to change. Further, they may cherish inner identity so deeply that any threat to their self-concept as related to the collective whole could produce antisocial behavior. Transition also becomes a problem in highly identified members; there sometimes exists a "difficulty in releasing them from the organization when their usefulness has been exhausted" (p. 338). Over-identification can even cause members to behave unethically if they are extremely dedicated to a group that begins to promote poor values or act unbecomingly. Thus, while organizational identification can promote healthy, thriving groups whose individuals care for the whole, it can also be detrimental for the individual and difficult for the organization if not held in check.

Together, this all suggests that organizational commitment is highly linked with organizational identification. Commitment consists of identification with, emotional attachment to, and participation in a group, and "represents a positive attitude toward the organization" (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 333). Because it is not exclusively shaped by identity, it may fluctuate positively or negatively based on the organization's success.

However, the more identified one becomes with an organization, the more that commitment generally deepens, thus circling back and reinforcing identification.

### *Identification in Totalistic Organizations*

Hinderaker (2015) defines totalistic organizations as those that operate by practices, relationships, values, and rituals that extend into members' personal lives and play a primary role for them outside of the organization (2015). Central to these memberships are "value-based relationships" that are "central to the member's life and identity, extending into an employee's everyday life and other organizational memberships" (p. 93). As totalistic organizations generally include close relationships that tie the member's friendships and family to the organization, they also seem to cultivate deep-seated identification more often than regular organizations, for they reach more thoroughly into an individual's life outside of the collective's environment (2015). In organizations like these, organizational commitment is generally very high because the organizational loyalty, psychological ownership, job embeddedness, and person-organization fit create attachment to the collective (Ashforth et al., 2008). These totalistic contexts often present an opportunity for family-like cultures to develop, as members generally operate with high amounts of organizational identification while sharing many critical experiences. Examining the family metaphor through the lens of identity, organizations, identification, and attachment reveals how this particular construct affects both the whole of organizations and the individuality of members.

### *Section Three: The Family Metaphor in Organizations*

Metaphors influence “how we view and make sense of the world in general,” and they affect the creation, understanding, and communication of human behavior and thought (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987, p. 369). They also shape learning, thinking, social interaction, and knowledge, manifesting “particular ideologies and world-views” as they help humans make sense of their surroundings (p. 369). For organizations, metaphors can especially function to enrich the significance of organizational values. Further, as an organization experiences change, metaphors may help to unite members under a common meaning while facilitating transition and smoothing difficulties. When utilized effectively, metaphors facilitate cohesive unity while allowing for individual interpretations.

In short, metaphors enable members of organizations to interpret events and intersect multiple contexts of life. Through the use of metaphors, members can apply one context to another context in order to understand both (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987). For instance, a CEO may apply the context of family to the context of an organization, and in doing so project the characteristics of family onto another structured experience, the organization. Before discussing this concept of the family organizational metaphor further, though, the overarching concept of root and identity metaphors are addressed.

#### *Root Metaphors and Identity Metaphors in Organizations*

Identity metaphors develop group cohesiveness, maintain control over employees, and promote commitment to the group (Ollilainen & Calasanti, 2007). Root-metaphors, which are specifically constructed identity metaphors, function to “undergird a broad area

of meaning,” similar to the way that a deep system of unseen roots supports the fruitfulness of plants above the ground (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987, p. 369). These “symbolic frames” allow people to understand more subtle themes that people operate under subconsciously; for instance, surface language such as *take care of*, *remain loyal to*, or *our own* refer to the root-metaphor of family while not explicitly naming this construct (p. 369).

Researchers also note that root metaphors have ties with the culture of the group, creating patterns that allow the organization to function (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003). Root metaphors are also described as “rich summaries of interpretive frameworks” that prove insight into an organization’s functioning when multiple metaphors are identified and studied (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987, p. 368). Members of an organization often operate under the lens of a root-metaphor without realizing that their perspective is actually rooted in a construct; thus, studying particular metaphors often lends insight into how and why certain organizations function as they do.

### *The Family Metaphor*

The family metaphor is a particular identity-based, root metaphor that arises and takes shape in organizations often cultivating member cohesion. The family metaphor refers to a “familial character, familial atmosphere, family paradigm, family ideology, or family spirit,” and it permeates countless organizations, creating a distinct and often close-knit culture for members (Haugh & McKee, 2003, p. 144). Because members of groups often “describe their organizations as being like family or as possessing a family environment” and because leadership in groups often promote this atmosphere, the

dynamic of family in organizations is important to understand (Brotheridge & Lee, p.141, 2006). It often promotes “a greater sense of involvement, commitment, and empowerment” as members are offered “a partnership with a caring and committed employer and a close-knit family of colleagues who share a passion for excellence and customer satisfaction, and who repress familial conflicts and dysfunctions” (Casey, 1999, p. 161).

Belonging to such an environment generally affects individuals on a deep level, transforming or molding their identities and thus becoming a significant influence in someone’s life. Additionally, research suggests that the family metaphor has not been deeply studied, but that an exploration of organizational culture is most beneficial to understanding familial atmospheres (Haugh & McKee, 2003). Consequently, scholars are beginning to examine “the culture of team and family-style work organization for the purpose of examining the less visible psychic effects of these practices on employees” (Casey, 1999, p. 157).

*Comparing families and organizations.* The family metaphor suggests that “organizations function like families” and promotes the idea that “organizations may be appropriately viewed through the lens of the family systems theory” (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006, p. 143). By constructing the climate of the home within their groups, organizations apply a familial lens to their members, thus promoting the same values and commonalities a healthy family would cultivate. Brotheridge and Lee (2006) suggest that the similarities between families and organizations explain the commonality of this metaphor. Each functions as a social system comprised of people, operating internally and within a larger context. Studies show that roles, structure, conflict, attachment, and

transition also overlap in numerous ways within the family and the organization, suggesting even more cause for the development of a family metaphor. Differences that separate home and outer groups, however, include task/relational emphasis (i.e., families promote relationships heavily and organizations are often more task-based), emotional interdependence (this is greater in families than work groups), and permanency (exit from organizations is typically possible but family cannot be biologically severed) (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006). Thus, though the organization and the family are two separate entities, their overlapping qualities often drive how the organization functions.

#### *Organizational Dynamics of the Family Metaphor*

*Values and culture.* Haugh and McKee (2003) describe family organizational culture as “a complex, negotiated phenomenon which refers to an ideology of the family wherein trust between workers and management is encouraged, and alignment between the goals of managers and employees and promoted” (p. 144). In both a family and in the familial organization culture, values of communication and trust overlap as a critical component to relationships. This family-like organizational culture often suggests a “normative consensus, unity, integration and harmony in social relations” (Ainsworth & Cox, 2003, p. 1463). Shared values often include integrity, trust, belonging, respect, understanding of human relationships, loyalty, and commitment (Haugh & McKee, 2003).

*Task-relational balance.* Because organizations exist to, in some sense, accomplish tasks, the balance between furthering such goals while developing relationships may become a difficult tension for familial organizations. Brotheridge and

Lee (2006) suggest that leadership must carefully monitor “the task and relationship dimensions of the groups” given that members’ personal needs are prioritized yet task focus is also important (p. 152). Their study on a governmental organization found that supportive leaders, supervisory authority, peer unity, and task clarity predicted a healthy group climate, thus demonstrating that positive work environments are founded upon a task-relational balance. Additionally, “task accomplishment, clarifying task expectations, providing rules and structure, and close supervision” actually promoted cohesion more than relational emphasis in this case (p. 152). Thus, their research suggested that in developing unity amongst members, leadership must not neglect the importance of tasks. With that said, differing groups may value and benefit from task or relational emphasis to varying degrees.

*Emotions.* The family metaphor powerfully evokes feelings of shared struggle amidst difficulty, as well as emotional images of familial bonding (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006). Likewise, the familial concept of “home” or close-knit kinship within an organization often appeals to the emotions, thus making the individuals jointly loyal to the organizations’ shared values. As trust increases and closeness meets emotional needs within the vulnerability of a family-like organization, individuals continue to feel tied to their organization. For example, one employee within Disney’s family culture went so far as to describe his environment as “real close-knit...better than marriage” (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987, p. 374). Thus, the magnetic effect of the family metaphor on members’ emotions is something to be carefully considered, potentially even for its negative implications.



*Attachment.* Attachment, closeness, and belonging are significant aspects of the family-metaphor, as these values are promoted by this metaphor perhaps more than by any other identity construct. As loyalty develops, so do feelings of belonging, attachment, and the desire to want to be a part of something larger (Haugh & McKee, 2003). Brotheridge and Lee (2006) speak of “emotional bonds” that develop more deeply as members share resources (p. 155). If organizations provide members with “core identities,” dependency may result, and the family metaphor may, thus, be used to manipulate members’ attachment to the group (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006). Individuals may experience attachment to the values of the organization and feel like they belong to a “family spirit” that contributes to their sense of identification and loyalty (Haugh & McKee, 2003, p. 144). Close relationships and committed investment in a group (and its members) often lead to an emotionally “deep attachment” to both the group and the leader, perhaps stemming from the sense of belonging (p. 146).

Members of organizations may foster family-like ties by sharing life events, such as celebrating each other’s personal lives and holidays (Haugh & McKee, 2003). Additionally, organizations foster attachment and closeness through social events, shared history, common commitment, and legacy building (Haugh & McKee, 2003). Friendships thus develop within the group, and conversations during time spent with the organization foster their closeness (Haugh & McKee, 2003). Family-based structures also often promote self-disclosure and confession of weakness, a practice that unites people in harmonious closeness (Casey, 1999). One firefighter reports that the depth of closeness, width of self-disclosure, and length of life together constitutes why “we become family” (Hinderaker, 2015, p. 105).

In addition to people, places also have the ability to foster a sense of attachment. Doss (2012) notes that the “personal ties that a person can have with a place” (p. 1) may create both identity in and dependence to a location, even during “a short-term place activity” (p. 2). Though some may assume that places have slowly become less important to people over time with ever-growing mobility and change, research actually suggests that “their importance in the contemporary world actually may have grown” (Lewicka, 2009, p. 209). Doss (2012) defines place attachment as a “human-place bond that can be formed through psychological, emotional, and or symbolic processes comprised of place dependence and place identity” (p. 5). Lewicka (2009) articulates the link between place and the family metaphor with the argument that there is “an almost unanimous opinion that the prototypical place is home,” for home connotes self-identity, attachment, security, privacy, stability, refuge, comfort, happiness, and ownership (p. 211). Further, rootedness, spiritual meaning, and length of time spent at a specific place all foster attachment, and strength of close ties directly predicts the strength of future emotional connectedness and homesickness. These factors may contribute to attachment or nostalgia felt toward specific places, deepening a sense of meaning as specifically related to a space.

*Costs and risks.* When considering the emotional interplay that may occur between members who view their organizations as homes, one must consider the potential risks associated with emotional fulfillment being controlled in this way. It may prove difficult for employees to challenge current practices in groups that feel like home, because the culture of one unified family may “trap organizational members in feelings of guilt and conflict” when they disagree with the organization (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006,

p. 142). Further, members may endure especially long work hours and experience blurred boundaries between personal and organizational life due to the fact that members “in a sense are already home” (MacDonald & Liff, 2007, p. 128, 2007).

