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# Conditions of Possibility and Agency: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Professional Lives of Three Women in the Liberal Arts Academic Disciplines

Angelyn Hayes

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, **CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY AND AGENCY: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE PROFESSIONAL LIVES OF THREE WOMEN IN THE LIBERAL ARTS ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES**, by ANGELYN HAYES, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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## ABSTRACT

### CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY AND AGENCY: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE PROFESSIONAL LIVES OF THREE WOMEN IN THE LIBERAL ARTS ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

by

Angelyn Hayes

The purpose of this study was to research the experiences of female academicians in traditional liberal arts academic disciplines at one institution. The challenges of being a female academician are revealed in statistical data about faculty rank, tenure, and salaries as well as in descriptive accounts of the environment that women encounter in the higher education institutions. However, the intersection of women and the academic disciplines rooted in the liberal arts tradition is a neglected arena of investigation. This research involved a series of qualitative in-depth interviews with three women representing biology, psychology, and English at a small public college and began as an examination of their experiences in these academic disciplines.

Consistent with qualitative research, the themes that emerged from the interviews did not highlight the original research focus. Rather, the women discussed their lives as teachers as a priority over their lives in the disciplines. Through the interviews, the women revealed that their paths into their disciplines began when they were children, a finding not addressed in current literature. Their stories also reveal commonalities in their professional socializations, their quests to have satisfying personal and professional lives, and the impact of relationships on the formation of their academic and professional identities. As each woman fell in love with her discipline during graduate school, she also

discovered teaching as her greater affection. In the context of agency and strength, rather than educational tracking or cultural pressure, they found conditions of possibility in academic careers primarily focused on teaching.

The results of this research suggest alternatives to some assumptions prevalent in current literature, including assumptions about when the direction of a career path begins and assumptions that women accept teaching-focused careers through systemic influences. The experiences of these women highlight the vital role of personal agency and meaningful interpersonal connections in the careers of women in academia.



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INTO THE PROFESSIONAL LIVES OF THREE WOMEN IN THE  
LIBERAL ARTS ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

by  
Angelyn Hayes

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Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
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in  
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in  
the College of Education  
Georgia State University

Atlanta, Georgia  
2007

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I was in high school, my brother Henry Hayes showed me a dissertation in the Georgia State library. He suggested that my teachers would be impressed if I referenced a dissertation in my term paper. That introduction to the idea of doctoral studies planted a mental seed that germinated into my personal goal to earn a doctorate.

As I approach the achievement of the goal, my heart and mind are filled with appreciation to dozens of people who have encouraged and supported me in the journey. My parents, Ollie Knight Hayes and Henry Thaxton Hayes, imbued with a love of learning from their own mothers, taught me to value education and to believe I could accomplish any intellectual goal. That value and that belief have sustained me through many phases of the doctoral process.

The process, including the combination of classroom studies, comprehensive exams, research, and writing, has taken many years to complete. During that time I have received encouragement, support, and patient understanding from family members and friends, each of whom contributed in her or his own way: my sister Janice Codington; my son Garrick Cheyne; my dear friends Candy Head and Thomas Merriwether; and others, including especially Don Cheyne, Joan and Elliott McElroy, Elizabeth Firestone, Mark Daddona, Becky Gmeiner, and Bruce Brewer. Because I have worked full-time during my entire time in the process, several supervisors and colleagues have provided conditions of possibility for my beginning, continuing, and completing the journey. While Peggy Gardner and Elliott McElroy made the beginning possible, Elaine Manglitz

and Brian Haynes enabled the completion. Co-workers Lora Leap and Fred Ganoë promoted my efforts while I was taking classes, and JoAnn Quattlebaum and Sonja Bagby cheered me during the prospectus phase. Words are completely inadequate for thanking Joan McElroy and Adriane Willis for keeping our office functioning, serving, and improving during 2006 while my focus was on the dissertation.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
MLA	Modern Language Association
TSC	Thaxton State College

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Higher education in the United States is an institution in which multiple purposes, divergent structures, and varied constituencies intersect. Some of the most important ways in which the academy pursues its purposes of teaching, scholarship, and service are the organizational structures defined as academic disciplines. Participants in academic activity include faculty members, students, staff members, administrators, alumnae, and governing boards. The purposes, structures, and players intersect in contexts of philosophical discussions, daily operations, and individual lives. This study addresses the intersection of academic disciplines and female faculty members whose professional lives are in those arenas. Specifically, I ask, “What are the professional experiences of female academicians in liberal arts academic disciplines?”

Academic disciplines are an integral component of American higher education, providing the foundations for departmental organization in institutions as well as the contexts in which scholars conduct research, publish findings, educate students, and provide service. Disciplines are distinguished by distinctive cultures, “shared ways of thinking and collective ways of behaving” (Becher, 1984, p. 166). Each discipline’s culture includes questions to ask, methods to employ, and expectations to fulfill. Its language and literature create a specialized and restrictive framework through which to experience and interpret events (Austin, 1996; Becher, 1989). Within disciplines, scholars encounter and create specific conceptual frameworks for developing theories, logical

structures for pursuing investigative research, and social norms guiding professional practices. Departments represent the locations in which disciplinary processes and practices are institutionalized, while academic curricula socialize future practitioners into the disciplines' perspectives, values, and methods. Each academic discipline further represents what Foucault (1980) calls a "regime of truth," a discourse that posits what is true and false along with the mechanisms that operate to maintain that particular definition of truth. Participation in a discipline requires proficiency in the field of study, loyalty to the group and its norms, and willingness to function professionally within the parameters of the discourse of the discipline.

In spite of the apparently insipid definitions and descriptors, disciplines are not benign enterprises. The disciplines and their organizational partners, academic departments, function in academia with varying levels of prestige, power, and practitioner production (Messer-Davidow, 2002). Scholars rank them in hierarchies of value (Seagren, Creswell, & Wheeler, 1993) and thereby assign prestige. Institutions provide funding that enables a department to employ faculty members who give voice to the discipline. Institutional funding for research also advances careers and thereby differentiates levels of influence or power (Slaughter, 1993). The department/discipline duo also serves as a gatekeeper to accept or reject those who seek admittance and to develop or dismiss would-be practitioners of the discipline.

The gate-keeping and development functions have led to highly gendered fields of study, especially career-specific fields. For example, in spite of efforts to attract more women into engineering, it remains male-dominated, while the fields of education and nursing are female-dominated. Yet, fields of study and academic disciplines throughout



the academy espouse a discourse of equity and meritocracy. Academic institutions and departments purportedly hire faculty members based on professional merit and discipline-specific expertise and ostensibly grant rank, tenure, and salary consistent with the quality and quantity of a member's professional academic activity. Nevertheless, the data related to rank, tenure, and salary are indicative of the challenges that women face in academia.

During the past three decades the percentage of full-time faculty who are women has increased slowly from approximately 22 percent in the mid-1970s (Maitland, 1990), but women continue to be a minority (38 percent) of the total number of full-time faculty (Curtis, 2004). The percentages of women holding the rank of professor and obtaining tenure are lower than those of men, and women earn about 80 percent of what men earn at all academic ranks and types of institutions (Bellas, 2001; Curtis, 2004). The highest paying disciplinary fields tend to be those with fewer women (Bellas, 1997; *Don't blame faculty for high tuition: The annual report on the economic status of the profession 2003-04*, 2004). While the number of women choosing careers as college and university faculty members increases, female faculty members are not reaping the same professional advancement rewards as men. "Despite the public perception - some might say myth - that women have achieved parity with men, the data show that this is not the case for women in the professorate" (Glazer-Raymo, 1998 p. 63). The continuing issues of inequitable faculty promotions, tenure, and salaries for women are positioned in the contexts of their chosen academic disciplines. Questions focused on the experiences of female faculty members are appropriately asked in the context of academic disciplines.

This study focused on the women whose professional lives are within selected liberal arts academic disciplines. The liberal arts disciplines are those with historical

connections to the earliest specializations in United States universities, including chemistry, mathematics, biology, and history (Hawkins, 1960) and to the “liberal culture” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which included philosophy, psychology, literature, and fine arts (Veysey, 1965, p. 180). I differentiate the liberal arts disciplines from fields of study or collegiate career fields (Stark, 1998) focused on specific career preparation such as business, teaching, and nursing. Specifically, I asked “What are the experiences of female academicians in liberal arts academic disciplines?”

The question represents an intersection of three personal interests: a long-time awareness of female experiences; an unintentional focus on careers, absorbed through twelve years of professional work in that arena; and an academically-triggered fascination with the academic disciplines. As a veteran of the 1970s feminist movement, I observed for two decades the slow, miniscule progress of women in society, but I maintained hope that women in academic settings were faring better than women in other segments of society. When my professional life evolved into a career in a university career center, I was exposed regularly to the evidence of male-dominance in various career fields and to the correlated salary ranges. My recognition that careers dominated by women were more likely to pay lower salaries fueled my awareness of and interest in the experiences of women in careers.

My final personal interest developed in the late 1990s as graduate coursework in higher education economics, organization and governance, curriculum, and history channeled my academic focus toward the academic disciplines while readings and feminist-focused courses strengthened my awareness of inequities in academia. Specifically, I experienced “consciousness raising” about women’s positions and

experiences in academe. This study examined the experiences of female academicians in the context of academic disciplines with an underlying assumption that academic disciplines are the categories that define professors' career roles and determine academicians' professional activities and affiliations. While women of color live experiences that differ from those of white women (Collins, 2003), this study addressed women's academic experiences with a focus on gender rather than on race.

Previous studies of women's experiences have included such contexts as female students' experiences (Hall & Sandler, 1982; Sandler, Silverberg, & Hall, 1996); faculty career commitment (Nye, 1997); faculty job satisfaction (Firestone, 1999); graduate student and faculty socialization (Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Turner & Thompson, 1993); and general experiences in the academy (Martin, 2000).

While scholars and researchers have written prolifically about the most noticeable gender-specific fields, few scholars have responded to the disciplines that are not career-specific, that is, the traditional liberal arts disciplines. My research questions focused on female faculty members who are pursuing careers within these disciplines. As the participants traced their paths to current career positions and described the worlds in which they work, several consistent themes emerged: the women's paths toward following in love with their disciplines began in childhood; their careers are centered in teaching rather than in their disciplines; they strive to maintain balance in their lives; their lives have been and continue to be intertwined with influential relationships.

Life in academia is often not equitable for female faculty members. Reports and statistical data confirm the gender discrepancies of the past three decades. The experiences of women in higher education have most often been studied in statistical

terms. When studied qualitatively, the experiences of women have been conducted from the larger perspective of life in an institution. The purpose of this study was to enhance the literature by using qualitative methods to research the experiences of academic women within their respective academic disciplines. Within the constructivist nature of qualitative research, I allowed the direction of the research to develop throughout the process. I used the following research questions as starting points for exploring the experiences of women.

1. How do women describe their disciplines?
2. How do women describe their experiences in the disciplines?
3. What are the women's anticipations or aspirations for a continuing academic career within these disciplines?

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature regarding female faculty members during the past thirty years informs my understanding of women's positions in academe. In the early 1970s, Marjorie Farnsworth (1974) offered advice and warnings to young women interested in an academic career. Regarding being hired, she wrote: "a mediocre male candidate enjoys a significant and real advantage over a superlatively trained woman when both apply for the same job" (p. 55). Summarizing the female experience in academia, Farnsworth advised, "You can expect to succeed on the job only if you are willing to work harder and longer and against much greater odds than those faced by the most mediocre of male colleagues" (p. 83). Her analysis of why women are denied tenure is succinct: "The real reason, of course, is that she is a woman, and women do not count and are not wanted" (p. 104). Farnsworth's advice is consistent with a report on the *Status of Women in Higher Education: 1963-1972*, which stated that "women seem to be concentrated at the bottom of the academic hierarchy and appear not to be promoted as quickly or as often as their male colleagues" (Harmon, 1972, p. ix). Reports and studies throughout the past three decades have examined academic rank, faculty salaries, women's academic experiences as students and faculty members, and the significance of academic disciplines. The literature consistently suggests that the status of women in higher education has not changed significantly since the 1970s.

Studies from each decade employed academic rank as one indication of faculty status. Pollard (1977) conducted a historical survey involving 3,713 women and 15,668 men and determined that 13.41 percent of the women and 30.86 percent of the men were at the rank of professor. At the rank of instructor, the numbers were inverted with 35.25 percent of the women and 15.25 percent of the men ranked as instructors. During the 1970s, the percentage of women at rank of professor remained consistently low (Pollard).

The next decade offered minimal progress for women in academia. Simeone's (1987) follow-up to Jessie Bernard's (1964) report on academic women asked, "What has been the real progress of women in academia in the two decades since *Academic Women* was published?" (p. 3). Simeone reported that the status for women in higher education was about the same in the mid-1980s as in 1964, with lower status than men's on measures of rank and salary and with more women working in part-time, non-tenure track positions. In reviewing statistics from the late 1980s, Maitland (1990) found that women continued to receive lower salaries, obtain tenure at lower rates, and progress through academic ranks more slowly. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) found more women at the academic ranks of instructor and assistant professor than at the ranks of associate and full professor. Men earned higher salaries at all ranks. These findings are corroborated with data from the American Council on Education publication, *Fact Book on Women in Higher Education*, which reported that women represented 28 percent of full-time faculty members in 1982 (Touchton & Davis, 1991). The increasing number and percentage of female faculty members was not reflected in a comparable increase in faculty professional rank. In 1985, 52 percent of faculty members at instructor rank were women while only 12 percent of all full professors were women.

The trends of the 1970s and 1980s continued through the 1990s and into the twenty-first century with continuing reports that the number and percentage of full-time female faculty members increased, while the percentage of women obtaining tenure and rank of professor remained lower (Bradburn & Sikora, 2002; *Statement of principles on family responsibilities and academic work*, 2001). In 2003-2004, 41 percent of full-time male faculty members were ranked as full professors, in contrast to only 20 percent of women with that rank (Curtis, 2004). Tierney and Bensimon (1996) summarized the challenge reflected in these percentages: "The meritocratic discourse of promotion and tenure is effective camouflage for the gendered aspects of seemingly neutral practices" (p. 97).

A comparison of female salaries with male salaries joins academic rank as an indicator of women's status in higher education. Barbezat (2002) reviewed pay equity studies through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Both case studies and national studies during the 1970s provided evidence of significant salary differences based on gender, and case studies for the 1980s suggested salary discrimination against female faculty members. Studies involving national data indicated that limited progress was made toward pay equity for women during the 1980s or the 1990s (Barbezat). Keller-Wolff (2003) examined faculty surveys from 1993 and 1999 in which participants reported wages for 1992 and 1998. The gender wage gap narrowed only slightly between 1992 and 1998. In 1998, the base salary for men averaged almost \$62,000, compared with women's base salary average of \$48,400 (Bradburn & Sikora, 2002). An examination of data from the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty controlled for experience, field, rank, and institution type and found that women still earned significantly less than men

(Toutkoushian & Conley, 2005). In 2003-2004, women earned only 80 percent of male salaries (Curtis, 2004). Salaries continue to reflect the problem of inequitable status for women in academic careers.

The literature on the experiences of women in higher education combines with quantitative data on rank and salary to provide an enhanced understanding of the status of women. The literature on women in higher education has produced a number of terms that have become vernacular to describe female academic experiences. A 1982 report from the Women of the Association of American Colleges (Hall & Sandler, 1982) generated the descriptor “chilly climate” to depict the experience of female students in higher education. Teachers tend to give more eye contact, more attentive posture, and more encouragement to male students than to female students (Martin, 2000). Sandler, Silverberg, and Hall expanded the use of the term to include faculty members and administrators who are contained at lower faculty ranks and who do not obtain the higher administrative positions. Miller and Miller (2002) defined the chilly climate as the “collection of behaviors and institutional actions that create an environment where women are treated differently in ways that adversely affect their personal and professional development” (p. 105). For example, women tend to be guided toward academic disciplines and fields of study that are traditionally feminine. Women are more likely to obtain positions in community colleges and smaller institutions than at large research universities. Within the verbiage of meritocracy, fewer numbers and percentages of women obtain tenure. Martin (2000) described a higher education environment that is capable of leading women to feel like “alien beings who do not belong in the academy” (p.10). Women have succumbed to pressure to be accommodating and agreed to teach



freshmen-level courses that were less valued in promotion and tenure. If they did not agree, they were labeled as inflexible and uncooperative, not likely to survive and succeed. By agreeing, they diminished their bids for tenure and promotion (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). The consistent theme in the literature is one of a continuing educational environment that contributes to women's experiences of being relegated to the periphery of the male-dominated academy.

Literature focused on how women think and learn suggests further challenges of being female in a traditionally male-dominated institution. While the studies run the risk of presenting "female experience" as an essentialist concept, I view them as describing what Martin (2000) calls "family resemblances" (p. 15) with similarities that appear and disappear in context and over time. Gilligan (1982) found that women's moral development is based on notions of relationship and caring in contrast to male moral development with its focus on rights and fairness. Thus, women speak with a different voice. In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) presented evidence that women's cognitive development is also different from men's and is linked to their personal experiences and feelings. Bunch (1987) coined the phrase "add women and stir" (p. 140) to portray the addition of women to the margins of the curriculum without altering its essentially male-focused knowledge base. McCoy and DiGeorgio-Lutz (1999) concluded that women, although comprising the majority number in higher education, find themselves treated as a minority, especially in the context of defining institutions' values, goals, and mission statements. Their conclusions are corroborated by qualitative investigations of women's experiences that lay the foundation for the current research.

The experiences of women in higher education often occur at the discipline-specific level. Within academic disciplines both female and male scholars teach, conduct research, and publish. Disciplines employ socializing practices that train graduate students and produce scholars and experts (Messer-Davidow, Shumway, & Sylvan, 1993). Working within disciplines, scholars employ a common vocabulary and adopt a designated code of conduct (Frost & Jean, 2003). Faculty fashion careers founded on or within discipline-specific discourses, asking designated categories of questions, accepting and rejecting specific kinds of research evidence, and employing standards of communicating professionally (Craft & Schmersahl, 1997). Disciplines are dominant forces in the working lives of academicians (Clark, 1987).

But not all disciplines are created equal. Each discipline reflects its own beliefs, norms, values, work patterns, and interpersonal interactions (Anderson, Louis, & Earle, 1994). The disciplinary education that faculty members have received affect both what and how they later teach (Lattuca & Stark, 1994). Stark and Lattuca (1993) identify differences in how the disciplines structure knowledge. Such factors as basic assumptions, symbolism, research priorities, and emphasis on research application contribute to disciplinary differences. Knowledge in disciplines such as the natural sciences tends to develop in a linear fashion while the social sciences and humanities, representing “soft” knowledge, develop in less predictable, more recursive ways (Lattuca & Stark, 1994). Disciplines in the pure science tradition embrace knowledge as universal, quantifiable, and cumulative while social science and humanities disciplines advocate the pluralistic nature of and interpretive approach to knowledge (Frost & Jean, 2003). Faculty

in people-focused fields such as psychology and sociology tend to emphasize student growth and development, educational goals, and active learning (Austin, 1996)

Differences are also reflected in the economic arena. An economic view of higher education interjects yet another intersection of women and disciplines. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) found that when disciplines compete for research and teaching funds as well as for status and prestige, the disciplines that are already resource-rich tend to obtain more. During the 1980s, academic fields that experienced budget cuts tended to be those in which higher numbers of women served as faculty members and higher proportions of students were female, including humanities, social sciences, and education (Slaughter, 1993). The disciplines that lose money, such as education, (Gumport, 1993) and are ranked lower, including English and psychology (Altbach, 1997), are those that have the most female students and faculty members. Mohanty, Dodder, and Karman (1986) conducted statistical analysis of salaries from 1977 to 1984 and found the highest salaries in the male-dominated fields of business, computer and information sciences, and engineering. In a statistical analysis of assistant professor salaries in 1988-89, Bellas (1997) reported that faculty members in disciplines with higher proportions of women had lower salary ranges. Economic indicators emphasize the gendered circumstances of academic disciplines and fields of study.

Martin (2000) framed the gendered condition of academic disciplines in terms of private and public arenas and productive and reproductive spheres. The traditional domains for men have been the public spheres of business or law or medicine. The female domains have been the reproductive and private areas in which care for children, the elderly, and the sick are provided. Women continue to be represented by low numbers

in science, mathematics, and engineering and high numbers in education, health sciences, and social work. Women's choices of disciplines during the 1970s, such as nursing and teaching, matched perceived role expectations (Kreps, 1974). Ransom (1990) examined higher education survey data from 1969, 1977, and 1984 and found that while the number of women in traditionally male fields, such as engineering and mathematics, increased, men did not enter traditional female-dominated fields, such as education and health sciences. Women continue to be represented by low numbers in science, mathematics, and engineering and high numbers in education, health sciences, and social work. For example, in 2003 only 8.6 percent of full-time engineering faculty members were women. Women represented approximately 28 percent of the full-time faculty in mathematics. In contrast to these low percentages of representation, 65.7 percent of the faculty members in teacher education were women and 95.8 percent of full-time nursing faculty members were female (*Digest of education statistics tables and figures*, 2005). The higher education literature has produced a plethora of information about women and the fields of business and engineering and confirms their secondary-class statuses (Buckner, 1997; Byrne, 1993; Carolfi, Pillsbury, & Hasselback, 1996; Ginther, 2001; Keller, 1985; Simon, 2000).

The literature offers fewer examples of studies related to the experiences of women in the liberal arts academic disciplines, those with historical connections to the earliest specializations in United States universities, including chemistry, mathematics, biology, and history (Hawkins, 1960) and reflected in the "liberal culture" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Veysey, 1965, p. 180). An exception is the Clark and Corcoran (1986) study of faculty at a comprehensive research university. As

part of an institutional case study of faculty careers, Clark and Corcoran conducted lengthy interviews with faculty members in biological sciences, physical sciences, social science, and humanities at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Of the 147 faculty members who were interviewed in the 1980 through 1982 academic years, twelve of the participants were women. All of them were tenured faculty members at the rank of associate or full professor. Their median age was in the forties. Although the researchers conducted the interviews in the context of a broad institutional focus, they extracted illustrations of career experiences, especially related to professional socialization. The female faculty participants discussed experiences related to their graduate school choices and decisions about integrating career and family. Women encountered male colleagues who did not take them seriously during graduate school and advisors who directed them to job openings at less prestigious institutions. As they began academic careers, some of the women experienced limited access to the communication networks of their departments or institutions. Based on the interviews, the authors identified a “triple penalty” (p. 33) reported by female faculty members: cultural barriers to establishing academic careers; advisors and faculty members skeptical of their abilities to succeed professionally; and barriers to positions and to full participation in academic careers.

Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) provide a second example of research focused on women’s experiences. They conducted interviews with both tenured and non-tenured female faculty members to investigate their experiences in academia. The women represented multiple types of undergraduate and graduate institutions, including public, private, secular, and religious. While most of the institutions are located in the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States, some participants were from other

geographical regions, including the south, west, and mid-west. Each participant was interviewed for approximately two and a half hours in an informal setting with no predetermined questions. The researchers expected to uncover differences between the tenured and the non-tenured samples, but found instead commonalities in the groups' experiences. Although Aisenberg and Harrington employed a research focus that was broader than the academic disciplines, the authors identified some issues related to women and disciplines. Many of the women in the study reported being led to their academic disciplines through their searches for meaningful work. In the process of gaining competence in the discipline-specific methods and materials, the women internalized the ideologies and values of the discipline. Female faculty members often chose fields that touched issues relevant to women's experiences and that offered possibilities of change for society. Aisenberg & Harrington reported the participants' tendencies to view the substance of their chosen fields as almost sacred in spite of experiencing marginality in their academic careers.

Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) framed the experiences of marginality in the contexts of the "marriage plot" (p. 7) and the "quest plot" (p. 14). The marriage plot represents the traditional role of women functioning in the private sphere of caring for others, especially in the home. The underlying assumption of the marriage plot is that all women should want and have a life founded on traditional norms and roles. In contrast, the quest plot represents the public sphere and has traditionally been associated with societal expectations for men. The women interviewed in the study often described challenges of determining to break the mold of the marriage plot and then beginning the quest for an academic career within an academic discipline. Many encountered obstacles

such as lack of mentors, lower salaries than men, and direct and indirect suggestions from academic leaders that they should subordinate career to home and family. For the women who persisted in their personal quest plot, their adventure was positioned in the context of pursuing careers fundamentally connected with subject matter that they loved.

Tierney and Bensimon (1996) also conducted faculty interviews within an institutional-level examination of experiences in academia. They employed a semi-structured interview with 202 assistant professors at twelve colleges and universities representing the following Carnegie classifications: Research I, Doctoral II, Masters I, Baccalaureate I, and Baccalaureate II. The institutions included both public and private as well as small, large, and medium-sized student enrollments. Of the assistant professors interviewed, a total of 122 faculty members were from the liberal arts and sciences, and 99 interviewees were women. Throughout the interviews with women, however, the participants often noted gendered-focused experiences that occurred at both the institutional and departmental levels.