Additionally, when leadership feels somewhat paternal, the father-figure boss may control members through the image of family closeness, pretending to act on behalf of the individual while actually using the member to promote the good of the organization (Ainsworth & Wolfram-Cox, 2003). Members in such environments may “believe that his or her self-development, source of self-fulfillment and identity” are found in belonging to the organization (Casey, 1999, p. 160). With such over-identification, risks of manipulation must therefore be monitored, as the guise of “family” may actually work against members of an organization.

*Role development and coordination.* Roles within a family-driven organization often function differently than those in more hierarchical organizations, because roles may become interdependent in a personal, family-like way. Often, family-like teams collectively monitor and regulate each other in the absence of supervisors’ authoritative control and hierarchical structures, with “sibling-like rivalry and nepotism” surfacing all the while “cooperation, familial warmth, and overriding commitment” are simultaneously being promoted (Casey, 1999, p. 172). Thus, fellow members may dichotomously develop family-like bonds and feel compelled toward cooperation, all the while sensing a competitiveness toward the attention and favor of leaders who represent father-like figures (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006; Casey, 1999).

Likened to this type of paternal figure, Walt Disney has been described as one “immortalized” as a spiritual and father-like leader of his organization, thus promoting

the family metaphor simply by his role (Smith & Einsberg, 2003, p. 373). Casey (1999) also notes that individuals of familial organizations obey the “authority and identity of the disciplining executive-father” as the symbol of the group’s ideals, thus fearing “family discipline” by the fatherly leader (p. 173). Team relationships may also be likened to those of siblings, spouses, or parent/child (Ollilainen & Calasanti, 2007). Family metaphors may also develop based on male and female roles in the home, assigning more emotional, relational, or mothering roles to women and treating men favored or groomed by the leadership as sons (2007). While family-like structures can promote closeness, loyalty, and a positive, often complementary experience in the workplace and other organizational settings, they can also feed partiality, hidden competition, and stereotypes.

*Conflict.* Often operating according to the roles discussed above, conflict that surfaces under the family metaphor may be difficult to handle. Organizational conflict is often traced to issues that occur in family units, as both often struggle because of “diffused and enmeshed boundaries” (p. 144), division due to hierarchies, splits within leadership, and useless rituals (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006). However, families sometimes handle conflict in ways that are not beneficial in organizational structures.

When a root-metaphor analysis was conducted at Disney, a company that intentionally cultivates and develops a loyal, family environment, conflict resulted in “resentment of management” (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987, p.375). Due to the happy-go-lucky friendliness of the organization, the idealistic paradise actually suffered from a “harmony-at-all-costs”, “conflict-free” mindset that caused members to be inadequately practiced in handling conflict (p. 378). Though conflict is often suppressed in this way,

one study found that leaders may use conflict to promote harmony and control, creating the image of a family that is very close but still argues (Ainsworth & Wolfram-Cox, 2003).

In essence, paternal figures can utilize the conflict to reinforce their fatherly and, thus, controlling role. Brotheridge and Lee (2006) note that because families and organizations are both governed by established leadership that both controls and supports members of the unit, relationships often look similar. Leaders and members may be distant or close in a similar way to the parent/child relationship; supervisors can micro-manage as parents often do. Additionally, conflict within such a close system takes more emotional effort to resolve, and the quality of these relationships often determine how emotions regarding conflict are expressed (beneficially or destructively).

#### *Section Four: Transition/Exit from Family-Like STOs*

##### *Transition*

Exiting organizations that bear hold on one's values, beliefs, and emotional needs can prove more difficult than in other organizational environments. In family-like organizations, restructuring, promotions, retirements, merging, changing leadership, or a change in the personal life of someone in leadership may lead to feelings of loss and separation for members (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006). As Hinderaker's (2015) research on totalistic organizations has demonstrated, which contained many family-like elements, when members rely on other members to perform and "carry the values, beliefs, and identity" of the group into daily life, primary relationships are often tied to the organization and exit becomes more difficult (p. 95). Linking back to aforementioned

dynamics with place attachment, residential working environments may foster distinct attachment, often creating a “single unit under pressure” whose identity spills into one’s personal life (p. 96).

### *Transition Sentiment and Stress*

When transitioning out of a role, individuals may experience deep sentiment, nostalgia, or stress at the feeling of leaving a part of themselves behind (Ashforth, 2001). According to Ashforth, sentimentality explains the tendency to “retain emotional or tangible ties to one’s past”, such as friends or memories, whereas nostalgia describes “longing for a fondly remembered past” (p. 134). Research suggests that losing the familiarity of a role and adapting to the strangeness of a new role can be “among the most stressful of life experiences, capable of engendering tremendous emotional turmoil and depression” (p. 220).

However, negative stress generally fades quickly and can be experienced positively when new roles present healthy challenges, therefore suggesting that transition arouses emotions either positively or negatively according to the person and circumstances. When experiencing transitional anxiety, an individual may vent negative emotions, seek social support, compartmentalize stress, or form a temporary identity that mentally creates distance from the previous role. As people cope with undesired transition, new roles generally become more acceptable and comfortable over time, thus balancing out the anxious feelings that often accompany change (Ashforth, 2001).

### *Transition Stages*

Exit generally includes three stages: pre-exit, exit, and post-exit (Hinderaker, 2015). Pre-exit includes the contemplation of leaving, often spurred by trauma, conflict, or outside pressure to end membership, and behaviors include looking for reasons to stay, doubting, stifling doubt, and testing the exit. After one decides to exit an organization, the former member must deal with the “positive and negative consequences” of leaving, both relationally and transitionally, and distance themselves from the group (p. 100). Ashforth (2001) notes one time period that creates an ambiguity of role identity, leaving the member between two attachments wherein he/she has disengaged from one role but not yet attached to another. Though pre-exit, exit, and post-exit are a general formula for transition, the process is very fluid, often influenced by recommitment or hesitation to leave (Hinderaker, 2015). Depth of difficulty when transitioning often signals the former extent of attachment, belonging, or relationship previously experienced within the “family,” because high levels of commitment and emotional fulfillment generally make exit far more difficult.

### *Types of Transition*

Many specific factors affect the magnitude of difficulty or ease in transition, specifically the type of change that one is experiencing. Ashforth (2001) notes several valences of role transition. *High magnitude change versus low magnitude change* examines “the number of core and peripheral features of the role identity that changes and the extent of the changes [in a transition], where core features are weighed more heavily” (89). The extent to which one’s base values shift in a role switch affects the

difficulty of that transition, as an individual is processing both numerous and meaningful changes simultaneously.

In short-term experiences where the organization and its members share a rich overlap in values, individuals may experience high magnitude change when transitioning from roles they deeply personalized. Once an individual has worked to embody a role on a personal level, more core elements of his or her own identity may feel shaken when role transition occurs. Whether transitions are *involuntary versus voluntary* also greatly influences an individual's attitude; generally, the more involuntary a transition seems, the less one feels able to retain a sense of control and the more he must deal with deep role identity change, as well as the loss of plans and hopes related to the previous role (Ashforth, 2001). Due to the nature of short-term organizations, members may feel like they have no control of their impending transition. Instead of choosing to step away when they are personally ready to do so, the members must walk through a predetermined transition whether they are ready to leave or not. Thus, individuals may have to wrestle through a sense of loss as they step away from an often personally impactful organization.

On the other hand, *predictability versus unpredictability* in transitions defines the ability of a member to know "the date of role exit" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 99) and the nature of what this exit will look like. As structured entry into any role generally eases anxiety for newcomers (Ashforth, 2001), demonstrating the human desire for stability. Though joining a short-term organization with a defined membership period may actually help members cope with transition (particularly with entry), once the members feel more attached to the organization, *involuntary* transition may then cause more anxiety.



Another factor relevant to consider with short-term organizational transition is the *collective versus individual* aspect (Ashforth, 2001). This covers the togetherness or individuality of a role switch. When more than one person experiences exit together, they collectively benefit from knowing pros and cons together, exploring role alternatives, supporting each other, and legitimizing the idea and eventual enactment of leaving. On the other side, as newcomers enter an organization, they may view their peers as “fellow travelers with the same status and developmental needs, creating an in-the-same-boat consciousness” (p. 101). Such group consciousness bonds members together as they experience a transitional exit or entry and generally eases the process of change. Entering and exiting short-term experiences collectively may thus help members cope with transition, particularly if a group has shared an intense, close-knit experience that is difficult to convey to outsiders.

Also pertinent to short-term organizational exit are *short versus long duration periods* that note the time period between first considering role exit (or learning of an exit) and first functioning fully in the new role (Ashforth, 2001). Longer duration periods allow individuals to prepare, train, build security through grace periods of learning, and feel valued as an organization takes time to invest preparation into the new member. These extended times foster a more positive outlook of transition and often ease the difficulties that may accompany the change. As members of short-term, intensive organizations exit and prepare for new roles, they may benefit from having long duration periods of transition depending on the extent of their commitment and experiences.

Finally, *irreversible versus reversible* factors greatly affect the transition process of a family-like short-term organization, particularly in faith-based organizations.

Reversible transitions occur when “the role and the transition had little or no effect on the individual and how he or she is perceived by himself or herself and by role set members” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 104). Irreversible transition, however, occurs when someone “is somehow marked by the experience of the role or the transition,” (p. 104), and may result in personal transformation, a search for meaning, and an identification of self with the role. Ashforth (2001) also notes that individuals with particularly irreversible roles may have difficulty identifying themselves apart from the role post-exit. In short-term organizations that offer participants a unique or transformational experience, feelings of irreversibility may increase as members feel different as a result of their experiences. Particularly in organizations with close family dynamics, members who have just witnessed transformation in each other or shared once-in-a-lifetime moments may encounter a difficult exit.

### *Facilitating Role Transition*

To facilitate role transition, organizations often use rituals and rites, including “the presence and involvement of significant others, the manipulation of emotionally charged symbols” that “evoke strong emotion, affirm group values and ideologies, renew group cohesion, and encourage the internalization of the role identity as a definition of self” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 11). According to Ashforth, these rituals serve to smooth transitional exit and entry, minimizing the “social-psychological and organizational disruptions of a role exit” or fulfilling “psychological motives for identity, meaning, control, and belonging” in a role entry (p. 11). For example, “identity narratives, transitional roles, anticipatory identification, sentimentality, nostalgia, grieving,

mementos, comforting rituals, mediatory myths, and exroles” all help individuals invest in new roles while “retaining a sense of attachment to the past” (p.12).

However, Ashforth (2001) also notes that especially abrupt or unwelcome transitions may overwhelm the very factors that are meant to ease change. In short-term organizations that benefit from inside jokes, traditions, or secret rituals to unify their members, individuals may adjust to the group more smoothly upon role entry. However, as Ashforth noted, when the inevitability of exit comes upon a group still thick with symbols like these, these factors may make exit even more unwanted.

### *Burnout and Transition*

Burnout encompasses “the loss of productivity due to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization” and often occurs in roles of heavy interpersonal interaction (Bailey, Kang, & Kuiper, 2012, p.157). Transition from highly relational, short-term groups may be effected by factors such as burnout, as members in this state simultaneously feel extreme investment and extreme exhaustion. In addition, perhaps the short-term nature of some roles leads members to be “all in” since the duration of the commitment is finite. In roles (including camp staff, firefighters, soldiers, etc.) that are residential in nature, staff remain on duty all hours of the day and even live at work, lacking personal living space, giving up normal resources, and often adapting to a specific persona.

Burnout from highly demanding, deeply relational, residential roles may result in ineffectiveness (feeling a lack of accomplishment), depersonalization (distancing from the feelings of others or cynicism), or emotional exhaustion (emotionally drained) and, thus, cause members to desire a reprieve from the role. Staff of faith-based camps pertain

to these factors of burnout, as they function in residential roles with little to no reprieve in a relationships-based job. In addition, the short-term nature of camp often creates a stark transition between the all-encompassing role and the pace of the outside world.

Because members in these organizations are forced (often positively) to become close with the fellow workers in their temporary work environments due to the co-laboring and semi-separation from normal life, relationships become critical to the experience as a way to handle stress and enjoy group cohesion. Due to the deep nature of these relationships, transition may become more difficult as close ties within the role have been formed, strengthened, and cultivated. In short-term groups that operate under the metaphor of a family, the deep relational bonds described here become very pertinent, as family culture often develops when members feel a mutual need for each other. However, as short-term groups face inevitable transition, this organizational structure often clashes with the cohesive group dynamic that has been formed.

### *Implications in STOs*

As noted by Ashforth (2001) previously, STOs allow individuals to anticipate both the “date of role exit, the onset and duration of the role entry period, and the nature of events surrounding the exit and entry” (p. 99). With predictability, members may undergo “anticipatory preparation” and thus increase their feelings of secondary control and sensemaking (p. 99). Many experiences have a set, finite term of participation; members enter the role or organization with a specific and known entry date, duration period, and exit date. These STOs often foster a deep sense of involvement while the member is engaged; however, roles, attachment, conflict, and transition may vary in how

they function in short-term groups compared to in long-term or indefinite memberships. In these organizations, exit is facilitated through role differences, firing, or retirement, whereas in STOs, members knowingly approach their exit after a specific time period.

Ashforth (2001) notes that short-term, fixed memberships may allow members to experience reversible roles (see *reversible versus irreversible roles* in previous section) because they may “adopt a temporary identity” and avoid personal transformation because of the brief nature of the experience (p. 104). If the role can be forgotten, the individual doesn’t have to come to terms with the experience. However, irreversible roles often change the person invested, causing the member to consider his identity in light of the role and make sense of his experience. Due to the specific nature of STOs, transitions and other factors mentioned above (attachment, roles, conflict) become an interesting aspect of study. Observing how these relational aspects function within STOs is important to understanding the effects, costs, and benefits of short-term investments.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

This research examined the expression and significance of the family identity metaphor in short-term organizational experiences. Organizational and personal roles, sense of attachment, styles of conflict, and patterns of transition were areas of focus throughout data collection and analysis. Qualitative data collection was utilized in this study, as I wanted to gather organic, individual stories to deepen understanding of how family metaphors are experienced and interpreted in intense, STOs, both during and after active membership status. In this section, I describe the research contexts, participants, and methods of qualitative data collection and analysis. First, I explain the various short-term organizational contexts from which the participants were selected. I then explain my personal interest in and relationship to the data, as well as how I protected against personal bias in my research. Third, I outline the demographics of interview participants and the recruiting process for this data collection. Fourth, I qualify the depth and richness of my research by defining my data analysis procedures.

#### *Research Context*

This study recruited past and current members of three organizational contexts that college students often participate in: summer camp staff, study abroad programs, and university Greek life. Each of these contexts offers a short-term, defined experience for participants, as well as opportunities to lead in defined roles, develop group intimacy, and cultivate common bonds.

In addition, each of these contexts is often characterized by family-like metaphors and cultures. The first context, HopeLife Christian Camps (pseudonym) is a nonprofit, faith-based Christian camp located in the southern and eastern areas of the United States. HopeLife employs thousands of college summer staff each summer, serving campers at family and youth camps, as well as children at day camps around the country. The second context is collegiate study-abroad programs offered by Newman University (pseudonym), a private, Christian university in the southern United States.

Also drawing from Newman University, the third context is leadership groups within Greek life organizations, including both sororities and fraternities. Individuals belonging to these smaller groups (which were nested within their broader memberships) shared intense, close-knit, collaborative experiences in a family-like leadership setting. Sorority A (pseudonym) is a fraternal women's organization that requires a formal recruitment and initiation process for membership in accordance with the sorority's national organizational standards. Sorority A has nearly 200 collegiate chapters in the United States, and members are considered "active" for the duration of their undergraduate years (typically, three to four years). Sorority A also contains faith-based rituals and values but is not defined as a faith-based organization.

Fraternity A (pseudonym) represents a men's local fraternal organization that exists only at Newman University. Similar to other Greek organizations, Fraternity A extends membership to collegiate men after a recruiting and initiation process, and active membership continues throughout college. Fraternity A does not define itself as a faith-based organization. Fraternity B, a men's local fraternal organizational only at Newman University, is a faith-based group that functions similarly to Sorority A and Fraternity A.

Research from each of these contexts was fitting to this study, because participation in or membership with these organizations is short-term. Summer camp staff work for a defined period of time, specifically, up to three months. Students studying abroad also travel for a specific period of time, generally, one to three months. Members of Greek organizations also have a short-term experience, as active membership in any chapter at Newman University lasts up to only three and a half years. Participation in each of these groups often involves an experience of closeness or high sense of belonging that is promoted by the following organizational dynamics. With camp staff, unity and relationships are explicitly and heavily promoted; study abroad students leave the country together and are collectively removed from their other organizational affiliations and relationships; and Greek life members share exclusive membership complete with secret rites and rituals.

For these reasons and because HopeLife Christian camps and Newman University are both faith-based organizations that value a close-knit culture, the family metaphor was prevalent in each context under study. In each of these contexts, members may be particularly predisposed to some form of attachment or loyalty to other members or to the organization itself, as well as opportunities to take on formally or informally defined roles. Because of the high intensity of the relational aspect in each of these groups, conflict is also likely to arise. Finally, every member of these organizations experiences transition due to the short-term nature of the groups. This includes transition into the group, as well as pre-exit, exit, and post-exit phases. Researching across multiple types of organizations with many similar characteristics but also variation provides rich comparative data. Additionally, college students often participate in Greek life, camp



staff, or study abroad programs, making this study relevant and applicable for the many undergraduate students who desire these experiences.

### *Author Positionality*

My personal experience as a summer staffer at HopeLife Christian Camps served as the primary catalyst for the formation of this research. It also first sparked my interest in members' sensemaking of the transition from family-like organizational memberships, particularly close-knit, STOs. Because my job at HopeLife was so intrinsically tied to relationships and so overlapped with my personal values, my exit was far more difficult than I had anticipated. Though the time between completing my role and leaving camp property was only a matter of hours, I felt like I mentally and emotionally processed this exit for months. Such a transition caused me to question what aspects of my experience had caused it to be so meaningful, as well as so difficult, to detach from.

First, I left a role that I had loved; through my position, I had thrived and found myself able to walk in my personal values through my daily responsibilities. In addition, because I identified so much with the purpose of my role, I cared deeply about the enactment of it and was intrinsically motivated to surpass the organization's expectations of me. Second, I left an all-encompassing environment where I held my title 24/7 and was always on call for the myriad of instrumental and emotional needs that arise at camp. Because we slept on HopeLife's property and only received one day off per week, the staff became highly invested in the culture and context of camp, which represented our world for those few months. The rituals, rhythms, structures and dynamics of camp had become highly familiar and seemed my only reality.

Third, and perhaps most difficult, I left the staff I had worked so closely beside. After a summer of such community where we were deeply known and loved, transitioning to life away from these people was painful. In addition to working alongside a team, our team's role had been relationships, adding an additional factor of intimacy to our jobs. Fourth, I transitioned during a period of exhaustion, having continually exerted myself emotionally, physically, and spiritually for three months, but then abruptly departing within a 24-hour period. As such, I had little time to process or recuperate from the rich yet draining summer I had experienced before moving on to other life commitments. After spending three months disconnected from the outside world and solely invested in one people group, I struggled to transition out of where I had been so deeply rooted. Seeking to find closure from my summer while simultaneously making sense of my new environment was a challenge, and I found myself frustrated that very few people could understand my experience or how much it impacted me.

This personal experience allowed me to craft thoughtful interview questions that provoked participants to consider a wide range of factors and how they may intertwine. Additionally, my involvement at HopeLife and my attendance at Newman University provided me with myriad connections and relationships that helped my data collection process. Notwithstanding these benefits of my intimate tie to the research at hand, I was also conscientious of this potential bias when collecting and analyzing data. By collecting data from organizations I was unaffiliated with such as study abroad groups and by interviewing people who held a variety of roles in their groups, I safeguarded against taken-for-granted assumptions that may have stemmed from my personal viewpoint.

## *Data Collection*

### *Process and Participants*

Criteria for all participants was short-term involvement in their organizations, whether camp, study abroad, or Greek life leadership groups. Sampling included 20 participants, ranging in ages from 20 to 23 years old, who were undergraduate college students: 6 were male and 14 were female; 8 were Greek life leaders (5 Sorority A females; 2 Fraternity A males; 1 Fraternity B male), 5 were study abroad participants (4 females, 1 male), and 7 were camp staff at HopeLife (5 females, 2 males). All study abroad and camp staff participants had completed their time abroad (1 semester or summer term) or at HopeLife (2-3 summer terms). Among the Greek life leaders, 6 were graduating seniors and 2 were juniors or underclassmen at the time of data collection.

### *Procedures*

Participants were personally contacted, conveyed the premise of my research, and asked if they would be willing to participate in an individual interview. Times and dates for interviews were scheduled according to the participant's availability and preferences. Interviews were audio-recorded, with two long-distance interviews conducted by phone and the remaining 18 conducted face-to-face. Participants were notified of the confidentiality of their information and consented to being recorded.

## *Interviews*

Interviews were conducted using an interview guide with questions organized according to a natural progression of categories, including but not limited to *roles*, *conflict*, *team dynamics*, *values and investment*, *culture*, and *post-exit*. Participants were asked about their initial experiences and interest with their respective organizations and then any roles held within the time of their involvement. In addition, participants were prompted to explain the relational dynamics of their group, including questions such as, “What did conflict look like within your group?” “What did you value most about the people you were with?” “What do you think most contributed to your closeness as a group?” and “What’s one of your most memorable experiences?”

Participants were then asked about pre-exit, exit, and post-exit experiences, as well as about processing and sensemaking. The questions were structured to stir participants’ memories and narratives, as well as to help them consider experiences and attitudes they may not have previously reflected on. Interviews were informal and meant to facilitate an atmosphere of comfortable and natural, yet guided, conversation. Audio-recorded interviews totaled in 15 hours and 27 minutes of data, or 344 double-spaced typed pages. The average interview lasted approximately 40 minutes, with the shortest at approximately 15 minutes and the longest at 81 minutes.