For example, women reported that the culture of both the academy and the disciplines hindered senior faculty members and administrators from recognizing practices and structures that promoted sexism in the two settings. These practices included “smile work” (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996, p. 83) and “mom work” (p. 85). Some participants had engaged in smile work to accommodate expectations of male faculty members. They reported agreeing to various assignments with a good-natured, congenial attitude in order to be accepted by their male colleagues. Other women encountered expectations that they should perform the nurturing, mom work functions that tend to maintain student satisfaction with the institution. After the women invested

time in assignments not related to promotion and tenure and in student relationships not valued in the process, they were denied promotion and tenure. Tierney and Bensimon concluded that although institutions had progressed in hiring more diverse faculties (women and minorities), the cultures of departments and institutions remain “male-identified” (p.101) and create disadvantages for women. The Tierney and Bensimon female participants did not necessarily accuse higher education leadership of overt discrimination, but instead described an academic culture that often prevented administrators and senior faculty members from recognizing how institutionalized structures, such as the promotion and tenure policies, might reinforce sexism. The Tierney and Bensimon qualitative study, along with the Clark and Corcoran (1986) and the Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) studies, informed my research because they examined the experiences of female faculty members and generated insights about the intersections of women’s experiences and academic disciplines.

My research enhances the existing literature in several ways. First, I investigated the experiences of women in academia beyond the problems implied in quantitative data. The data expose a systemic problem of discrimination against women but do not highlight individual women’s experiences in that system. Research conducted at the individual level is critical to understanding and explaining issues at the larger, institutional level (Winsten-Bartlett, 2000). Second, I initially researched the experiences of women in the specific context of traditional academic disciplines, a context that is largely missing from the literature. The existing literature reports research that was conducted at the institutional level or was focused on the academic areas aligned with career fields, but it offers little to inform our understanding of women’s experiences in



the disciplines that are rooted in the liberal arts tradition. Finally, by conducting a series of in-depth interviews with each participant, I expand the data about the experiences of academic women. While the studies cited above (Clark and Corcoran; Aisenberg and Harrington; Tierney and Bensimon) employed interviews as a technique for gathering data, they employed one interview with each participant whereas I employed a series of in-depth interviews with each participant.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

This study of the experiences of female faculty members was a qualitative, feminist research study, using interviews as the primary technique for collecting data. Before describing the research process, I will discuss qualitative research, feminist research, and in-depth interviewing.

#### Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a comprehensive term for non-numeric research strategies that examine phenomena with attention to individuals' perceptions and the meanings they find and construct in their lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p. 2). Researchers conduct investigations in natural settings and attempt to understand their investigations in terms of the meanings that people construct and find in these settings (Denzin & Lincoln). While qualitative research is not restricted to any single method, research strategy, or disciplinary theory, it is applied to "forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena" (Merriam, 1998, p. 5).

Qualitative research shares common characteristics related to research design, research implementation, and the reporting of research findings. Qualitative researchers design studies without the tools and techniques that typify quantitative research. Whereas quantitative research assumes that a reality exists in the world and that the reality can be

studied and understood, qualitative research is founded on the assumption that reality is constructed and not fully knowable (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Rather than framing research to quantify and measure variables or to test hypotheses and theories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), qualitative researchers employ inductive research strategies that develop or shape a theory (Merriam, 1998). The qualitative research design is characterized by a clear focus, a set of anticipated, but intentionally flexible strategies, and a context in which the researcher connects with participants or relevant material (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). “The qualitative researcher plans to use part of the study to learn what the important questions are” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 5). While guided by the initial research design, the strategies and direction of the study emerge in response to changing conditions, with design decisions being made throughout the study as the concerns and issues unfold (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

Emerging research is possible because the qualitative researcher is not only the research implementer, but also the primary research catalyst. The researcher is actively situated in the research, responding to the context, and adjusting and adapting techniques as needed (Merriam, 1998). The qualitative researcher approaches research with two considerations that significantly influence the emerging nature of the research. First, the researcher is concerned with the process and expects to discover significant concerns and questions as the research progresses and evolves in context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Second, the researcher focuses on the participants’ perspectives, encouraging them to freely express thoughts and feelings and listening for each individual’s unique point of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 1998). As the instrument of data collection, the researcher approaches the study with an assumption that

“everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 6). Without the restraints of a script or protocol, the researcher is freed to accept the fluidity of the research context.

The characteristics of qualitative research data analysis and reporting are consistent with the characteristics of design and implementation. The qualitative researcher collects data and reports findings not with numbers and statistics, but with words that describe themes, concepts, and categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998). The researcher’s concern in data analysis parallels her concern in data collection with the meaning that individuals discover and construct in their worlds (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998). While striving to understand the participants’ perspectives, the qualitative researcher also constructs meaning through the process of analyzing and interpreting the findings (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research provides opportunities for the researcher to analyze and report the constructed meaning in creative ways (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because it opened the possibility of constructing meaning from the experiences of women in the setting of academic disciplines. While the research was specifically focused on women and their experiences in the context of their disciplines, using qualitative research allowed flexibility for me to collect data that were not expected or prescribed. The emerging nature of qualitative research offered the possibility of identifying experiences and themes that have not been addressed in the existing literature. Qualitative research also presented an opportunity for me to invest myself and my identity in the interviews

(Oakley, 2003), as well as apply my interpersonal skills in the research processes of seeking and hearing the stories that the women told.

### Feminist Research

The collaborative relationship between the researcher and participant described above is descriptive of feminist research as well as qualitative research. As with qualitative research, feminist research is a broad term that is more easily described than defined. While feminist research resists delineating lists of techniques or sets of protocol, it is associated with goals and characteristics (DeVault, 1999). Lather (1991) defines the ideological goal of feminist research as being to “correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience” (p. 71). DeVault (1999) suggests that an aim of much feminist research is that of including women, especially when and where they have been ignored, misrepresented, or silenced. In the case of both of these goals, the position of women is central to the research. This research focused on women and provided opportunities for their expressing both the inclusive and excluding experiences in their professional lives.

My research focus on women’s experiences incorporated several key characteristics of feminist research. For example, in feminist research, gender is a central concern as a basic organizing tenet that has impacts upon lives (Lather, 1991; Olesen, 1994). With this study’s emphasis on the participants’ distinctive experiences as women, gender was central to the questions I asked (McCarl Nielsen, 1990). Another feminist research characteristic is the examination of issues, concerns, experiences, and factors that have been omitted from research and reporting (McCarl Nielsen, 1990; Stewart, 1994). In selecting the phenomenon of individual female experiences in traditional

academic disciplines, I have addressed an arena that has been under-noticed, yet is central to women's experiences in academia. Feminist research is characterized by methods in which participants participate fully in a collaborative relationship between researcher and participant (Punch, 1994). While seeking meaning from the participants' experiences, I avoided claiming a unified voice from the participants when one did not exist (Stewart, 1994). The research was characterized by female-focused, collaborative discussion of the experiences of women.

### In-Depth, Qualitative Interviews

In-depth interviewing is a method closely aligned with qualitative research as an entrée to another's viewpoint (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). A feminist interview is an active, open, fluctuating conversation in which the interviewer and the participant are often emotionally engaged while conversing about "mutually relevant" issues (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 239). The issue of women in academia is relevant to me as a research topic and relevant to the women as part of their life stories. By using an adaptable interview guide rather than a structured interview script or questionnaire, I created an environment in which each participant answered from her own perspective and presented her personal account of experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Oakley, 2003). Each interview helped to direct the study as the participants presented new ideas (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Repeatedly, the conversation with one participant influenced follow-up questions for my next interview with her as well as questions to ask the other participants.

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to understand "the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 1998, p. 3). This

purpose is consistent with goals of feminist research to actively engage individual women in conversation about their worlds. Merriam (1998) clarifies that while the research interview is a conversation, its inherent purpose is to obtain a special kind of information. Using a list of guiding, open-ended questions, the interviewer does not adhere to exact wording or a precise order for asking the questions because the goal is understanding another's experience without any inclination of controlling the interview (Seidman, 1998). This format allows the research conversations to unfold naturally with digressions in the conversation and opportunities to explore experiences and issues as they emerge (Merriam, 1998).

Following Seidman's (1998) guidelines for in-depth interviewing, I conducted three individual in-depth interviews with each of three women representing different academic disciplines and had a brief fourth interview with one participant. Seidman calls for the first interview to be a "Focused Life History" (p. 11) that guides participants to describe their paths to current positions and situations. The second interview, "The Details of Experience" (p. 12), is present-focused and may include details of a typical day in the participants' lives. The third interview, according to Seidman, moves beyond experiences to "Reflections on the Meaning" (p. 12). I approached each interview with open-ended questions that enabled the participant and me to explore responses, examine experiences, and extricate meaning from those experiences in the academic disciplines (Seidman, 1998).

#### How the Research Happened: The Interviews

As I began this research, I had few expectations about what women would report about their experiences. On the other hand, I entered the interview relationship with a

positive expectation that the participants would be open to sharing their stories with me. My background in counseling informed my expectation. While earning a master's degree in counseling, I developed and enhanced my listening and observational skills. I also developed the habit of noting recurring themes in conversations. My career in higher education has provided me continuous opportunities to build rapport with students and employ the counseling-related skills that encourage open communication. The same skills were factors in realizing open sharing in the interviews with all of the participants.

At the time of the interviews, the participants were faculty members in a small public college located on the periphery of a large metropolitan area. As a relatively young institution that began as a junior college, Thaxton State College (pseudonym) has been adding baccalaureate degree programs for several years. Most of the new programs have been added to the School of Arts and Sciences in which the women taught. The participants represented three disciplines within the school: natural sciences, English, and psychology.

Sarah Carson is a biologist who chose employment at Thaxton State because of the opportunity to focus her career on teaching. While communicating in a quiet, reserved style, she voices strength of her convictions about science and about teaching. She anticipates a long, teaching-focused career in academia. Diedre Knight is a dramatic, multi-faceted woman who left her tenure-track position teaching English at Thaxton State College (TSC) soon after the interviews were completed. She approaches her career and life with practicality, enthusiasm, and creativity. Her dramatic tendencies permeated the interviews. In her new non-tenure track position, Deidre hopes to experience a better career match than she encountered at TSC. Maggie Elliott initially prepared for a career



as a practicing psychologist, but found greater professional fulfillment and enjoyment in teaching. A part-time teaching position at TSC eventually led to her full-time position. Maggie communicates directly and honestly, peppering her conversation with comfortable easy laughter. As our interviews concluded, she was dealing with several career-related questions triggered by the approaching birth of her first child. I will discuss more details about the women in Chapter 4, *Three Women's Stories*.

During the first interview, a "Focused Life History" (Seidman, 1998, p. 11), I asked questions designed to guide the participant in describing her personal path to her current positioning. I focused the questions on the woman's academic and career decisions and influences that led to her particular discipline. During the first interview with each participant, we explored information about the participant's undergraduate and graduate educational experiences, as well as the more personal factors, such as family, that influenced her career path. After explaining the research design, I opened each initial interview with the suggestion that the woman go back as far as necessary to tell the story of her journey into her discipline. Additional questions focused on what specifically attracted her to the discipline. The first interviews provided the context for understanding and exploring the participants' experiences as academicians within a discipline (Seidman, 1998). The first interviews were also occasions for me to create an atmosphere of openness and acceptance for the conversations. As the researcher conducting the interviews, I intentionally listened with self-discipline and personal interest (DeVault, 1999) and inserted my own comments and questions as part of the natural flow of the conversations.

Listening intentionally involved basic counseling techniques such as observing non-verbal behavior and clarifying what I heard. Self-discipline was necessary because I sometimes wanted to interject my personal responses that would have redirected the conversation to my personal experiences rather than to theirs. My genuine interest in the women's lives and stories and experiences helped me to be involved in the conversation and avoid repositioning the focus.

The second interview with each woman focused on her current situation and experiences, including the details of how she arrived at her current position after graduate school. Seidman (1998) labels this "The Details of Experience" (p. 12). As the present-focused conversation unfolded, the women told details about their interactions with students, other faculty members, colleagues at other institutions, and administrators. Following Seidman's suggestion, I asked each woman to reconstruct a typical day in her life as an academician as a tool for exploring her current experiences. The second interviews provided information about the women's transitions into professional academic lives and how they now experience those lives.

During the second interview, we also explored further descriptions of the women's disciplinary positioning. Each woman provided details about her discipline, its language, and its questions. In all three cases, describing a discipline included contrasting it with other similar disciplines. For instance, the scientist compared microbiology with chemistry; the English professor noted differences between rhetoric, composition, and literature within the field; and the psychologist differentiated between counseling psychology and behavioral and developmental psychologists. The interviews investigated how their disciplinary passions are attached to their specific specialties within the larger

disciplines. The participants also discussed their lives within their disciplinary departments and explored organizational characteristics and other factors that contribute to their experiences in academia.