## *Data Analysis*

Participants’ responses were personally transcribed verbatim, and all participants and organizations were assigned pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Once typed transcriptions were complete, I began qualitative data analysis by listing preliminary

patterns and categories that prominently surfaced and were detected during the transcription process. I then color-coded quotes throughout the data according to the trends I had initially noticed, using methods of primary-cycle coding to observe patterns. Tracy (2013) notes that primary-cycle coding “begins with an examination of the data and assigning words or phrases that capture their essence” (p. 189). This level of coding uses first-level codes that are “descriptive,” emphasizing the “who, what, and where” of the data instead of its interpretation. Continuing to use primary-cycle coding, I soon moved to a categorization system of listing related quotes, combined from all the interviews, according to their respective categories. This allowed me to move into secondary-cycle coding with the most pertinent data compiled.

Tracy (2013) describes secondary-cycle coding as a critical examination, synthesis, and categorization of the primary-coded data (p.194). Second-level codes seek to “explain, theorize, and synthesize” the data, and focus on interpretation (p. 194). I utilized secondary coding by developing a categorization system for critical elements that were pertinent to the development of each organizational family. These included the *presence of critical experiences* (absent, somewhat, prominent), the *degree of self-disclosure* (low to high), the *degree of emotionality* (low to high), the *definition of roles* (ambiguous to clear), and the *intensity of identification* (role, group, organizational; low to high). In addition, each organizational experience discussed with participants in interviews was set on a continuum of four core organizational family units. These families were coded as *distanced*, *functional*, *healthy*, and *enmeshed*. Levels of closeness, forms of conflict management, and methods of coping with transition were used to define

these four families. These methods of primary and secondary coding provided a grid through which to observe and analyze membership experiences.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings: A Typology of Organizational Family Experiences

The group dynamics revealed through this study were analyzed through the lens of four family types that emerged in the analysis and shaped the overarching interpretations of the data. I refer to these family types as *distanced*, *functional*, *healthy*, and *enmeshed* and describe them in turn. Each family type was coded for *members' levels of identification, presence of critical and shared experiences, degree of emotionality, and definition of roles*. *Identification* (including role, group, and organizational identification) was coded in levels from *low* to *high*. Identification accounts for any overlap in values between the individual and his/her role, the individual and his/her familial group, or the individual and his/her respective organization. As members found expression of their personal beliefs, purposes, passions, and values through their role, the group, or the organization at large, their investment and interpersonal closeness tended to increase.

*Critical, shared experiences* entail important, defining, bonding, or intense moments that members in the group all experienced in common. Shared, critical experiences encompassed memorable experiences of both difficulty and joy. Familial-like units often shared these moments together, afterwards holding them as unique to the group and fairly foreign to outsiders. These were coded as *absent* (the group did not share critical experiences), *somewhat prominent* (the group shared some critical experiences), *prominent* (the group shared many critical experiences), and *highly prominent* (the group shared many continual or especially formative experiences).

*Degree of self-disclosure* encompassed both self-disclosure of identity ( i.e., a willing disclosure of one's defined self through the sharing traits, characteristics, emotions, or personal experiences) and self-disclosure of weakness (i.e., revealing personal weaknesses or struggles stemming from shared group experiences or individual experiences encountered while part of the group). For example, self-disclosure of identity often entailed member sharing about their personality dimensions, whereas self-disclosure of weakness may arise when a group member falls ill and does not hide their need from the larger group. Both identity and weakness disclosures were coded from *low* to *very high* levels. Also connected with self-disclosure, *degree of emotionality* signifies the depth of commitment, investment, emotion, or passion for/toward the group. Emotionality was coded from *low* (low investment, light emotion) to *very high* (deep loyalty, emotion, commitment).

Finally, *definition of roles* represents the level of clarity provided to members about their specific roles, duties, or responsibilities within the group. Coding ranges on a scale from ambiguous (role not specified, named, or given by an authority) to clear (role defined, member had knowledge and understanding of role prior to experience). The presence of *cross-functional roles* (the presence of overlapping roles within a group; members fill in for one another due to role gaps or needs) are also noted and coded from *low* to *high*. In each family type, patterns of conflict management, transitional prepping and coping patterns, and levels of closeness were also closely analyzed and helped refine the typological scheme. Now that the defining qualities of each emergent family type have been outlined, each type will be described in detail.



### *Distanced Families*

One familial unit pattern epitomized what I refer to as a distanced family (DF) in which there was little attachment, bond, or interpersonal connection or commitment among members. Similar to a real family characterized by physical and/or emotional distance, members in these groups did not rely heavily on each other, know each other deeply, forge strong relationships, or invest in the group to engage in healthy conflict. However, the group still resembled a “family” in the participant’s mind in that members shared experiences unique to themselves and were immersed in an environment that was conducive for forming family-like ties. Only one participant in the data sample represented the distanced family type, but his experience was distinct from all other family types and, thus, warranted separate analysis and attention.

Transition out of these “families” was fairly easy for members in a way that may be similar to family members separating from siblings or parents with whom they rarely maintained physical contact or cultivated personal relationships. Though real families do not have to deal with total transition – that is, out of the family, they may experience estranged family members, a cutting of emotional familial ties, extremely deep and lasting conflict, or loss. In addition, families by lineage experience various transitions throughout life, such as high school graduations or marriages. In distanced family units, transition was smooth and absent of deep sadness. Hunter described his transition back to the United States after a month in Europe: “It’s not like I missed people as much; I just kind of missed cultural things.” Instead of forging ties that later had to be strained by loss of constant companionship, the DF member created memories in his personal life that

was not significantly attached to other people. This eased transition and caused pre-exit, exit, and post-exit phases to be a simple turnover.

Thus, the distanced family type was not defined by relationship valence (i.e., the presence of negative relationships) but by relationship intimacy (i.e., the absence of close relationships). As study abroad participant, Hunter, noted,

“There was some closeness with the big group mostly just because we always traveled everywhere together...I wasn’t really attached to anyone or any group really...[regarding friendships]. I wouldn’t say close, but there’s definitely friends, not like great friends. I was more of a loner.”

DFs, though not as interpersonally close or vulnerable, still shared some connection through shared experience. The DF member interviewed talked little about friendships and more about his personal gain from the experience, and he did not report missing people from the group post-exit.

### *Organizational, Group, and Role Identification*

In the DF, the member “bought in” less to the group dynamic specifically, even if he cared about the organization’s purpose or his own personal expression of values through the experience. Thus, low group identification was a factor contributing to loose bonds between members, and thus created a more distanced “family.” Defined roles in DFs were extremely low if present at all, leading to an ambiguous sense of role identification beyond one’s personal desire for a specific experience. In the most distanced familial unit that emerged through this study, the participant (Hunter) noted that on his study abroad trip, the leading professor was “basically everyone’s dad.” However, beyond this, no further roles were mentioned and group identification was very low.

### *Critical, Shared Experiences*

The DF member's lack of common critical experiences contributed to his lack of closeness, as crucial moments of shared time served to seal the bond between members and create an atmosphere of family. Instead of joining together with fellow members to endure difficulty or experience new opportunities together, the member of the DF did not prioritize time with the others and, instead, valued personal agendas. While there was no indication of this creating a negative experience for the member, a lack of interest in cultivating group experiences contributed to the loose friendships of the distanced family.

### *Degree of Self-Disclosure and Emotionality*

Self-disclosure and emotionality emerged as critical components of close family units but were absent or extremely low in distanced family models. The member of the distanced unit was unwilling or unmotivated to disclose aspects of their personal lives to other members – including but not limited to personality traits, habits, weaknesses, personal narratives, or past events. In addition, the distanced member did not experience prevalent in-the-moment self disclosure brought on by critical experiences, and, instead, willingly withdrew from the group and experienced much alone. Hunter explained: “If I ever felt like I was just like, ‘No I don’t wanna do that,’ then I would just leave and do something by myself.” Emotionality in DFs was extremely low, meaning that the member expressed very little passion for, interest in, nostalgia toward, or attachment to “family members.” In addition, the distanced family member demonstrated little affection for or loyalty to the others, as the significance of his experience had little to do with his

interpersonal relationships or group dynamic. While the distanced family member demonstrated commitment to an experience (i.e. their study abroad trip), he did not display much investment in the group itself.

### *Conflict Management*

In this particular study, the distanced family member did not seem to forge strong enough ties with each other to manage conflict. When asked about conflict, Hunter reported: “No I’m not really a conflict person, like I try to avoid that mostly anyways.” Though personality seems to be a contributing factor to conflict management, a lack of interpersonal closeness and prioritization of group relationships removed the need for thorough conflict management and resolution. As conflict is inevitable in any family, and as well-managed conflict is a critical component of healthy family units, a lack of conflict at all defines the distanced family as one with weaker and uncommitted interpersonal relationships.

### *Functional Families*

The next group is deemed the functional family (FF), as its members contributed to each other only insofar as their shared purpose demanded. Functional families originally came together around a common goal, and formed a family-like bond centered on one task, vision, or desire. They shared experiences that others did not partake in, particularly pertaining to the planning and executing stages of their common task. FFs developed varying ranges of closeness, often dependent on the leadership governing the dynamic. Group closeness levels were low, but definitely more present and developed

than in distanced families. One member of back-to-back familial short-term experiences, Elisabeth, explained that after her first group experience (a FF family), she “came away with a lot more ... individual relationships” instead of a team relationship. This was an evident characteristic in functional families – intentionally sought relationships thrived when members were individually motivated to develop them, but team closeness waned once the task was accomplished. Elisabeth described her first team within her sorority in a way that characterizes functional family dynamics and motives well:

“The whole team wasn’t on the same page and we never got there, we didn’t talk about anything really but... I was roommates with one of the people on the team and if I hadn’t been roommates with her I wouldn’t know anything that was going on in her life or how she was feeling about even being on... [the] team because we just strictly talked business. Which I think was hard and I think that was pretty underwhelming.”

Because accomplishing a task was the primary goal of functional family dynamics, the functional team itself did not prioritize deep closeness. As another FF member explained: “That was really what I think drove us together was just like this common need [i.e., task].” Instead of being driven by knowing each other, FFs were driven together by the shared purpose of the task at hand.

As such, members transitioning from FFs did not experience deeply emotional or difficult transition, although they did report some sadness in transitioning out due to the high levels of time, effort, and passion invested in the task. In addition, FFs made memories together simply because they collectively joined efforts toward one task and spent high amounts of time together throughout the process. Though members reported missing each other and nostalgically reflected on their FF, they did not express unresolved feelings of attachment or difficulty exiting; and though some tried to maintain

relationships with their family members post-exit, no FF remained a tight-knit, cohesive group once the galvanizing task element was absent.

### *Organizational, Group, and Role Identification*

Whereas role identification was high and organizational identification was somewhat high, group identification in FFs was somewhat lower and largely contingent on the team's functional purposes. One FF member explained this experience well:

“You know, that bond of STEP was very much the tying factor and I think we all recognize that, so like most of the time when we get together we talk about STEP stuff.”