The third interview moved beyond experiences to “Reflections on the Meaning” (Seidman, 1998, p. 12). The participants reflected on the meanings of the experiences described in the previous two interviews, as well as their expectations for the future. Most of the questions in the third interview were premised on the details of the previous two interviews and in each case, were informed by information from the other two participants. For example, because two of the participants had described the professional influence of her department head, I asked the third participant about the same concern. Having transcribed the first two interviews before conducting the third interview, I was able to ask follow-up questions to clarify earlier information. With one participant, the clarification question was related to her career path. With another participant, I explored her observations about her academic department. Having heard some references to the roles that mentors had played in the women’s lives, I asked directed questions in the third interview. The third interviews concluded with questions about the women’s expectations for their careers in academia.

Consistent with one of the characteristics of effective feminist interviews, I participated fully in the interview process and the interview relationship as I investigated the experiences of these women (Oakley, 2003). I listened with focus and mental energy and verbalized my responses while attempting not to interfere with the flow of the interviews. Each interview reflected the participant’s personality, my personality, and a relationship that we developed through the interview process and in our social context

(Seidman, 1998). For instance, the participant whose personality is typically shy and reserved waited for my lead in the interview while the more extroverted, free-spirited woman often interrupted the flow of questions to ask about my opinion or my experiences. My comfortable openness with the women set a tone for their sharing with minimal restraint (Stewart, 1994). Thus they talked openly about their childhoods, about challenges in graduate school, and about their experiences at Thaxton State College. The overall tone of the interviews reflected the gender connection that I developed with each woman as I interviewed in a non-hierarchical context of respect, responsiveness, sensitivity, and non-judgmental openness (Merriam, 1998; Oakley, 2003; Seidman, 1998).

Being actively situated in the interview process allowed me to be flexible in conducting the interviews. I discovered concerns and questions as the research progressed. The open-ended nature of the research allowed each participant to answer from her own frame of reference rather than from prearranged structure and to freely express her thoughts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). With a focus on the participants' perspectives and encouraging their free expression, unexpected themes and categories emerged. I adjusted my questions and adapted my expectations throughout the interview process.

### Sample

The women I interviewed for this research were selected based on their affiliation with an academic discipline in the liberal arts tradition. The sample was purposeful in the sense that I included women from whom I could learn about their academic experiences and the meaning they construct (Merriam, 1998). The participants were representative to

the extent that they were likely to have the common experience of being a woman in an academic discipline (Morse, 1994). The three participants are faculty members in three disciplines in the liberal arts tradition: natural sciences (biology), the social sciences (psychology), and the humanities (English). This number is consistent with expectations of qualitative and feminist research and allowed adequate time to conduct multiple, in-depth interviews with each woman while pursuing an understanding of the meaning she finds and constructs in her professional life.

The participants in this research were all faculty members at the same higher education institution at the time of the interviews. In one sense, this qualifies as convenience sampling because interviewing the women was more convenient than interviewing at multiple locations (Merriam, 1998). Beyond the practicality of interviewing at one college, I had expected interviewing women from one institution to keep the focus on their experiences in the disciplines. This was not the case as each woman presented the institutional context as a crucial aspect of her experiences in the discipline.

After determining the institution where I would like to conduct the research, I met with a senior faculty member who also serves as a coordinator for an academic program. I explained my research plans and asked her opinion regarding any institution-specific professional risks to potential participants. While my goal was to ensure privacy and confidentiality for all participants, I wanted her informed opinion regarding the chances of repercussions if the privacy were breached. The senior faculty member was confident that participants were not likely to encounter any negative consequences of being identified as a research participant.

Next, I examined the faculty roster to narrow potential participants based on gender and academic discipline in arts and sciences. From that potential pool, I considered women's years of experience in academia. Because most of the senior female faculty members held administrative positions, I decided to focus on junior faculty members who had no more than six years of fulltime teaching experience. By processing these pieces of information, I compiled a list of five potential participants and scheduled an individual meeting with each of them. While all five were willing to participate in the research, one was not appropriate because her actual academic discipline is Women's Studies. The fifth potential participant was going to be unavailable during the time I hoped to conduct interviews. Thus, I received enthusiastic verbal agreement from the three women who became my participants. The participants, identified with pseudonyms, will be described more fully in the Three Women's Stories chapter.

### Context

The participants in this study were employed at Thaxton State College (pseudonym), a four-year public institution located on the outskirts of a metropolitan city in the Southeastern part of the United States. Interviewing women at this institution expands research to non-research universities at which faculty studies are rarely conducted. Thaxton State College (TSC) is a relatively young institution that began as a junior college. After its status was changed from a junior college to a baccalaureate degree-granting institution, the college continued to focus its identity on serving as a teaching institution with an emphasis on career-focused fields of study. TSC continued to market itself locally, to expect and attract students who transferred in, and to emphasize teaching as a faculty member's primary responsibility. Ten years after beginning

baccalaureate programs, TSC offered baccalaureate degrees in business administration, nursing, teacher education, applied science, and music. The lone liberal arts degree in music represented the implementation of a stipulation from a large private donor.

Thaxton State College, according to its *Academic Catalog*, maintained its small size and community-focused mission “to provide educational and cultural programs to meet diverse needs and aspirations of the citizens it serves.”<sup>1</sup>

The institution gradually added degrees in more traditional academic fields throughout the late 1990s, including biology, psychology and human services, and integrative studies through the School of Arts and Sciences. The Arts and Sciences programs of study provided opportunities for faculty who had previously taught only lower division core curriculum courses to teach an upper division curriculum for juniors and seniors. Under new academic leadership, the number of majors and faculty members increased rapidly to include degree offerings in communication and media studies, criminal justice, English, history, mathematics, and political science. The participants in this study were all faculty members in the school of Arts and Sciences at the time the interviews were conducted.

Changes at TSC in recent years have led to a culture of mixed responses. As a number of programs with historical ties to the junior college and its career degrees have been eliminated and the faculty members teaching in those fields dismissed, some remaining faculty members have demonstrated resentment and apprehension. When academic deans have been encouraged to step down from their leadership positions and department heads have been reassigned to full-time faculty status, other faculty members

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<sup>1</sup> To ensure anonymity, I do not provide further references to institutional documents because the institutional characteristics are so unique.

have expressed a sense that only new administrators and new faculty members are valued. Under the provost's leadership, with support from the college president, faculty members work in a culture of changing expectations. All newly hired faculty members must have an earned terminal degree, and shortly before the study began, the academic administration informed veteran faculty members to immediately begin work on advanced degrees in order to remain employed at TSC. The Thaxton State College Faculty Handbook specifies that a terminal degree is required for promotion to ranks of assistant, associate, and full professor, and that in almost all cases the appropriate terminal degree is a doctorate. Previous promotion and tenure policies followed the minimal state system guidelines of requiring a doctoral degree only for the rank of full professor. Promotion and tenure policies also reflect a shift in the weight of evaluation categories, with scholarly activities carrying a higher weight factor. My conversation with the senior faculty member as well as indirect comments from participants suggest that changes have led to pockets of discouragement and frustration within some faculty groups.

In contrast to the negative responses from the frustrated groups, other segments of the campus community are pleased about the changes. Especially in the School of Arts and Sciences, veteran faculty members are enthusiastic about the new degree offerings and the subsequent opportunities to teach upper division students. They seem to accept the publication expectation as a manageable trade-off for the status and privilege of being part of a baccalaureate degree curriculum. They feel valued as the administration allocates positions and funds to their academic unit. Reports and rumors about the possibility of offering graduate degrees through the School of Arts and Sciences generate



additional positive reactions and expectations. The participants for this study were female faculty members who work in this setting of optimism.

The School of Arts and Sciences has changed organizationally as the new degree programs have been added to the curriculum. At one time the School was organized into departments of humanities, mathematics, music, natural sciences, social sciences, and teacher education. Recent changes include moving the mathematics department to a different school unit, creating a psychology department separate from the social sciences department, and dividing the department of humanities into two departments (Language and Literature and Communication and Media Studies). The reorganization emphasizes disciplinary separations and in some ways limits faculty contact. For instance, whereas the psychology faculty previously met regularly with all social sciences faculty, they now meet and function as a separate entity with less direct contact with those who teach criminal justice, history, and political science. The women whom I interviewed work in a context of growth, expectation, and fluctuation.

#### Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in qualitative research occurs simultaneously with data collection (Merriam, 1998). While collecting data during the in-depth interviews, I was positioned as a woman and as an administrator. My gender and my position offered both connection and separation in the interview relationship. My experiences as a woman in academia share commonalities with all women in academia, including the women whom I interviewed. We experience higher education as a minority in spite of the numbers (McCoy & DiGeorgio-Lutz, 1999). We typically report to supervisors who are male. We encounter the unintentional sexism of a male-centered system. Our ways of seeing and

understanding the world have family resemblances. Yet, I am a woman whose life history includes living through the years of feminist awakening in the 1960s and 1970s and developing life views influenced by those experiences. The women who participated in this study are younger than I am. They arrived in academia after women's studies, Title IX, and affirmative action were already in place throughout higher education. Our experiences are separated by the social contexts in which we entered higher education and entered adulthood. Nevertheless, my status as a woman in academia provided a connection with the participants that allowed unencumbered discussion.

My position as an administrator held potential for separation from faculty participants based on the tendency toward rifts or distrust between faculty and administration. The norms associated with professionalism in contrast to those of administration tend to fuel separation (Etzioni, 1991). For example, faculty members function as the professionals in their academic work. Administrative decisions can impact how faculty members are required to invest their time and expertise, thus curtailing faculty autonomy. Administrator decisions regarding critical aspects of the institution, such as budgetary allocations, may lead to rifts and resentment within faculty ranks. The potential separation proved to be inconsequential in the interviews for two major reasons. First, my position of director is a lower-level administrative position. A higher-level position such as vice-president or assistant vice-president might present a hierarchical relationship, but director does not. Second, I am an administrator in a student services unit rather than an academic unit. This separation is an advantage for eliminating any hierarchical positioning. With professional responsibilities that include regular interaction with faculty members as colleagues, my administrative role actually offered an

unexpected connection with faculty members. As I interviewed the participants, I experienced rapport and personal empathy that validated my expectation that the faculty-administration separation would be minimal in this research context.

The researcher as an instrument of data collection makes data analysis possible throughout the data collection process. With informed consent of the participants and commitment to their rights to privacy, I audio-taped the interviews and incorporated them into a system for collecting, storing, and retrieving data (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Humberman & Miles, 1994). A complete transcript of one interview is included as an example in Appendix A. During the interviews, I focused on listening and being sure that I understood what the participant was saying. Using a technique I learned from studying counseling, I observed and noted participant behaviors that might inform the words I later heard on the tapes. I also wrote one-word notes about my own responses and insights. These brief notations proved useful in identifying follow-up questions. Knowing that I had the notes as well as the taped interviews enabled me to focus on and participate actively in the interview without the distraction of wondering if I would remember what I had observed or thought. During the interviews, I listened to identify the important questions and to assess what was verbalized incompletely (DeVault, 1999; Scott, 1994; Seidman, 1998). I made initial observations about the patterns of behavior for individual participants and emerging themes consistent with all the participants. This process of qualitative data analysis generated questions to ask a participant during her interviews and questions to ask the other participants in future interviews. For example, when one participant spoke emphatically about students' unrealistic expectations, I asked the other participants about the issue. They, too, had strong negative reactions to their experiences

with student expectations. Each participant's responses generated data for analysis on its own and prompted data that was obtained in subsequent interviews (Seidman, 1998).

Thus, the first phase of data analysis occurred during each interview. My next phase of data analysis was incorporated into the process of transcribing the taped interviews. All interviews were successfully recorded, and the audiotapes provided complete documentation of the conversations. I intentionally chose to transcribe the tapes myself in order to hear again the voice inflections, emphases, pauses, and other nuances that influence the interpretation of what participants said. As I listened and typed the words into the computer, I pictured the woman whose voice I was hearing and identified more emerging themes (DeVault, 1999; Seidman, 1998). After I completed each transcription, I offered the participant an opportunity to review the document for any information that she wanted removed. This process is consistent with the collaborative characteristics of feminist research (Creswell, 1998). Two of the participants deleted references they had made about other individuals. These omissions did not alter the meanings of their experiences or the themes of the interviews. All other proper names in the transcripts and quotations are pseudonyms. Throughout each phase of the research, I used constant comparison as a technique for analysis.

Using the constant-comparison technique, I noticed a particular incident, phrase, or other "unit of data" that seemed relevant to the research and then compared that nugget with another in the same or a different interview (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). The process was ongoing throughout the research as I listened and jotted notes during the interviews, listened and analyzed during transcription, sought participant reviews of the transcriptions, and reflected on the data. I intentionally focused on analyzing the data

without imposing preconceived expectations from the literature or my own experiences (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). When I heard a similar category of information from two of the participants, such as her relationship with her department head, I intentionally asked the third participant about her experiences in the same category. When I noticed a pattern of descriptions from any participant, I monitored the patterns of descriptions from the other women. For example, one participant used vivid words to describe her experiences as a teaching assistant during graduate school. I then listened for similar descriptors as the other women talked. I also noted individual differences in the participants' accounts and experiences and allowed the discrepancies to inform follow-up questions and analysis of the data. By employing this constant-comparison technique, I noticed categories or themes that were emerging (Merriam, 1998).