STEP, not interpersonal closeness, was the defining factor of this group, and once it was over, the team had a harder time staying connected, as the very nature of their functions changed. However, while the function was still relevant, group identification increased due to task commitment and each other.

As the leader of a FF group within her sorority, Marie described the mentality that formed as the leadership team worked toward their goal: “If you're rude to one you're rude to all of us. We very much took on that mentality.” This group identification formed amidst their lengthy task but eventually faded after the task was complete.

Another FF member belonged to a small group of executive leaders responsible for guiding their entire sorority membership. The eight members each held specific task roles, but the group had freedom to spend as much or as little time together as desired, as long as their task was completed. This member described her FF as follows:

“[Our overarching leader] was very much a ‘I can handle it, I can do it all’...[she] kinda just let everybody do their own thing and she did her thing... yeah so we weren't close at all; I feel individually close with everyone but we weren't close

as a group which was very interesting... It was more of a ‘you do your role, I will check in with you and we’ll get the job done.’”

Instead of cultivating high group identification, this FF focused on individual tasks and responsibilities. Roles functioned more as silo efforts, which prevented camaraderie and deep feelings of commitment to the team itself from developing.

### *Critical, Shared Experiences*

Sharing of critical experiences was prominent in functional families, as they often experienced high stress, situations requiring immediate problem-solving, sleep deprivation, and an intense requirement of time and energy in order to fulfill their task together. However, these critical experiences were heavily task-based, not personal in nature. An FF member (Marie) explained: “So during STEP it was really seamless, I mean we grew closer because we were all stressed, we were all you know like taking the criticism and you know kind of laughing after practice.”

Shared time spent together for the sake of the task contributed to group cohesiveness, as the following FF member describes when her group took a trip together to work on their task. After a long day of work and exhaustion, the group went to dinner and got to hang out without only working on their task. It was here that their group dynamic deepened further: “You know we were like, I think just all of our guards were down and, you know, we weren’t trying to be a certain person.” Other members of FFs, however, experienced a dynamic that accomplished tasks, but did not prioritize a deep team dynamic. She attributed this to their lack of interpersonal closeness and the fact that “we didn’t really bond that much.”

Thus, the need to complete a task afforded FFs the opportunity to connect beyond their mission. However, this closeness only occurred within the context was not thereafter sustained to the same degree as it had been during their shared experience.

### *Degree of Self-Disclosure and Emotionality*

Self-disclosure of one's identity and personal weaknesses was only prevalent when members of FFs chose to develop individual relationships on their own time. Alternatively, emotionality was somewhat high in the entirety of the groups as they were intensely task-focused. Specifically, they were collectively passionate about the cause at hand and, thus, highly invested in its accomplishment – and much more so compared to other members not involved in the prominent leadership roles. As one FF member said, “We didn’t expect it to become anyone else’s life, because they didn’t sign up for this job...[you] eat, breathe, [and] sleep Sorority A.”

### *Definition of Roles*

Functional families generally had their roles explicitly and discretely defined early on, and they maintained their roles throughout the experience (with some overlap). Specified roles contributed to the functional feel of the group, as each member was able to perform his or her task to complete the job. When functional families didn’t have well-defined roles, conflict ensued. One FF member described the difficulty she experienced when her role was not clearly explained:

“It was really difficult at the beginning because I was never really trained, and so when you’re dealing with that amount of money and different aspects that was kind of frustrating; and so I feel like it was a lot of just trying to survive.”



In addition, when leadership in functional families defined their roles exclusively in terms of tasks, the close family atmosphere decreased. Along these lines, an FF member on a leadership team in a sorority recalled:

“[Our overarching leader] had to play more of a presidential role of a ‘this is my position, like this is what it needs to be, this is what you need to do.’ And so I think because of that, it kind of set a not a family environment.”

Roles played a very important role in FFs because of the task-based nature of the team; if a member failed to perform his or her role properly, he or she compromised the group’s functioning. Even when roles overlapped among members (where one member would temporarily fill in for a portion of another’s role or assist in their duties), the organization of functional groups generally began with specifically named task roles. According to this structure, each member’s identity in the group was not defined in terms of relational roles such as “the mom,” but, instead, in task-focused terms such as “choreography chair.”

### *Conflict Management*

Within functional families, conflict resolution was only valued to the extent that it facilitated task accomplishment, and because members were focused on their goal instead of interpersonal relationships outside of the shared task, they typically chose a passively aggressive approach to managing it. Sorority group leaders, for example, often described conflict as “very passive...we’re all feeling this tension [but] no one’s doing anything about it,” and “it was all passive and behind doors.” Another sorority leader described their conflict similarly:

“It felt like everything was very secretive sometimes with what was really going on with us, so it wasn’t a really transparent environment or very vulnerable. So I

felt like conflict was kind of passive aggressive and um would kind of blow up at different moments.”

### *Healthy Families*

Healthy families (HF) represented the most balanced group dynamic that emerged from close-knit, STOs. HFs shared high interpersonal and group closeness, as well as high personal, organizational, and group identification. High levels of vulnerability and self-disclosure contributed to such camaraderie, as well as high levels of shared critical experiences – both lighthearted and difficult. In healthy families, roles were fairly well defined and members understood how to fulfill both their relational and functional positions in relation to the team and the organization. However, cross-functional dynamics arose in HFs, a factor that seemed to correlate with the high levels of trust and closeness. As members cared more deeply for each other than members of FFs, they became more willing to serve one another and take on aspects of each other’s responsibilities or roles, thus creating the cross-functional and highly cohesive dynamic. Sorority leader Elisabeth’s description exemplified these HF group dynamics:

“We put the Lord first and were all on the same page, but it was the single most cohesive leadership group I’ve ever been a part of...not saying cohesive in the fact that we always agreed on everything, but cohesive in the fact that even if you didn’t agree, you respected the majority opinion or you respected the person in higher power, or you respected the advisors; and I think that was established through just being able to be real with each other...and spending time outside of [sorority] stuff together.”

HF members desired to invest in each other outside of their organization and, thus, cultivated close bonds that extended beyond the group task. Conflict was embraced, but with care, as members cared deeply about relationships with one another and desired to resolve differences instead of avoid or stew on them.

Transition and exit for HF members was considerably harder than for those of less relational group dynamics. Because deep relationships had formed, there was more of a sense of loss when the groups split up. However, though members missed each other, they were still able to move on from the experience and translate their core values into other experiences. Healthy family members prioritized their relationships outside of the organization post-exit and remained friends with people even when the organizational connection was gone. In addition, HF members held their family units in high esteem post-exit and expressed loyalty toward them. One Hope Life Christian Camps staffer worked at camp for three summers, and a year after her final summer described her team as follows:

“My team is like an ex-boyfriend that I still care about; I still want to know that they’re doing well; I still want to check up on them. A lot of my girls text me and...call me...whenever they have things going on...I’m still connected with Hope Life.”

HF members also tended to be dedicated to their experience even as they approached exit: For example, one Hope Life staffer described that she “wanted to be 100% all in all there” her last week at camp.

A study abroad student similarly explained the difficulties of transitioning out of the HF dynamic:

“You know we had spent so much time together; like I said, it was like 87 days of being social 24/7, and so it was really sad because we had gotten so close; just the little things you laugh about: like we always ate balsamic and olive oil at whatever restaurant we went to and we were like ‘who are we gonna eat balsamic and olive oil with?’ And just the reality of going back, we were all pretty sad... we were exhausted by the end – [but] then when we were sitting in the airport, we were thinking through all the fun things we had done and [feeling] just sad that we were leaving...you’re gonna go back but it’s not gonna be the same at all.”

The same study abroad student also described the relational transition that occurred:

“It wasn’t necessarily like culture shock, but it was like we had been given those eight people...to invest in and we...had just become really vulnerable...so it was hard for me to come back and [have] so much small talk... it was such a different level of conversation...no one is every going to actually understand what happened this summer.”

Overall, HFs struggled not only with the loss of an experience they had invested such time, energy, emotion, and effort into, but with the loss of those deep relationships.

### *Organizational, Group, and Role Identification*

In HFs, members shared high role, group, and organizational identification, with group identification being highest. One camp counselor’s experience speaks to these levels of identification:

“They were family, not in like the sense that we knew everything about each others’ life and story... . It was just the overall caring for one another’s wellbeing, I think, and knowing that if one of us went down we all went down.”

Herein lies a critical component to healthy organizational families: while some developed because of self-disclosure, others developed more due to a shared unity, deep caring, and mutual trust.

HFs all demonstrated an internal trust-based reliance, and as each member needed the other, a strong group identification and loyalty formed. In addition, family group and organizational identification blended in healthy families as members first came together because they believed in the mission of the organization, and then grew close to one another by furthering this mission side-by-side. As a president of a Christian service fraternity explained: “I think definitely all of us being in Fraternity B helped because, you know, at the end of the day we all have this same mission and we all joined a group knowing what the mission of the group was.”

Regarding role identification, HF members who highly identified with the organization itself also often identified deeply with their particular roles. They, thus, felt satisfaction when they were able to express their personal values through their organizational roles. Though this was common, not all members felt completely at home in their roles; yet, even in partial role identification, members still reported high loyalty and love for their organizational families. In addition, HF members with high levels in all forms of identification generally felt loved and cared for by their organization.

### *Critical, Shared Experiences*

Healthy family members shared many critical experiences as a unit such as inside jokes, bonding moments of camaraderie,, and crucial moments of difficulty. Along these lines, one sorority leader recalled:

“We went through some pretty highs and low together just in the way of things would change on us at the drop of a hat...I think largely we spent a lot of time together, but I think we just all really had the same vision and mindset, and so I think that when you have something that you’re working towards, its easier for...people to be on board and be a team.”

HF members reported that moments of problem-solving, collaboration, and exhaustion actually benefitted the team dynamic, strengthening the bond through shared experience. In addition, members associated “showing up” for other members’ critical life celebrations as a byproduct of being close and team-minded:

“I think some of the funnest [sic] memories were, you know, me being on Miranda’s team when she had to deliver pooppy news or Katy’s team or Laken’s team when she got engaged - all of us were there and meant the world to her because we weren’t just a council; we were friends.”

Healthy families spent substantial time together, as it was during these times that critical experiences organically took place. Hope Life Christian Camps staffer, Claire, explained:

“We actually got in trouble for spending too much time together... Teams where they didn’t care how you spent your time, who said ‘we’re just gonna have fun,’ or who didn’t care about the serious conversations, or who didn’t meet the needs of all their people - those are the teams where there was not closeness and there was, honestly, bitterness that forms.”

Laine, who studied abroad for three months, similarly described the role that time spent together played in her friendships: “You literally spend 12 hours of your day being social every single day, and your friends are given to you; and you’re like, ‘these are the people that I have to invest in for right now.’”

Shared experience also played a role in fraternities that share deep emotionality and commitment to each other. One member of Fraternity A, Mitchell, described his group’s fierce loyalty to each other:

“I think its both, like both things that you said – with my pledge brothers it’s a shared suffering, and with everyone in Fraternity A, it’s a shared experience, and my experience with suffering in life and, with the next pledge class, I didn’t suffer with them, but...getting to see the way that they do that.”

These comments allude to the prominent elements of self-disclosure and emotionality, which are described in turn.

### *Degree of Self-Disclosure and Emotionality*

Healthy families were willingly vulnerable with one another and built closeness and trust through self-disclosure. A sense of being known cultivated deeper relationships which, in turn, built a positive family dynamic where members could be authentic and

honest without fear of rejection. Elisabeth, an HF member of a small group in her sorority, explained:

I feel that I was better able to...vocalize...what I think. But also, I'm behind the advisors and I'm behind the people higher than I am 100% because...they know me as a person, and because they know me, I don't have any walls up; and because I know them, we both know that we're striving for this overall goal."

Members of healthy family dynamics expressed a freedom from the pressure to put on a mask or hide true feelings: (Sophie) "I would be sitting on a couch in [my director's] home just with my family and...nothing would be expected of me but to be how I am, as I am currently."

Many HFs formed in environments like Christian camp staff, where employees were actively encouraged to build strong relationships. Whether having time built into the day to talk with one another or being guided by leaders whose top priority was team relationships, HF members often benefitted from the setting around them. One camp staffer at HopeLife said, "I think fostering closeness the most is...a time to...enjoy each other. Time to talk, time to hang out, time, and also like pushing people to have those conversations and to build relationships..." Claire also elaborated on the value of a leadership team's ability to model vulnerability: "I think that's why our team was close, because we didn't seem like these untouchable people who were always happy."

Annie, who studied abroad, also noted the criticality of vulnerability:

You have to be vulnerable to get to know people – like really get to know people – and become true friends with somebody...most people were super good about being vulnerable and sharing. So that for sure was the number one thing in getting close to people... you have nothing else to do but be vulnerable."

Thus, HFs formed based on mutual trust, willingness to be vulnerable, assurance that other members would be loyal, supporting one another, shared understanding, and camaraderie from shared critical moments.

### *Definition of Roles*

HF entailed specific roles and operated from these, though some cross-functioning occurred because of the high group identification and interpersonal closeness. Sorority leader Katie explained this family role dynamic and the importance of those roles being well-defined: “I made it a family by defining everyone’s role, and when you know your role you know how to function in the family. That’s a good way to put it – when you know your role you know how to function in the family.” Well-defined roles safeguarded against over-stepping bounds, intrapersonal frustration, and task ineffectiveness.

While pre-defined roles were not established for study abroad participants who encountered HFs, these emerged according to personality and need: “Every moment someone was acting like a mom, like we were all moms at some point or another and the people you traveled with were your people - they were your family.” In addition, HFs often created traditional familial titles and roles for each other, as if trying to mirror a real family in absence of their own. For example, Laine said: “We named everyone, which, we gave them character names or something. So Mary was Mrs. Potts because she would just be like ‘Let me rub your back’ or ‘Let me do your hair for you,’ or just little things.” Finally, though roles were often defined in HFs, the priority for members was not to doggedly stick to their roles, but to take care of each other. With such cross-functioning, members were willing to sacrifice their own role or step in for someone else in effort to take care of each other.



## *Conflict Management*

Conflict in HFs varied based on if the HF leaned more functional or more relational. Where interpersonal closeness was high, conflict often became more confrontational, as members prioritized each other's friendships enough to be honest about difficulty and reconcile quickly. When conflict was confrontational, it was addressed with the intention of restoration, and participants felt that this was motivated by the need to smooth situations while living in close proximity. Granted, while this same factor caused FFs to ignore conflict until the experience was over, HFs embraced conflict in effort to keep healthy relationships. One camp staffer at Hope Life explained:

“We’re all together all waking hours and some sleeping hours...I think the biggest thing was just nipping it [conflict] in the bud, and we didn’t make our team a place where we can make fun of each other and that sort of thing...Hope Life Christian camps and especially [the leader of our team] set this culture on our team of confronting it.”

It was in these types of environments that members were more willing to approach and resolve conflict, because there was no fear of family breakdown because of the disagreement. HFs even taught members how to view conflict as facilitating interpersonal closeness. A Hope Life staffer who worked on a smaller leadership team for three months explained:

“[It] was such a sweet community that we could talk about it and fight through that and work through it together... [my view of] conflict [is] black and white from before and after camp. I literally was so bad at it, ran away from it at all costs, and now I’m like ‘ok, I don’t enjoy those conversations but know the fruit and point of them.’”

In addition, HFs experienced such high loyalty toward each other that even when one member of the team made a mistake and the whole team suffered, petty conflict was avoided. After suffering consequences as a group for the mistake of one member,

Caroline described the effects on the family dynamic: “It felt like we were enough of one body to suffer consequences together, and so it was cool to see the dynamic of literally no bitterness.”

When conflict became a possibility between the team and those under their leadership, the team forfeited interpersonal conflict so they could collaboratively manage conflicts that arose from the outside. One leadership team within Sorority A experienced this unique shift as it faced potential conflict with the larger sorority membership:

“Whenever we started having meetings with the chapter...[conflict] amongst the team totally diminished because it’s like ‘us against them’ now; and so you go into a big meeting...knowing it’s going to be painful as heck for us, but knowing that we have to mask that together to lead them [the rest of the members] well; and there’s a solidarity that comes from being a united front.”

Thus, healthy families were marked by an understanding that conflict, when handled well, could be honed as a tool for more interpersonal closeness and team effectiveness.

### *Enmeshed Families*

The fourth organizational familial type that emerged was the Enmeshed Family (EF). EFs displayed the highest levels of relational closeness, vulnerability, and utter loyalty to each other. Members shared many critical experiences that were deeply emotional and meaningful. Whereas conflict was handled similarly to HFs, role defining was far lower than in HFs because members prioritized belonging to the family more than role clarity and effectiveness. Enmeshed family members reported extremely high levels of identification, specifically group identification, but also organizational and role identification in most cases. This became a critically important characteristic, because people who belonged to enmeshed families experienced a total overlap in personal and

organizational core values and commitments. This led to extremely high emotionality and commitment and an often unhealthy development of organizational identification.

EF members struggled to transition out, as the totalizing nature of their organizational experience often enmeshed their very identities with the organization or its members. When the group had to separate or the roles ended, members wrestled to reestablish themselves as separate individuals, unidentified with each other or the organization. Thus, enmeshed family members clung to each other and their experience and felt high levels of frustration, fear, anxiety, and sadness during pre-exit, exit, and post-exit periods.

Transition was most difficult for EFs, as they were the most connected both to each other and to the shared experience. EF members reported their shared time as very intense and unique; that is, for study abroad EF members, the trip was extravagant, rare, and new; for Hope Life staffers, it was all-encompassing, emotionally draining, physically exhausting, relationally rich, very demanding, and fairly isolated. For Greek life members, their experience was exclusive to members only, involving rituals and defined culture.

Julie, a Hope Life staffer, described her difficult post-exit as follows:

“My immediate exit process is what I would like to describe as being forcefully ripped out of one place and forcefully pushed into another, so I know that’s not what happened - I personally chose to leave. I left on my own accord, and it’s funny to say that because I wanted to leave so badly. So why would I describe it as being ripped away? But that’s like the people aspect; I felt...ripped and that rip left wounds away from my people, from my family...”

Julie also summarized the difficulty of an extremely quick transition to an environment that was very different from camp:

“There was a 48-hour span from when I was sitting at camp and when I was sitting in a classroom...went from being so completely 100% known to...nobody having interest to know anything. So even if I tried to explain it, they would kind of just want 10 seconds and then want to move on; so I simultaneously didn’t want to be with anyone, but I also didn’t not want to be with anyone because I was so used to forever being with people....”

Study-abroad participant Ellie described a similar type of transition from her EF, but in the context from Europe to Newman University:

“I was really worried when we started thinking about transitioning back...I get attached really easily, I don’t want to leave you people...coming back and saying like ‘I don’t want to be here,’ I just really felt like those people were my family like I loved them, and now I don’t have them...I had really attached my life to theirs and so I really struggled with that coming back...something people said a lot was “we’re never gonna get something like this again” which weighed really heavy on all of us.”

EF members felt like no one outside of their family could understand what they had gone through or how they had been personally transformed. As Ellie recalled:

“Nobody’s gonna understand what you go through and the tight-knit bond that you have...it was the most life-changing experiences I’ve ever had, and it’s a very sacred thing but it also makes it a very frustrating thing...nobody seems to understand what you’re saying and again you don’t want to be here...it’s a whole remolding of yourself.”

EFs demonstrated the depth of their connectedness as they struggled to untwine themselves from such unique, shared, rare experiences. However, EFs demonstrated the depth of friendships that can be formed through even STO family units. They represent the deepest type of organizational care and interdependence, and the difficulties that come with such closeness.

### *Organizational, Group, and Role Identification*

Enmeshed families shared high organizational, group, and role identification. Members in titled jobs often took the job, not because they were drawn to the purpose of the role or organization, but because they cared so deeply for the overall aim and for each other. Overlap between personal core values and organizational values was prominent, and members expressed undying dedication to their organizational family units. In addition, enmeshed family members experienced high ownership within their roles, groups, and organizations. One Hope Life staffer expressed the personalization of her role:

“The growth that I saw with...impacting other people’s lives through that place...makes me think that I have ownership of it. Because...saying that Hope Life is all about their mission statement, I feel like I’ve been a part of the mission and done work through that camp.”

This same staffer made a profound statement on the encompassing nature of her role when asked about the benefits and costs: “My time and my heart and the majority of myself was spent on my campers...it just cost me myself.”

Another member who experienced an EF belonged to a fairly healthy-functional team, but contributed to the group in a way that far more resembled an EF for her personally. She described the role identification she had and the way her high investment affected her view of leaving the role:

“[I had] fear that they [the next person in the role] won’t do the job that I did, fear that there’s no one who can do the job that I did, so... when someone else comes and maybe does just what’s expected and required, you get nervous and anxious.”

### *Critical, Shared Experiences*

Critical experiences were prominent and intense in solidifying EFs. Many EF members reported moments full of laughter and inside jokes, as well as deep suffering or difficulty shared by the group. Study-abroad participant Ellie, who described her study abroad group as a tight-knit “family,” noted the importance of critical experiences in their dynamic:

“A lot of life really did happen over there... and when you’re traveling, you know, eight hours a day on a weekend, you do get to learn a LOT about people’s lives. You do experience a lot of these things together, whether it’s little things that seem really little, but eventually become bigger things...you start to bond because you are the only ones doing that thing right there.”

Hope Life staffer Caroline expressed similar thoughts:

“...we [girls in her role] were the only other three who understood that role...I could try to explain it to a counselor, but they would have no idea unless they actually did it...they understood what was going on and so it was really cool because we got to join forces and fight lies and things like that together, so that was really, really sweet.”

Enmeshed family members found comfort in the fact that others had experienced the same moments they had, but while the presence of so many critical experiences bonded the family, it also made it more difficult to transition away from these people.

### *Degree Self-Disclosure and Emotionality*

Self-disclosure of personal identity, investment in the family and mission, and emotionality were all very high in EFs, as members seemed to throw their entire selves into the purpose and its people. Conner, Hope Life staffer, demonstrated the highly relational nature of his and many others’ roles at camp. If relationships were central to a job, it became very easy for staff to blur the lines between task and close interpersonal

connections: “Hope Life is relational...so you grow in these friendships really deep really quick because that’s sort of what you rely...its what your job is.”