The initial phases of analysis were largely intuitive (Merriam, 1998). During the transcription process, I observed the more tangible evidence of how many paragraphs or pages were taken with a specific category. Following Seidman's (1998) suggestion, I marked transcribed phrases or categories that caught my interest due to relevance or irrelevance to the study and those that were fascinating to me personally. As these phrases or ideas reappeared in subsequent interviews, I identified them as potential themes. After all the interviews were completed, transcribed, and approved by the participants, I printed the transcriptions. I physically cut and labeled the transcriptions according to topics discussed. By viewing the actual number of pages and paragraphs, I was able to see a physical indication of which categories might be considered in clusters. Moving beyond quantity of information, I read and analyzed the clusters of data for commonality and significance leading to the themes that emerged from the data.

In the concluding stages of analysis, my focus was on finding and making meaning of the interviews, the interactions, and each participant's experiences. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggest that the researcher "speculate without fear" throughout the analysis process (p. 169). I employed this strategy as I reached conclusions that will be discussed later. The next chapter shares the women's stories in detail, revealing how each came to be a faculty member in a liberal arts discipline.

## CHAPTER 4

### THREE WOMEN'S STORIES

Understanding the meanings these women encounter and create in their lives begins with understanding each one's distinctive story. Each woman described her inchoate interest in her discipline as beginning in childhood. At the time of the interviews, each woman was employed as a junior faculty member at Thaxton State College. Their paths from childhood to the interview context are as unique as their personalities.

Sarah the scientist is an incredibly reserved, introverted woman who spoke softly and sometimes hesitantly, waiting on my lead as the interviewer. English teacher Diedre is as extroverted as Sarah is introverted. Diedre was outspoken, dramatic, quick to answer any question, inclined to wander in her conversation and to ask me questions. Maggie's interviews were indicative of her career in psychology. Her answers were direct, suggesting her years of experience in asking and answering questions about herself. In contrast to Diedre's sometimes boisterous laughter, Maggie was prone to laugh gently at comments she made about herself. All three of the women seemed comfortable talking with me in the interview setting, and explored their lives and their experiences with honesty and enthusiasm for the research project.

#### Sarah

Sarah, the youngest child in a family of four children, grew up in the suburban area of a large southern city. Her family was devout Catholic, and she attended private

Catholic schools through elementary and high school. Sarah was greatly influenced by her two older sisters who took pride in her intelligence and her academic accomplishments. After high school, Sarah first attended a small Catholic college out of state, but after her sophomore year transferred to a large metropolitan university located in the city where she had grown up. After completing her undergraduate degree in biology, Sarah took only a short break before beginning graduate studies. She completed her doctorate in microbiology at the oldest state university in her home state and from there accepted a faculty position at TSC.

Sarah's scientific path began when she was a young child. Her older sisters took pride in having their precocious youngest sibling learn what they were studying. While one sister studied anatomy and physiology, Sarah learned muscles and bones. When another sister enrolled in science courses at the nearby community college, she sometimes took Sarah to class with her. The child enjoyed listening to the teachers and absorbing what she could understand. Sarah described how this sister taught her algebra concepts, saying, "I was really into math. I really liked math puzzles and lots of, any type of puzzle where you had to figure logic and stuff out. And she sort of – both of my sisters reinforced that in me." (1)<sup>2</sup> As significant role models in her life, Sarah's sisters initiated and encouraged her early interests in science.

By the time she was about eleven years old, Sarah owned her own microscope, her requested birthday present. "I liked just experimenting, and I had all sorts of little projects that I did at home." (1) Sarah did well in all of her high school classes, including physics, chemistry, and biology. That success "clinched it for me. I knew that I had to do

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<sup>2</sup> I note which interview is the source for each quotation by indicating its number after the quotation.



something in science.” Having enjoyed science as a child and having performed well in high school science classes, Sarah entered college as a pre-medical student.

As Sarah’s sisters influenced the early years of her life, they inaugurated a common theme throughout Sarah’s life. Significant individuals consistently influenced her academic and career decisions. The sister who was studying to be a nurse told Sarah, “You have the brain to be a doctor. Doctors don’t have people telling them what to do. Nurses do. You just don’t want to do that.” (1) Sarah’s little girl idea of becoming a nurse was immediately altered to becoming a doctor. “Of course, I changed my mind.” (1) Although Sarah was an outstanding student with excellent grades in all sciences courses, she did not take Advanced Placement classes in high school because her brother-in-law, a physician, recommended that she take the easier classes and get good grades. She again followed a family member’s advice and did graduate from high school with a strong academic record.

Sarah’s academic journey after high school led her to a small, private college. “I was afraid to go to a big school,” she admits. (1) The shy college student enjoyed the small classes, the thorough study of subjects, and the relationships with some professors. Sarah described one professor who particularly influenced her life with a challenge to consider science instead of pre-medical studies:

I had a fantastic teacher, Dr. Butler<sup>3</sup> – who – she said to me on one occasion, “Everyone wants to be a doctor when they come in. And then I like to change at least one fourth of those students into real biologists, to real scientists. So, at least entertain this for me.” (1)

Sarah did more than just entertain the idea. She changed her mind about becoming a doctor. Sarah said, “She just totally changed my mind. She made me realize that, yeah,

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<sup>3</sup> All proper names are pseudonyms.

there wasn't a whole lot of science in medicine, that medicine was different. And that I was truly in love with science.”(1) Sarah's decision to follow her love for science led to her transferring from the small private school to a large university where she would have the opportunity to do research.

Life at the university was significantly different from the life Sarah had experienced her first two years of college. She enjoyed living in an apartment with friends, feeling “a little bit anonymous,” and having different experiences each semester. She reported, “I was exposed to a larger and more diverse institution. I mean, that's where I sort of started to learn about diversity....I was exposed to diversity and differing opinions from other students in courses.” (2) Sarah valued not only ethnic and racial diversity, but also diversity of opinions and viewpoints.

While Sarah benefited from this exposure to diversity, she also found some negative aspects to being at a big university indicating,

I really didn't get much out of it – as an undergraduate. Didn't care for it too much when I took the big classes because I felt like just a number. You didn't have a lot of contact with the professors. (1)

Sarah disliked the large classes with minimal contact with professors and later experienced a sense of being unprepared for graduate school. She recalled,

I felt lost when I went into my first advanced micro class because the micro class I took at City University was just, just scratched the surface. They didn't go into any depth, and they gave all Scantron tests. And I just forgot it all. (1)

Although her undergraduate experience did not adequately prepare Sarah for graduate school, the undergraduate university did provide an opportunity for some research.

The university professor who engaged Sarah in research is also the individual who triggered her interest in microbiology. She described how he did so:

He did turn me on to microbiology – essentially. He got me interested in micro. I did research with him...I did, as a lot of undergraduates do when they *are* given the opportunity to do research, I did a lot of “grunt work” where I counted spores that had germinated in various media at various relative humidities. And then basically reported my results back to the graduate student that I worked for. (2)

Sarah gained her first research experience and encountered microbiology. Sarah’s undergraduate studies concluded with her earning the good GPA she wanted and her beginning the transition to graduate school.

Sarah had applied to the graduate institution with an interest in studying parasitology, but the institution mistakenly arranged her interview day with professors in the microbiology department. Although a specific individual did not influence her mind change at this juncture, her encounter with professors shaped a redirected path. She explained her experience:

I liked the people so much – the professors and listening to their research and how enthusiastic they were – that I decided to stick in that department rather than going over to the vet school even though that’s where I had originally intended to apply. (1)

Without an external voice offering her direction, she initially thought she had to begin as a master’s degree student. Sarah applied as a master’s student and then realized, “No. I could go directly for my Ph.D. I knew that’s the goal that I wanted. I didn’t know that I wanted to teach at this point, but I knew I wanted my Ph.D.” (1) Her introduction to graduate school included not only the confusion about which type of degree to pursue, but also some very unpleasant experiences. “My first year of graduate school was horrible,” she declared. (1)

Her first unpleasant experience involved the research professor with whom Sarah was assigned to work. She had received an acceptance letter giving an August start date, but moved to the graduate university College Town a few months in advance. When the

professor heard that she was in town, he expected her to come to his laboratory and begin researching. He did not accept her explanations for doing otherwise. By the time she did arrive in the laboratory, he had departed for an extended trip, leaving no instructions for Sarah. He returned to the lab weeks later and criticized her for having done so little work. The experience almost ended Sarah's academic career. She reported, "That year, after experiencing him, I almost decided to leave graduate school because I thought, 'I'm not cut out for this.' I just thought, 'I'm just not cut out for graduate school.'" (1) Sarah had translated the professor's expectations and responses into an indication that she could not be successful in graduate school.

Sarah's self-doubt in her laboratory experience was compounded by the unfamiliar experience of feeling inadequate in the classroom. She described her feelings:

I felt very inadequate compared to some of the other kids in the department. Now some of them dropped out. Those were the ones I felt at least more adequate than them. But I felt ill-prepared for grad school... In some of the more advanced micro classes, when I was in there with these other folks that came from smaller schools or, you know, I don't know, or different schools, I felt behind. (1)

When Sarah compared herself to classmates, she saw students whom she perceived as being better prepared than she was. She felt inadequate because what she had learned and how she had learned in undergraduate school had not prepared her for graduate studies. She verbalized her feelings of self-doubt, saying,

When I got to graduate school, the approach to learning and testing and everything else was so completely different that I was completely lost. Number one on the approach. Number two, I felt like, "Well, I've forgotten everything." I don't think I learned a lot of the material deeply enough to survive in graduate school... And I just felt inadequate. And I literally had to teach, re-teach myself basic micro to do well in these graduate school classes. (2)

Sarah struggled to learn the content she needed to know and compared herself unfavorably with classmates who seemed to be performing successfully. Feeling inadequate as a student was an unfamiliar, painful territory for Sarah. Time in the research laboratory triggered similar self-doubts:

When I was doing research, sometimes I was like, “I feel inadequate. I feel like my research project is much less, you know, advanced than my partner over here. I feel like I know fewer techniques than anyone in the lab. I feel like I have to get help all the time.” Which probably wasn’t necessarily true. I think it was just a psychological thing....I *always*<sup>4</sup> felt – when I did my research I felt like it was – I was so far behind my other colleagues. I felt like half the time I was faking it. (1)

Sarah found herself in the tenuous position of being unprepared for the classroom work and being uncomfortable in the research laboratory. In the midst of her “horrible” year with feelings of inadequacy in the classroom and in the laboratory, Sarah began discovering her love for teaching.

Sarah’s initial reaction to the prospect of teaching was anything but enthusiastic. Her introvert tendencies generated tremendous doubt and apprehension about the prospect of teaching. She recalled that time, saying,

During your first year of grad school, you’re expected to teach. I was terrified. I was like, “I have to stand up in front of people and talk?” And up through – in high school I was so shy. I never – I was the type of person who – I was just really shy. I didn’t initiate conversation a whole lot. And after saying “hi” I didn’t know what to say next. I had no idea how to introduce small talk or anything. I had just a handful of friends. Usually they were the nerdy type, the smart kids. And in college, I came out a little bit more out of my shell. But I was still sort of shy, you know. And then in grad school, it got a little bit better, but just the thought of having to stand up in front of a bunch of college kids and teach ‘em stuff was *terrifying*. (1)

Sarah’s introverted personality flavored her fear of teaching and her assumptions that teaching would be a horrible. She recounted how her experience belied her expectations:

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<sup>4</sup> Italics indicate the participant’s emphasis.

I never knew I had a knack to stand up in front of – you know, and teach it. I always thought of myself as one on one type. And so, my first semester of teaching was *fabulous*. I loved it. (1)

And thus the scientist became a teacher.

When Sarah received positive student feedback that further encouraged her efforts as a teacher, she said to herself, “This is great! And they seem to like me. My evaluations are good.” She continued her story, saying, “And so I put even more into it. And actually started attending some science ed seminars to learn techniques to use. So my second semester was great.” (1) In contrast to the inadequacies she experienced in microbiology class and in the research laboratory, Sarah described feeling successful as a teacher:

When I was in the classroom, I felt normal. I felt comfortable. You know, I felt like I knew what I was talking about and knew what I was doing. And I felt the students respected me. And I felt adequate. (1)

As a teacher, Sarah again felt the positive emotions that represented her academic experiences before graduate school: comfort, respect, normalcy, and adequacy.