By nature of spending so much time together, EF family members experienced a conducive setting for forming such strong relationships. Along these lines, one study abroad participant said: “You have a roommate in your program, you have meals with your program, you go to class with your program, you travel with your program...they are your people. I mean that is your family for the next three months.” This study abroad participant noted another trait common in EF families: members were not experiencing critical moments or common self-disclosure with many people outside of their organizational families, because the experience was so all-encompassing. By doing everything together, having a shared purpose, and being somewhat isolated from the rest of the world, EFs developed strong emotionality, investment, and closeness to each other.

### *Definition of Roles*

EF members rarely mentioned defined roles, though many of them were in task-specified jobs or assumed relationally-based roles in the group. Defined roles became less of a priority for EFs because the members wanted to help each other, or they became personally invested in their roles and, thus, expressed them from intrinsic motivation and not merely outward expectation. Enmeshed family members noticed the importance of every person contributing to the group, and noted this interdependence. HopeLife staffer Caroline mentioned: “Camp couldn’t have functioned if I was in every position and like... it was just really cool to see like people call one another out or come alongside and

encourage each other.” Thus, though role involvement was important to EFs, role-defining was not as prominent and more overlap occurred.

### *Conflict Management*

Conflict emerged in EFs as an inevitable part of being so close with a familial group, but EF members were so dedicated to each other that they were in a safe space to work problems out, confront them, and seek reconciliation. Study abroad participant and member of a 3-month EF said:

“We had experienced a lot of things going really well for us and just a lot of laughing; I mean I don’t think I’ve laughed that much like ever...and then a lot of things went really wrong, and so you really learn how to problem solve and...fight well or not well, and you learn people’s quirks and when people are exhausted and what to do.”

EF members expressed the deepest levels of understanding one another’s personalities, tendencies, and weaknesses. Instead of ignoring conflict, they were generally able to healthily confront it and operate from a personal knowing of each other’s behaviors. Thus, conflict was impacted by the fact that the group learned each other well.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

This study examined the “family” identity metaphor in STOs and its implications for member identity, interpersonal relationships, and membership transitions including exit. STOs, or groups that have a short, defined, and known period of membership, offer a unique organizational experience due to the temporary nature of the group. Members often seek to express their personal narratives through organizational narratives, and it is in this setting that family dynamics can so quickly form (Hermann, 2011). Family-like STOs – especially ones with faith-based missions or elements - may be prone to cultivate deep camaraderie and closeness between members, given the experiences and structural dynamics of the organization and membership. As such, members in these particular contexts may become highly identified.

This research attempted to deepen understanding of the often-difficult exit from short-term, family-like organizations, as well as define patterns of both healthy and unhealthy organizational families. In addition, it highlighted possible difficulties that may develop when organizations function as a family. Findings from this study provide insight into the trends associated with family dynamics, particularly those that form in faith-based organizations, and offers implications from the membership experiences within these environments.

### *Four Distinct Experiences of Organization as Family*

Four family “types” emerged in this research: distanced families, functional families, healthy families, and enmeshed families. These families relate to one another on a scale of closeness, from distanced (i.e., the lowest levels of identification and closeness) to enmeshed (i.e., the highest levels of identification and closeness). The participants in this study reported multiple experiences that were not correlated to a single organizational context; rather, with the exception of the distanced family experience, members in each organizational context made sense of their experiences diversely, as functional, enmeshed, and healthy alike. This study also revealed important dynamics that may contribute to particular types of family cultures and experiences, such as vulnerability, critical experiences, trust, and shared values.

Though healthy families represented those with the most optimal levels and forms of these elements, the data also revealed that groups “felt like family” even when the relationships were predominantly functionally task-focused. With that said, those family cultures were only as strong as the presence of a shared task, and outlived functionality only to the extent that members invested in each other apart from their task-centered experiences. The factors involved in cultivating these types of family-like dynamics are critical for organizations seeking to develop similar cultures for their members, as well as those desiring to help members thrive both inside and outside of the organizational family. Understanding the development of family culture may benefit short-term organizations by guiding them either to cultivate healthy, unified cultures or to address unhealthy dynamics that can arise in a family-like setting.

### *Core Elements of Healthy Organizational Families*

The definitions of “family” that carried throughout the data are exemplified by the idea of being simultaneously known and loved. Participants tied feelings of security, trust, and stability when describing “family,” and especially emphasized family as a place where people know you most deeply but aren’t going anywhere. Though many likened organizational groups to their biological families, participants spent little if any time talking about their own families, demonstrating the value they had on “family” outside of their families. Within this safe group of people who was “there for you,” there existed the opportune environment for elements of families to thrive and develop, thus making the family even stronger. Though the family identity metaphor often arose where individuals desired to build a close culture, it also developed when members primarily cared for a shared task, often inadvertently. Several participants experienced a family culture that developed as a result of the amount of time and effort spent together, and were almost surprised when they cared so much for the others by the end of the experience. Regardless of why the family metaphors developed, the aforementioned elements consistently appeared in descriptions of the root ideals of family.

### *Implications for Studying Family-Like STOs*

#### *Intentionality in Root Metaphors*

Members of family-like STOs, particularly those with high identification and close-knit group culture, often operate within them subconsciously. Because of the transient nature of STOs, members may not even realize the family culture that has

developed until the experience is complete. This study elaborates on present studies of root metaphors, extending implications of these constructs in organizations by suggesting intentionality in both noticing and cultivating them.

Acting as the support system to these cultures, root metaphors act as “symbolic frames” through which members function, often unconsciously (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987, p. 369). When short-term organizations uphold values such as self-sacrifice for the sake of the group, caring for each other, and prioritizing relationships over tasks, a root metaphor of family begins to develop. For example, faith-based camp cultures upheld and promoted the values of knowing each other deeply, fighting for each other, and walking in vulnerability with each other. This created the atmosphere of a family, though explicit roles such as “mom” and “dad” were never spoken or assigned as an expected structure. Members simply knew to care for one another. As Smith and Eisenberg (1987) noted, surface language often reveals root metaphors such as these; members use phraseology that describes the family unit without ever naming the construct definitively.

This study suggests components necessary to develop a family root construct in organizations, such as shared critical experiences, healthy vulnerability, and thoughtful confrontation. Though many root metaphors develop unnoticed, members and organizations that understand what contributes to healthy metaphors may intentionally cultivate certain aspects of group culture (e.g., vulnerability) in order to capitalize on opportunities for the organizational family to subsist. At the same time, the family metaphor may be exploited for member control or simply make certain members feel distanced and alienated if they do not identify in the same ways as others. This shifts the view of root metaphors from a hidden framework revealed by language, to an opportune

chance for organizations to cultivate a specific root metaphor and, thus, cultural dynamic. Instead of aimlessly allowing familial root metaphors to develop, organizations and members can purposefully drive a healthy familial culture that maximizes each member's potential to thrive (Brotheridge & Lee, 2006).

### *Organizational Identification*

As Ollilainen and Calasanti (2007) noted that organizations often maintain cultures that “promote...loyalty and commitment,” while drawing out “worker...satisfaction and identification with company goals” (p. 8). As members desire to make sense of the world and experience the “deeper meanings provided by...collectives,” they become motivated to identify with organizations (Ashforth, et al, 2008). These motivations heighten as members' personal sense of self and values overlap with an organization's, as members write their own narratives into those of the group and “solidify [their] self-concept” (Hermann, 2011, p. 248).

This study suggested the value that members placed on self-concept, as many spoke of the blending of their personalities and typical behaviors with their organizational roles and functioning. This research also presented a correlation between high organizational identification and high levels of commitment, as members who identified with the values of their groups, and found expression of their own personalities, tended to invest themselves both willingly and lavishly. This affirms Ashforth and colleagues' (2008) work, which describes the deep-structured (fundamental) and situated (temporary) identifications that often create attachment to an organization from an individual's very core of self, and shift his/her mindset to view the organization as part of who he or she is.

Unlike indefinite organizational memberships, STOs allow for more predictability because “one is able to anticipate the date of role exit” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 99). Though short-term organizations are not as explored as indefinite organizations, this study builds upon the groundwork of organizational communication research and presents implications as to how the family metaphor impacts short-term groups uniquely. First, a finite period may cause organizational memberships to feel more condensed, and may intensify identification. Ashforth, et al (2008) notes that organizational identification promotes job satisfaction, internal motivation, and support in stress. If short-term experiences are intense, members may need more support, motivation, and satisfaction, and thus tend to identify more quickly and more deeply. Camp counselors, for instance, commit to a short time of totalistic membership and reported deep vulnerability and dependence on one another to finish the task. Many also described fellow “family” members post-experience with very high esteem for them. This suggests an intense period of motivation and support that led to deep satisfaction overall.

Second, the family metaphor combined with high identification may cause relationships developed within the short-term experience to be stronger and closer, as the feel of family empowers members within the context of a “partnership with a caring and committed employer and a close-knit family of colleagues” (Casey, 1999, p. 161). With less time to commit to one another, members may decide to invest intentionally from the very beginning, particularly if they immediately share critical experiences. Third, because a family has less time to develop in a short-term organization, it therefore may tend toward enmeshed levels (must invest deeply because time is short) or functional levels

(not worth investing in the people because time is short). Organizational identification in short-term organizations intensifies when members are motivated to invest.

### *Conflict and Confrontation*

This study builds upon previous research that suggests the inevitability of conflict, the importance of conflict management in maintaining healthy relationships, and the best practices of conflict resolution (Cahn & Abigail, 2014). However, this study goes further to suggest that organizations who train their members to address conflict well will bolster a healthy family culture. This study offers the idea that functional families prioritizing a shared task tend to avoid conflict, so long as it does not diminish accomplishment of the task. Families prioritizing the relationships being formed, however, address conflict more often in effort to heal and strengthen individual bonds.

Research has shown that a “harmony at all costs” mindset, though sometimes present in family cultures, actually harms relational dynamics (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987, p.375). This study’s findings corroborate that view and suggest a correlation between others-focused relationships and healthy confrontation. When members valued each other as humans and friends, they tended to view addressing conflict as necessary, important, and beneficial. According to Smith & Eisenberg (1987), a “conflict-free” mindset can cause members to be inadequately practiced in handling conflict (p. 375). The only member in this study to report no conflict was the DF member, where relationships didn’t develop to the point of much disagreement. Closer family members, however, reported some type of problematic situation. When these conflicts arose, however, families rated as “healthy” on the spectrum did not report deep love and confrontation as mutually

exclusive, but as closely tied. Confrontation actually increased as bonds deepened, and conflict management was viewed as a means to strengthening relationships. This research suggests that organizations that cultivate atmospheres of loyalty and trust liberate members from fear, and thus encourage them to use confrontation as a tool for tightening the bonds in the family instead of as a difficulty to avoid at all costs.