Having found her love and her niche, others’ voices had less sway on Sarah’s decisions. Her friends were not encouraging, telling her that teaching was a waste of time. They said,

“Oh God. You’re wasting your time. You should be doing the research so you can get the publications so you can get a good post-doc so you can become a research professor so you can work for a pharmaceutical company.” (1)

Sarah responded, “Well I like it. Maybe I want to teach at an undergraduate institution.”

Her major professor “wasn’t very encouraging about the teaching,” telling Sarah, “As a matter of fact, as soon as I have money for you to have a research assistantship, we’re going to get rid of this TA-ship because you’re spending too much time on this. This is not important.” (1) Again, Sarah voiced her burgeoning confidence, stating, “Well, it is

kind of to me because I like it.” (1) The confidence to voice her preference to others was accompanied by a growing personal insight as she “started to realize, after my second year of teaching—I’m like ‘That’s what I want to do. I want to teach at a small undergraduate institution.’” (1) Sarah’s positive experiences in teaching further directed her career path toward teaching.

Sarah received external affirmations in addition to her internal confirmations about teaching. She noted, “I actually won awards for teaching, so it proved that I had a knack for it....One was a departmental TA award and then one was a University-wide TA award.” (1) As a result of winning the University award, Sarah was required to conduct a TA class to mentor the new teaching assistants in the University. Sarah gained this additional teaching experience and progressed through the graduate program. She continued to teach while conducting research and completing coursework.

Sarah’s advisor told her when she was ready to begin searching for her first professional teaching position, and she recounted how unexpected his direction was:

Well, it was sort of a surprise that my advisor wanted me to defend as quickly as he did. I thought I had probably another year, perhaps, to go. And he mentioned the spring before – or a half a year before I actually started looking, “No. I think you’re ready to defend very shortly or you will be in August. So you might want to start thinking about looking for positions.” (2)

Following her advisor’s advice, she began applying for advertised job openings. In the process she demonstrated her newly developed self-confidence, saying,

I was even sending out C.V.s to places that were just looking for a general biologist, not necessarily specific to my discipline even though that made me a little nervous. But I thought I could do it. (2)

Sarah had developed confidence in her teaching abilities and was willing to voice that to herself and others.

Sarah's job search concluded with two employment offers, but deciding between the two "was actually really easy. I mean, I got two interviews, offered the jobs, and it was an easy decision for me which one was more suited to me." (2) The less suited of the two positions involved many administrative responsibilities while the position she accepted at Thaxton State College was for an assistant professor tenure-track position teaching biology, the discipline she loves.

Sarah elaborated on what she loves about her discipline of biology:

It's hard to put my finger on what exactly I love about my discipline. I guess, it's always an adventure, is one. In the laboratory it is anyway. I love it. I mean, you start off with a question, and you set out to answer the question. And guess what. You get many more questions than you ever imagined that come out of that one question. And I love that. I guess that's the main thing that I love. You start off asking a single question, then you end up with more questions than you even imagined – than you started with. Do you answer the question you started out to ask? Not always. Not always. You usually end up somewhere else. That can be frustrating sometimes. But I like it because I think I'm the kind of person who gets bored very easily. And so, if new questions didn't arise from that, I would be completely and utterly bored. So that's what I like about it. (2)

Sarah loves the quest for answers that leads to more questions in biology research. Her love for microbiology is framed somewhat differently:

I think it's because it's more a happy mixture of chemistry and biology. And I like the two....And I find myself, to tell the truth, more drawn to chemistry and chemists than I do to biology as a whole. Just mainstream biology. Now there's this area called molecular biology – cellular and molecular. And that's me. That's my area....You can't just look at the biology. You have to think about the chemistry aspect. (2)

As a "person who gets bored very easily," Sarah is attracted to the complications of biology and the variety of microbiology. While Sarah loves her discipline, she does not describe herself primarily as a biologist or a microbiologist. Rather, Sarah describes herself first as a teacher.



When Sarah meets new people, she introduces herself as a teacher and follows up with the detail that she is a college-level science teacher. She explained, “I don’t really think of myself as a research professor....The main aspect of my career is teaching. Teaching in research and teaching in academia.” (2) Because Sarah does not focus on conducting and publishing research, she names herself “teacher.” The research in which she is involved is research that includes her undergraduate students. Thus, she teaches in the laboratory as well as in the classroom.

Her impressions of teaching as a graduate student continued into her career. From her earliest days at TSC she felt adequate as a teacher, recalling, “Adequate? Yes. Naïve, also. I had to learn a lot, I felt – I would feel very young. I never felt inadequate though, because – I also felt like I knew what I was doing.” (1) Feeling adequate as a teacher balanced Sarah’s perception of herself as young and naïve. She clarified that she needed to learn how to handle classroom discipline situations and how to develop professionally.

Following the pattern established in her childhood, Sarah sought advice from colleagues. She also gained confidence in assessing the advice and applying it, saying, “I knew how to seek out advice....I felt like I had enough experience knowing what was *good* advice for me and what was not good advice for me.” (1) Sarah sought advice from colleagues and accepted the advice selectively. She described how one senior chemistry professor, Tom Brown, functioned as a mentor although not designated as such by the college:

He was my mentor from day one. Like I would always go to his office for help because he’s, I think, very wise when it comes to students. And has a lot of great advice and has helped me immensely. I’ve adopted a lot of his same philosophies in the classroom. Not all! Some things I think, “Um, that’s not for me.” (1)

As Sarah continued her life-long pattern of listening to others' advice and guidance, she matured into the position of discriminating between which advice she would apply and which she would not. Her first assigned faculty mentor, Chad Harrison, assisted Sarah "professionally in general. Not necessarily the teaching profession, but just being a Ph.D. in general." (1) Sarah had both an official mentor, Dr. Harrison, and an unofficial mentor, Dr. Brown. In both cases she discerned the appropriateness of their advice for her professional life.

As an academic professional who views herself primarily as a teacher, Sarah explained how she participates in scientific conferences that focus on teaching:

To keep myself happy when I attend conferences, I have to attend those that sort of stimulate my interest in teaching as well as those that stimulate my interest in research. And I don't think there's very much mixing the two, to tell you the truth. For instance, the big conference I go to called the American Society for Microbiology, they have a separate, a *completely* separate undergraduate conference from the research conference. And they cater towards pedagogy at the undergraduate – Pardon me. They call it the "Microbiology Conference for Undergraduate Educators." And then there is the American Society for Microbiology conference that just basically deals with research and dissemination of research. (2)

Even the conferences in which she participates indicate that Sarah's professional life is centered in teaching. She emphasized differences between her career and those of her colleagues whose focus is not teaching.

When she communicates with colleagues at other institutions who invest their careers in research, Sarah encounters the disparities between them. She said,

Sometimes when I talk to my colleagues who do research, they don't have any clue what it's like really teaching undergraduates....I think it's the graduate students who understand what it takes to really properly disseminate, not only knowledge, but critical thinking skills to undergraduates....I sometimes feel like I'm talking to someone who just has no idea what it's like to teach at a school that I teach at. Sometimes. And they laugh, they say, "Yeah, I have no idea." They understand that they don't know. And I'll have to explain to them what it's like, what

challenges I have versus the challenges they have. They forget very easily.  
(2)

Sarah is objective as she notes the differences between her professional life and those of her more research-focused colleagues. She encounters both respect and disrespect for her avocation, noting,

I have some colleagues that I run into who admire me for what I do. But they say, "I could never do it." And they admire me for the fact that I can do it. And then have those who I don't think respect me very much for what I do still. I don't like to hang out with those individuals because I don't really know how to talk to them. If anything, the only thing I talk to them about is strictly research. (2)

She embraces the fact that her professional choice is not always highly regarded by her colleagues. Nevertheless, Sarah chooses to build her life around teaching, including her social life.

While colleagues in biology at different institutions offer diverse responses, Sarah reported that members of the science faculty at TSC are united in their commitment to teaching. She elaborated that,

We're teachers. I have to say. I mean, we teach. And we mesh in different ways. You know, we talk very rarely about our own disciplines in that regard. It's kind of funny. We're plucked out; we're put in a group to do a different type of job. (2)

Sarah and her colleagues at TSC are united in their professional focus on teaching, which she views as separating them from other academic professionals. Following the pattern she began as a graduate student teaching assistant, Sarah finds satisfaction and enjoyment when she teaches.

Sarah reported that her greatest professional rewards come from student comments about her influence or her teaching, saying,

A student will come by and just will start telling you how much you've influenced them...They'll stop me in the hall. It just makes me feel really good. And so that's very rewarding. Just to know that, even the times where you think you're doing horrible, that there's at least someone out there who thinks you're doing a good job. (2)

The students who express positive feedback and appreciation reinforce her sense of being competent in doing what she chooses to do: teach biology.

While Sarah's professional passion is teaching, she also invests time in some administrative duties as requested by the department head. As she anticipates her future, she considers the possibility of being the head of a department either at TSC or another institution. She is not, however, interested in being an administrator who does not teach. "I would completely quit this job if someone told me I could not teach any more. Like if it were strictly administrative stuff and research, then – I wouldn't be interested." (3) In that statement, Sarah answers the question of her priority. Sarah is first and foremost a teacher, and she summarizes the satisfaction she derives from her career:

Like when I see our students succeed...It just makes me feel so good. So that – I think about those specific instances of student success, I think that's where I – I think to myself, "I think I found my calling." (3)

I agree that Sarah has found her calling. In her quiet, introverted style, her face lights up when she talks about her teaching and her students. As the interviews concluded, Sarah and her husband were discussing the possibility of having children, and she was uncertain how that major life change might affect her career in terms of assuming more administrative duties or moving to a different institution. Regardless of her personal life or the specific institution, Sarah expects to continue teaching in some context.

#### Diedre

Diedre spent her childhood in several locations in North Carolina, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. After her parents' divorce when she was very young, Diedre and her sister

were reared by their grandmother and their mother. She lived in Pennsylvania from sixth grade through high school graduation. Diedre was a bright, precocious child who did not invest her adolescent energy and creativity in academics. As a “spacey, crazy teenager” (1) she did poorly in high school, hid her grades from her mother and grandmother, and was happy just to be accepted to college. She attended an out-of-state flagship university where she majored in Radio/TV/Film Production and minored in English. After graduation, she worked for a while in the advertising field, before returning to the same university to obtain her master’s and doctoral degrees in English. Diedre’s first full-time tenure-track position at TSC was a disappointment to her. As a result, she left TSC and returned to her beloved undergraduate and graduate school state university to teach advertising in a non-tenure track position.

Diedre is in love with two academic areas. Her creative persona embraces English, especially the creative aspects of the discipline. Her pragmatic side draws her to the field of advertising. Because of these two passions, Diedre described herself as schizophrenic. I found her to be passionate, opinionated, creative, and caring.

Two themes weave consistently throughout her story: first, her mother and the more generic *maternal*; second, pragmatism. Actually, her mother and her pragmatism walk hand-in-hand throughout Diedre’s story as she notes, “Falling in love with the discipline wasn’t enough for me because I had to think of it practically, too. My mother had instilled that in me.” (2) Diedre has embraced the practicality that her mother instilled in her and lives both enthusiastically and practically.

Diedre’s mother and her grandmother reared her. She described them as two “powerful women who are kicking butt right and left all over the world.” (2) Both women

valued education and her grandmother was an educator. They wanted Diedre to go to school and to do well in school. She said, “So, education was really important in my family. There was never any doubt that we would go to college.” (1) Diedre’s mother and grandmother established an expectation that she would go to college, and in this family, education was inextricably paired with career. She explained, “They were never really interested in whether my sister and I were married or had families or any of that. They were more concerned about our educations and our careers.” (2) Within this family that emphasized education and careers, Diedre began her journey toward her academic discipline.

Diedre’s grandmother had taught her to read at an early age, and she was a “voracious reader.” She also wrote poetry and was interested in literature. When asked in high school about her career goals, Diedre said she wanted to be a poet. This was not acceptable in her family because “my mother and my grandmother were both interested in my being practical about it.” (2) Her mother’s experience of divorcing and finding “herself unexpectedly in a situation where she needed to be the breadwinner” flavored her perspective on Diedre’s education. Education was a means to a career. Her mother’s response to Diedre’s goal of being a poet was unequivocal:

“No. That’s not going to work because if you’re a poet, you’re going to live in a garret, and you’re going to sleep under newspapers. So, what you have to do is come up with a career path that’s going to allow you to make a living.” (1)

Her mother’s emphatic requirement that Diedre pursue a practical career continued to inform Diedre’s path. Diedre reported, “We compromised, and we agreed that I would study journalism.” (1) Along with Diedre’s having no doubt that she would go to college,

she had no doubt that she would study something consistent with her mother's pragmatic view of education.

Within the journalism school where Diedre enrolled, she chose a major in Radio/TV/Film Production with a minor in English. After completing her undergraduate degree, she worked in radio and particularly enjoyed her job as an advertising copywriter: "They were paying me to sit around and write all day and be creative. Wow!" (2) She also garnered her mother's approval; she said, "This is the perfect job for you. This is really the perfect job for you." (2) Diedre had met her family's expectation that she obtain a college education, and specifically an education that would provide a career. As an advertising copywriter, Diedre met the practical obligation of earning a living and simultaneously had an outlet for her creative inclinations.

When the job ended because she "didn't fit in real well with the company" (1) and she "didn't like the woman I worked for," (2) Diedre entered graduate school to study English in a master's degree program, thinking she would teach English in high school. Diedre passionately embraced her graduate school experience, including her graduate teaching position in freshman English classes. She described her revelation about teaching:

Within probably two semesters, or at the time quarters, of doing that, I knew that I loved teaching. I got really lucky. My second semester as a graduate student, I got my own class to teach....So the first class I ever taught, my second semester in graduate school, I had six students in there. It was an English 1101 class. And I loved it! (1)

Diedre's positive experiences during her first semesters as a graduate student led her toward a career decision, concluding "Gosh. This is really fun. I like teaching college."

(1)

Diedre embraced not only the teaching component of graduate school, but also the experience as a whole. The maternal theme continued as Diedre described her graduate school experiences:

But I felt very nurtured. I felt very well taken care of. The entire time I was there, I never had a bad experience in a class. I never had a bad teacher. The people that I knew and liked directed me to their friends. They told me who to avoid. I was able to do that. And – a lot of graduate students and people who've come through graduate programs describe their experience as more of a business relationship with faculty. Mine was like a love bath. It was just being nurtured through. Really. And that was good for me because I work best that way. (1)

Diedre felt nurtured and cared for throughout her graduate school experience.

Relationships were integral to her delight in graduate school. Describing her major professor, Diedre said, “We liked each other a whole lot....She is one of my best friends now.” (1) She took classes with professors she had known in the community “who were really friends” and who “felt very much like they were family in a certain way.” (1)

Diedre's story resounds with examples of individuals who nurtured her and relationships that encouraged her throughout graduate school.

Diedre's realization that she loved college-level teaching merged with her positive experiences and prompted her to continue graduate studies toward a Ph.D. Diedre once again applied her practical approach to education. Because she had completed a creative writing thesis for her master's degree, Diedre chose to balance that with an academic dissertation. She examined depression in the poetry of a female poet through the lens of psychoanalytic feminist criticism. For practical financial reasons, she continued teaching English as a graduate assistant and also taught courses in the Advertising Department. She described the end of her graduate school experience as being unsettled, saying, “As I'm finishing up my Ph.D., I'm teaching in the English Department, I'm writing my



dissertation, and I'm teaching advertising classes in the Advertising Department. Still schizophrenic at that point – just back and forth.” (1) Diedre was enthusiastically involved with the graduate school experience that she enjoyed and with the two academic arenas that she loves.

While knowing that she loved teaching and wanted to work in academia, Diedre also approached the job search with her usual practicality. She recalled,

I did know that I could not be a hundred percent certain that the teaching job I wanted for myself would be there for me. And I was grateful that I had fall back. I knew, “If this doesn't work for me, I can do something else because I have something else.” And I knew that even more when I was working at the radio station and doing some advertising work freelance for other people. I thought, “This is good because you don't know that that's there.”...In fact, when I was on the academic job market, I was on the corporate job market as well because I needed a job. And I knew that I was going to have to do one or the other. (3)

Diedre was seeking a teaching position, but she viewed her experience in radio and in freelance advertising as “fall back” if she were not hired in academia. “I didn't want to come up empty handed.” (3) She was determined to have employment either in academia or in advertising.

Diedre began her job search before she had completed her Ph.D. She took advantage of her university's opportunities to develop job search skills and participated in interviews at Modern Language Association (MLA) conferences. Nevertheless, she found that “being on the job market is like being tortured.” (3) The torture was made more bearable because of relationships. “Fortunately I went through the experience with good friends who were doing the same, and we agonized and grumbled together. And offered support to one another.” (3) The nurturing that characterized Diedre's graduate school experiences with professors continued into her job search experiences as friends served as sources of encouragement.

The practical and maternal themes of Diedre's life played out in her experience of interviewing for a job at a Benedictine monastery. While the prospect of teaching advertising and public relations at the college was appealing, her mother said, "Who are you going to date? Everyone there is a monk." (3) Diedre was attracted to the idea of living in a monastery and being able to write for a while, but her practical side wondered about a different scenario: "If I got the job and was looking to get out in a couple of years, what if I couldn't and I'm living in a monastery? My whole life, my whole life I'm here with the monks!" (3) Diedre was horrified at the prospect of being trapped in an untenable environment with no escape or "fall back" option.

As she approached the completion of her Ph.D., Diedre applied more actively for jobs and had interviews at several institutions. She chose TSC's offer over a community college position because she preferred a baccalaureate institution over a community college and because of TSC's location in the state where she had attended undergraduate and graduate school. Her experience was not what she had expected of her first academic position. She explained how her expectations and hopes were unrealized:

I rarely have expectations in the traditional sense. Hopes, and maybe that comes from – from paying attention to my mother....Because I had had such a wonderful experience in my graduate institution, I did expect – and I will use "expect" there – I expected to come to a campus where things were organized and people were on top of stuff....I expected the people above me to know what they were doing. And I expected them to be people that I could admire and follow instruction and – I think I expected a more evolved place than I ended up at. (3)

Thaxton State College was not at all what Diedre had wanted in her first career teaching position. Her practical side knew that she was moving to an institution that was not a research university, but somehow she anticipated a college that was similar to her graduate school university.

Diedre's list of disappointments about TSC was a long one. She had expected students who were better prepared for college, saying "I knew this is not the same level as the institution I'm used to student-wise. I didn't know the students were going to be this unprepared. *Wildly* unprepared." (3) She was dismayed by the students' lack of preparation for college and was frustrated with what she perceived as a lack of services for the unprepared students, clarifying,

I expected there to be resources in place to help these people because they weren't prepared to be here. I was appalled to discover that they weren't...I mean we're not all going to be Ivy League, and I'm never going to work in an Ivy League institution, but good institutions – I don't care where you are on the chain – if you have it together and you know who your students are and you're serving them and you're serving them correctly, you're gonna make it happen. (3)

Diedre expected the institution to provide the services that she thought the under-prepared students needed. Her intense frustration with the college was triggered at least partially by her commitment to students and to meeting their needs.

Diedre references class time as "meeting with students" and expressed respect for the students:

I don't need them to think that I'm a role model because I'm not. I don't need them to think that I'm an authority because I'm certainly not. I would like for them to see me as somebody who can show them some things they might want to know about. (2)

Diedre described a leveled positioning of student and teacher in which she opens herself to learning from students. She indicated,

One of the things I love about teaching is I love what they have to offer. And – sometimes what they have to offer is just as valuable as what I have to offer. I like to keep a space where they can put that out there...I always learn from my students. So I find that very exciting – their interpretations, their theories about stuff. (2)

Diedre values students and what they offer in the teaching and learning context of higher education. She derives satisfaction from providing opportunities for students to share their ideas.

She also values what students offer in terms of their curriculum preferences:

I also believe in listening to the students. I think what the students want to get out of their degree is a lot more important than what the professors feel like teaching and what they can teach. And if you have students, abundant students, saying, “We want to do PR. We want to do PR. We want to do PR,” then I think your job as a department head, as faculty, is to say, “Here is what they want. This is what we need to put together for them and have that available.” And if it means we don’t get to teach all these fun little classes that are our, you know, *pets*, so be it. That’s just the way that it is. (2)

The students’ voices were clear to Diedre, and she wanted the department to offer the curriculum the students requested. She sounded frustrated and angry that faculty colleagues insisted on a curriculum to satisfy what she viewed as faculty interests.

Diedre’s relationship with her students incorporates not only valuing, but also her themes of maternal nurturing and practicality. She said,

*But* students do like some nurture, and I will give that to them. I will give them some “mommy action” every now and then. But I don’t even think my “mommy action” is as “mommy” as some people’s. It’s more like sister. (2)

Diedre described relating to her students with nurture and acceptance. She expressed passion about the education of students at TSC, saying,

But I really – I feel very, very fervently about at this institution, school isn’t a luxury for these kids. They can’t come in and dabble in all these fun things that are so interesting. They need to be taught how to get jobs, how to go out into the world. (2)

Just as Diedre’s own education was preparation for a career, she viewed that as the purpose of education for her students. TSC was not serving that purpose as Diedre thought it should or as she had expected that it would.

In the midst of her disappointment with TSC, Diedre once again applied a practical approach to her situation:

I sat down and I wrote a list at the end of last year. Things I like about this place and things I don't like. And the don't-like list was stronger. So, I wrote a note on the bottom of it and said, "If I still feel this way in a year, I will go on the market. In the meantime, I need to do X, Y, and Z to make myself more marketable." (3)

Diedre directed her frustration, disappointment, and anger toward developing a plan for her career path. Although she expected to "gut it out" (3) for a while longer, she decided that her situation was not improving. She contacted a former colleague about a possible position with her graduate institution and accepted a contract to teach advertising. As we concluded our interviews, Diedre was in the process of moving from a tenure-track position in English at TSC to a non-tenure track position in advertising at the university where she completed her undergraduate and graduate studies. She is happy to be moving away from tenure track.

Diedre expressed unequivocal disgust with her tenure track experience, stating,

And it quickly became clear to me, "tenure" is the carrot that you dangle while you're working us like field animals. Because the fact of the matter is, you're under-staffed, and you don't even have enough administrative help. So, we're doing administrative position tasks, *and* we're doing the work of more faculty than are actually here. Yet, you're not going to tell me that you know that's inequitable to all concerned. You're going to tell me, "This is just how it is on the tenure track."...I decided being on a tenure track was just a bunch of "hooley" after this experience. (3)

She perceived the tenure track to be an administration strategy to overwork faculty members. In her new position, Diedre will be a non-tenure track faculty member, teaching advertising. The position shifts her from one love, the academic discipline of English, to another love, the advertising field of study.

Diedre fell in love with English and with advertising and refers to cheating on each of them when she reported,

I don't think they mind so much, though. I think I have an open relationship with both of them. It's not normal – I don't want to say "normal" because that makes it sound like it's clinically wrong. Most people don't do what I'm doing. They don't do both....And I love both. I mean, both have allowed me to be creative which was something that was really important. (2)

Both the field of advertising and the discipline of English have provided Diedre creative expression. She was drawn to English as a child who embraced reading and creative writing. She loves both the literature and the writing aspects of the discipline and she values having gained the psychoanalytic feminist lens as a vehicle for reading and understanding. Diedre's attraction to advertising began with her love of music, which is intricately connected to radio. Her undergraduate degree in Radio/TV/Film Production opened doors in radio, including opportunities to produce commercials and public service announcements. From that springboard she moved into the creative position of copywriter. When Diedre spoke of her two "disciplines," she elaborated more thoroughly about English than about advertising, suggesting she was more socialized into the graduate studies field.

During graduate school, Diedre learned the theory and language for scholarly work in literature: "I learned the language of theory and developed a theoretical approach to what I wanted to do. I do psychoanalytic feminist criticism, and that's what they [professors] were teaching me how to do." (1) Psychoanalytic feminist criticism was the lens through which she developed her dissertation. Diedre also gained awareness of other areas of English, including divisiveness in departments. "A lot of literature people think that what the creative writers do is lightweight, that it's not rigorous enough." (2) She

reported that linguistics “is something that’s totally alien to me” but offered more detail about rhetoric and composition:

Rhetoric and composition has its language. There you address strategies of argument. You address composition, composition strategy. Totally different from what it means to read and interpret a text. And different schools of theory are going to ask you to talk about things in different ways. So, yeah, I think language is a very important part of what happens in the discipline. (2)

Diedre recognizes the impact of differences within English and presented them as factual listings more than personal experiences. She named literature, creative writing, rhetoric and composition, and linguistics for English. With straightforward words, she also mentioned writing, design, research, and sales as components of advertising. She has had minimal professional affiliation with either field except for practical reasons. She explained, “I join MLA when I’m going to the conference, and I let my membership expire when I’m not.” (3) She last attended the MLA conference for the purpose of participating in preliminary job interviews. Diedre has also participated in Associated Writing Programs, “the creative writing group.” Diedre’s experiences in English have occurred mainly at the institutional level rather than in the larger disciplinary context. Her academic life is framed through the perspective of her practicality and her passion.