### *Transition and Exit*

The participants' experiences that comprised this study suggested that pre-exit, exit, and post-exit care were not necessarily deliberate or well-executed in STOs, as more emphasis was placed on pre-experience buildup. In addition, because of the intensity of STOs, members are often required to invest the bulk of their time, energy, and attention until the very last second of the experience, thus leaving no time to process, unwind, or prepare to exit. Ashforth (2001) recognized the benefit of collective group exit, as a group consciousness can ease change. Participants in this study reported leaning on other exiting members of their organizational family for support, as these seemed to be the easiest people to be around for many and the main ones who could relate to the experience.

Ashforth's (2001) research also specifies that members may have difficulty identifying themselves upon exiting a role, as they experience a time of ambiguous role identity. Here, tensions exists between two attachments, and a member has disengaged from one role but not yet attached to another (2001). When members of short-term organizations in this study exited their intense roles and experiences, some reported periods of disillusionment, social anxiety, and uprooted-ness in which they groped to



adjust to a new normal while still being very attached to their freshly-surrendered role. This supports Ashforth's research on the uncertainty associated with transitional exit, while calling for organizations to implement efforts to ease this time period by providing support and guidance in helping members not merely identify with one organization or group.

In addition, research by Brotheridge and Lee (2006) explain an aspect of transition that makes exit from family-like groups difficult: the component of primary relationships being often connected to these organizational experiences. This particular study supports this idea, as members explained the sadness and strain associated with leaving their family behind. Though all participants in this study experienced predictable and somewhat involuntary transition due to the nature of short-term organizations, the magnitude and reversibility of change varied by member. Ashforth's (2001) research on types of transition pertain to this research in critical ways and explain the difficulty of many short-term membership experiences examined here. Whereas magnitude relates to the amount of "core and peripheral features of the role identity that changes and the extent of the changes," reversibility refers to the depth of transformation experienced by an individual (Ashforth, 2001, p. 89, 104).

These concepts pertain critically to short-term organizations, as members commonly feel impacted by the rich experiences these groups offer, and upon exit lose core role identities that may have formed. Members thus often exit and undergo a stark transition, finding themselves away from their "families," back to a normal environment, and disoriented with the high levels of change and low levels of social processing available. This study suggests that organizations help their members find ways to process,

appreciate, and apply transformations that have occurred during the experience, while encouraging them to maintain importance relationships in contexts outside of the short-term organization.

As high levels of organizational identification coupled with a close family culture generate deep commitment to the organization or family, members often experienced burnout even amidst encouraging family environments. With deep-seated commitment comes a growing willingness to both invest and trust (Ollilainen & Calasanti, 2007). As members pour out not only skills and time, but themselves, they often feel expended by the end of the experience because they have invested their very lives. Davis and Myers (2012), for example, explained that “exiting a strongly identified role” can seem “as if part of one’s self is being left behind” (p. 197). In the present study, participants commonly reported burnout in interviews, particularly by camp staff (emotional labor, exhaustion) but also in various other ways by study abroad participants (exhaustion, ready for home) and Greek life participants (a readiness to be finished with a role).

Where high organizational identification and deep bonds of family ties develop, commitment to the group accordingly grows, thus putting members at higher risk of wearing out. Feelings of exasperation, frustration, sadness, nostalgia, and disorientation often mingle together when this occurs, as members wrestle with the dichotomies of having invested fully, cared deeply, and experienced intensely while then feeling exhausted, burned out, and isolated from the family post-exit (Ashforth et al., 2008; Hinderaker, 2015). Ashforth (2001) explains that factors such as “transitional roles, ... sentimentality, nostalgia, [and] grieving,” all help individuals invest in new roles while maintaining a feeling of “attachment to the past” (p. 12). This substantiates the

significance of participants in this study mentioning counseling, memory books, and verbal processing as important aspects of their post-exit period, as well as the emotionality that many of them spoke with when describing their memberships. Regarding metaphors, roles, conflict, and transition, this study thus confirms previous research on identification and organizational culture, while offering suggestions for organizational leadership and members in short-term, high-intensity, familial cultures that may help members navigate the difficulties that come with these rewarding experiences.

### *Practical Implications for Leaders of STOs*

In light of this research, organizations that intentionally cultivate a close-knit culture for their members may benefit from considering how to care for these members well throughout their life cycle of involvement and eventual exit. This study showed that members struggled when their leadership failed to emphasize role-defining prior to the experience or failed to communicate roles well. A clear explanation of member roles helps individuals to be confident in how they fit into the larger whole, while preventing conflict caused from role confusion. This research also calls organizations that want to develop a healthy family-like culture to promote others-focused conflict, encourage vulnerability, provide critical experiences for members to develop closeness, and emphasize a shared mindset. However, it is also critical for organizations (particularly those that are highly missional) to notice and safeguard against risks for over-identification. Teaching members the organization's values and motivating them to carry those out while also guiding members to define their own sets of values may help

members to maintain a distinct personal identity and carry their personal values with them without feeling deep “loss” upon exit.

To avoid the potential burnout and exhaustion that comes with members’ high investment, emotionality, and commitment to the family’s members or tasks, organizations must provide support throughout membership and demonstrate care for individuals that enables them to thrive consistently. Along these lines, organizations are called to heighten their support for members during pre-exit, exit, and post-exit. Providing members time to process, take space, de-identify, or reflect on their experiences before they are thrust from the “family” may ease the transition when it comes. For example, following up with members post-exit demonstrates a care for them that is not contingent on what they can contribute to the organization. It is during the post-exit period that members are separated from the support system they have had so richly for so long, and it is also when sensemaking becomes heightened. By both encouraging sensemaking through avenues like counseling, verbal processing, reminiscing, and reunions, organizations can teach members how values, experiences, and relationships gained or expressed through the experience extend outside of the organization.

### *Practical Implications for Members of STOs*

This research also has implications for members of family-cultures within STOs, as organizations do not always care for members well. Pre-experience, it may benefit members to understand their roles and how to personally express values through them. Even if the organization does not define the role well, a personal mantra defined for the

role may help the member walk in his or her responsibilities with less internal frustration. Members must also reinforce to themselves that their role is not the sum of their identity. Rather, values can be expressed in countless ways, through countless avenues, in countless seasons.

Members may also benefit from guarding against possible pitfalls of their personalities. Some people tend to be too invested, and others too detached. Knowing one's self well, and being aware of strengths and weaknesses, allows members to invest fully yet wisely. In addition, members can guard against the totalizing nature of these organizations by first understanding that the organization is not the only means of expressing their core values or forming family-like relationships. Members may benefit from finding ways to express their personal beliefs outside of the organization, as well as from creating space for themselves during membership. If one is aware of an almost complete overlap of values, he or she may be more willing to safeguard from potential underlying difficulties of total organizational membership.

Regarding transition, members should be aware that exit from close-knit families is often a difficult experience and can leave one feeling overwhelmed at the amount of "life" that needs to be processed or reflected upon. Processing experiences *throughout* the experience may reduce this overwhelming feeling post-exit and help members make sense more coherently. Finding ways to periodically detach from the experience or build relationships with fellow members in ways that are not connected to the organization may also help members to detach from the totalizing nature of many family cultures. Investing in friendships for the sake of the relationship and not always for the organization leaves members with interpersonal connection throughout post-exit and life thereafter, thus

diminishing the feeling of loss when the family disperses. In addition, anticipating exit through disengagement and sensemaking shifts a members' focus from complete investment in the organization. Finding ways to process and have healthy closure, such as going to counseling, engaging in sensemaking, collecting memories, and transferring values to other endeavors, all allow the member to value the experience while moving forward.

### *Opportunities for Further Investigation*

This study highlights organizational identification as a potential pitfall in short-term yet totalizing organizations. It also suggests the importance of emotional, relational, and organizational boundaries for members who care deeply about the organization and its members. In addition, this research highlights the need for coping for those who have intense close-knit organizational experiences and may need guidance in translating their experiences to the external world. Further research is needed regarding how individual personality dimensions may spur many aspects focused on in this study, such as organization identification, conflict management, and the tendency to struggle with transition. Though there is a plethora of research on organizational culture and experience, there exists little on the specific nature of STOs, including sensemaking, culture formation, and transition. More research is needed here, and further studies should be conducted on continuing investment/loyalty to family-like organizations post-exit, as well as on investment's specific relationship to identification. This study also touches on the issue of member burnout, but future researchers may benefit from

studying prevention of, coping with, and restoration from burnout, particularly in faith-based organizations.

### *Study Limitations*

This data sampled members of three different types of short-term organizational experiences quintessential to college student life. However, within each organization, there was variation among participants regarding specific roles, as well as the duration of multiple roles that were held within the same organization. Many members belonged to smaller leadership teams during their time of being active in the organization, or experienced a transition from one smaller team to another within the larger structure. This variation of experiences gave a rich sampling of data, but also suggests structural complexity that was not fully and systematically examined in the present study. In addition, it is important to note that not everyone desires a “family” in their organizational experience. As the researcher in this study, I personally enjoy and seek to cultivate a close, family atmosphere in groups I invest in, but this is not the case for everyone, as demonstrated by the distanced family type. Thus, though constant patterns emerged when members in this study described what constituted a family feel, family backgrounds do vary widely from person to person and could affect someone’s perception of a healthy or dysfunctional family.

Further, as this study was conducted in a Christian context, the faith-based aspects likely influenced what participants desired in membership, as many intentionally sought family-like cultures or purposes. I believe this also accounts for some of the identification reported in this study, as members were often committed to and defined by

their faith, and secondly to the organization, in a way that those in a secular context would not be. Those in non-faith-based organizations may experience an equal drive for their values that extends past their organizational memberships, but that was not addressed in this study.

In addition, because I have had membership in both the Greek life organization and the Christian camp studied in this research, I knew all of the participants personally and asked them to participate in the research. However, I was also removed from most of the specific experiences they described. Knowing the purpose of the research beforehand, as well as having relationship with me, might have influenced participant responses. Finally, members interviewed all had varying exit timelines. Some were in the pre-exit phase, others were as little as a few weeks removed from their active membership, and some completed their terms several years prior. Though this variation provided a rich range of data, it is important to consider the different stages of transition and reflection represented in interview answers and how those potentially shaped the findings.

### *Conclusion*

This research was deeply personal to me, as I tend to invest fully and deeply in the purposes and people I care about. I always desire for organizational groups to embody a family that mutually cares for, invests in, and builds friendships with one another in ways that are sustained outside of the experience. After belonging to a staff that developed one of the closest families I've ever known outside of my biological family, I experienced many of the dynamics and challenges uncovered in this research – including significant organizational identification, group attachment, both healthy and enmeshed



group dynamics, and a very difficult transition with little guidance on how to make sense of or recover from burnout and exhaustion.

This study is in no way meant to discourage organizations or members from developing a family culture. However, I do hope it brings possible pitfalls to light for those whose personalities or experiences may be prone to some of the difficulties discussed in the study. I also hope it suggests means to treasure the riches of a “family” developed through organizations – by preparing fully pre-experience, cultivating a healthy family during-experience, and coping well post-experience. It is my aim for individuals to rejoice in the beauty of relationships, in the authenticity of genuine care for another, in the excellence produced when one invests with his or her maximum potential and passion, in the art of transitioning well, and in the memories of priceless seasons.

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