Diedre fell in love with her discipline and her field of study and lives them with passion. Both English and advertising provide vehicles for creative expression. Both arenas offer opportunities for Diedre to pursue her other passion, teaching. With her “schizophrenic” approach, she feeds her practical view of career. If a job in English is hard to procure, she can fall back on a job in the advertising field. She has worked in corporate advertising and now has a position teaching advertising. As I completed the interviews with Diedre, she was excited about returning to the university where she had

obtained all of her degrees and to the town where she had enjoyed living. She described her expectations:

It's kind of a quality of life thing. I think I'm gonna be much more peaceful and controlled and not running around like a chicken with my head off....I think that my life, my day-to-day life is just going to be easier. I'm going to have more control over what happens in it because the organization is going to be better. And I'm hopeful that it will allow me the opportunity to turn to some of the other things that I care about. The fact that the job is not tenure track is just fine with me because the taste of it I got here – not interested....I think I'm going to have a nicer, more peaceful life, and I think I'm going to actually end up being able to thrive better professionally. (3)

Diedre is enthusiastic about moving back to College Town and to teaching as a non-tenure track instructor. She expressed positive expectations about teaching better-prepared students at an institution she likes with colleagues she respects and having a more peaceful lifestyle.

Diedre's story is about life, especially about how "to keep your life the way you want it while you're doing this." (2) She is energetic, free-spirited, with a multi-faceted personality that she calls "schizophrenic." She talked openly and enthusiastically without guarding her emotions. Her language is articulate and filled with creative descriptors. She described herself as "high-strung," and my time with her confirms that she is energetic and excitable. Her energy is contagious. While she loves her work, she loves life beyond work. She is practical about supporting herself while being passionate about enjoying what she does. Diedre's experiences are in the academic settings where she lives and invests her passion.

### Maggie

Maggie is the older of two daughters whose father was in the military. The family lived in a variety of locations until her parents' divorce at the time that she was finishing



elementary school. After the divorce, Maggie, her sister, and mother lived in a Southern university town for a few years before moving to a suburban area where Maggie spent her high school years. As a good student throughout elementary and high school, she knew at an early age that she wanted to pursue a doctoral degree. She attended the flagship public university in the state where she had attended high school. She majored in psychology, minored in English, enjoyed college, and achieved academically. After college graduation, Maggie immediately began studying counseling psychology in a doctoral program at a public university in an adjacent state. While completing her doctoral internship, she taught part-time at Thaxton State College. That experience led to her current full-time tenure-track position in the Psychology Department.

Maggie's story is about happenstance, personal growth, and commitment to helping others. Because she has processed her life experiences through years of studying psychology and being a psychologist, her interviews were less spontaneous than those with Sarah and Diedre. In clear, thoughtful comments, Maggie described her experiences in psychology and academia. As with the other participants, her paths in those directions began in her childhood.

Maggie's nuclear family emphasized the importance of education, but did not seek to direct her career choices or her academic path. She recalled,

It was just an expectation that I go to college and that I do something that, beyond that, just do something that made me happy and that I could basically support myself at. And that was about it. There was never any pressure to make money or to do anything in particular. (2)

Maggie knew that she would go to college, but had no idea what she might study or what career path she would take.

The stronger influence toward psychology, according to Maggie, was the impact of having parents who divorced. She shared her reasoning:

I think psychology is full of people from dysfunctional families. My parents were divorced, and I did the, some sort of – like when I was in maybe sixth grade or something – one of those family therapists. So, I thought it was really interesting. And I guess that's mainly what attracted me. (1)

Her personal experience in family therapy while growing up created her inchoate interest in psychology. Career interest reports that she completed in middle school suggest that she was considering a career in psychology at that time. She remembered,

I found one of those things, school record things that I filled out every year about what I wanted to be when I grew up. "Psychologist" showed up in there a few times, when I was in like middle school. (1)

Maggie's early interest in psychology was subtle rather than profound, and gradually unfolded later on her educational path.

Maggie began undergraduate school as an undeclared major, uncertain of her career path but certain that she wanted to continue her education through the doctoral level. She explained,

When I started at State University, I was undeclared because I wasn't completely sure what I wanted to do. But I knew that I wanted to get – I pretty much knew I wanted to stay in school until I got a Ph.D., which is sort of backwards of what you're supposed to do – like decide on your career first and then see if you need a Ph.D. But I pretty much knew I just wanted to stay in school and get a Ph.D. (1)

Maggie made a personal commitment to earning an advanced degree and did so through internal motivation that was not shaped by a career goal. Although her mother did not recommend or promote a graduate-level education, Maggie reported that her mother encouraged college education:

So, neither of my parents went to college. And particularly with my mother, that was a big issue for her. And so it was really important to her

that we get as much education as we could and really important that we went to college. She never really pushed graduate school in particular, but just making sure that we got a good education. And education was definitely valued and emphasized from early on – that you do your best in school, that school is very important. (2)

Maggie fulfilled her mother's expectations that she go to college and do her best.

Although Maggie did not experience those expectations as being beyond college, her early decision to stay in school and get a Ph.D. is consistent with what her mother voiced as important: “get as much education as we could.” (2) In undergraduate psychology classes, she “found it fascinating to think about the reasons why people do things they do and why people are so different.” (1) Within her decision to pursue a Ph.D., psychology seemed interesting and offered a career option other than teaching.

The happenstance aspects of Maggie's life began to emerge as she made the transition from undergraduate to graduate school. She said, “See my entire professional history is a series of me falling into the right thing because I was completely green. I had very little guidance. I knew not what I was doing.” (1) Maggie suggested that she made choices without direction from others and that coincidence was as much a factor in her academic path as was her decision-making.

As a senior in college, she started considering graduate schools. While examining an American Psychological Association (APA) book, she saw counseling psychology and clinical psychology and decided counseling sounded nicer. Likewise, she browsed a listing of graduate schools and Adjacent State University came first in the alphabet. She described her decision with a chuckle:

Adjacent State University was the first in alphabetical order. That wasn't the only reason I applied. But that is – I was like, “Adjacent State, oh.” I used to live in Adjacent State's town for a period of time. All my family went to Adjacent State, and I lived there a little bit in middle school so I was like, “Oh, I'd like to go back to where I know a lot of people.” (1)

The alphabet and her family connection prompted Maggie's interest in the university. Just as her inclination to get a Ph.D. was not connected to a clear, rational reason, her decision about where to apply to graduate school was circumstantial. She did take initiative in applying to two additional graduate programs but chose to attend Adjacent State.

The application process for Adjacent State included an interview day. Maggie described the event as triggering self-doubts:

And every single person seemed to know a whole helluva lot more about what was going on than I did. You know, people were like, "I'm married and have two kids." And I'm like, "Oh My God! I'm twenty-one still. And I have no idea what I'm doing." People who had master's degrees and had liked worked in college counseling centers and done all this stuff. And I was like, "Oh my gosh." . . . So, I did feel very, very naïve, very young, very green going into it. (1)

Maggie felt immature and insecure as she progressed through the graduate school entry process. Nevertheless, she began the doctoral program and spent the first year of graduate school taking classes.

During her second year of graduate school, she shifted from only taking classes to participating also in practicum, saying,

I was really scared at the beginning, I guess as most people are, about starting actually doing work and how I was going to get through that, and how easily people would be able to tell that I didn't know what I was doing. (1)

The uncertainties that Maggie had experienced as she began graduate school reappeared as she began her professional practicum. Her apprehensions were somewhat appeased by encouragement from fellow students. She explained, "I had a lot of, you know, support from fellow students. Like 'Everybody's felt that way, and you'll figure it out.' That kind of thing." (1) Maggie wondered how she would cope with actually doing counseling in

her practicum setting. In contrast to other aspects of her academic life, she intentionally chose a practicum setting that differed from the one at Adjacent State, noting,

I did that because their counseling center was so –They have had, I don't know if they still do, like a big old-fashioned counseling center. *Lots* of people; no session limits. You know, psychiatrist on – who consulted. That kind of thing. So it was a really different experience. Adjacent State's Counseling Center had been reduced to just a few people and session limits and a lot of budget-cutting stuff going on there. (1)

The first practicum site was in a university counseling center that provided her different kinds of experiences. As she continued in her program, she devoted increasing amounts of time to her practicum experiences while completing the coursework.

Maggie's sense of happenstance in life was reinforced when she took and passed her preliminary examinations at the conclusion of her doctoral coursework. She recalled her assessment of that experience:

I got in some sort of weird zone, and I ended up doing really well on prelims, to the point that when I went back like three weeks later when they, you know, gave 'em back to us, and I read my answers. I was like, "WOW! I wrote that!" (1)

Her incredulous response suggests that somehow luck intervened with her answering the examination questions.

From a beginning motivation of "I want to help people," Maggie found interest in the theoretical foundations of psychology and counseling. She reported,

I really like counseling theories and all the, you know, different perspectives on what makes people have problems and what makes them get better. And trying to see how all of those things are really kind of looking at the same problem from different perspectives, maybe aren't as disparate as people think they are. So, I think it got more intellectual and maybe a little less, you know, "I just want to help people." Deeper reasons as I went along. (1)

Maggie's interest in psychology developed intellectually, prompting her to consider more scholarly issues. Her progression through the graduate program infused not only deeper reasons for an interest in psychology but also a valuing of personal growth.

The value of personal growth was an integral component of Maggie's socialization into her field. She explained:

The socialization process of becoming a psychologist, I think, is really – well I think it varies a lot depending on what your training is like. But with mine, there was really a focus on, “You don't come out the same way you went in.” I mean this is a growth process personally and everyone changes, and you learn a great deal about yourself while you're going through this process. (1)

Becoming a psychologist involved not only investments in intellectual pursuits, but also a focus on self-evaluation and personal development.

As Maggie became more involved in working as a therapist, she developed a strong connection between her intellectual interest and her emotional development, saying,

As you *do* therapy, you – it becomes much more interesting in terms of, you know, an emotional encounter, and feeling like you grow a great deal from that process. And also, it's like an intellectual challenge as you realize that you have to think on your feet and figure out what's going on with people as you get more information. So, it becomes sort of like solving a puzzle – sometimes is how it feels. And I think that became a lot more interesting. (1)

Maggie combined knowledge and expertise in her practice of therapeutic counseling and found that the more she did therapy, the more she liked it. She liked therapy, but she also liked teaching.

Maggie's path toward teaching involved both coincidental and intentional situations. While an undergraduate student, Maggie participated in a peer sex education program as a presenter and leader. She enjoyed making educational presentations to

student organizations and residence hall groups and determined that she was effective in this role. When Maggie needed income for graduate school, she applied for and obtained a teaching assistantship. She recalled that experience:

So I taught, I guess, a total of about three semesters of a class that our department did for teacher education majors. It was like a basic “helping skills for people who are going to be teachers” kind of class. And I really liked it a lot – liked teaching a lot. Got pretty good reviews, and everything went well with that. (1)

Although obtaining a teaching position was intentional, her experience was unexpected. She found teaching to be energizing in contrast to her experience in therapeutic endeavors, saying, “I found it [teaching] very – and I still do – I find it really energizing. It’s one of the only things that – doing therapy sometimes I find really draining, even though I like it.” (1) Maggie began a teaching assistantship for practical financial reasons, but discovered enjoyment in the activity.

As she reflected on the contrasting consequences of the two professional activities during graduate school, Maggie began to question her career choice. She reported,

By the time I was finishing up my internship I thought, “I am not sure that I can do this exclusively, full-time, you know, and this be it.” And of course, I was worried about it. I was like, “So I spent six years in school, and I hope that I can do this. I kind of need to find something that I can do where I can be happy, but still use this big degree I’ve got.” (1)

Although she was doubting her capacity to be a full-time therapist, she was not really considering a career in academia. She explained why:

I just hadn’t really considered going into academia because my main – um, you know, all my educational experience had been at big research universities. And I saw what they did, and I didn’t want to do that. You know, I didn’t want to do research, do a lot of research. I didn’t want to run a lab or whatever, that kind of thing that people do when they’re psych professors at places like Adjacent State or State University. And uh – So I just – I guess, you know, I didn’t know enough about all the different kinds of schools to know that there was a place that I could kind of fit in and focus mostly on teaching and a lot less on the research side of it. (1)

Maggie enjoyed teaching but did not consider it as a career because she assumed all academicians were heavily invested in research. “I didn’t think that I was going to end up in academia. That was just sort of a happy accident.” (1) Happenstance intervened to direct Maggie’s path.

Maggie’s connection to an academic career began during her year of required clinical internship. While working as a full-time intern therapist at a Veteran’s Administration hospital, she met a professor from TSC. That connection led to Maggie’s being hired as an adjunct instructor in the Psychology Department and her discovery of an academic setting that focused on teaching rather than on research. When the department had an opening for a full-time, permanent faculty position, Maggie applied. She described her feelings and thoughts at that time:

I was really, really starting to freak out about what I was going to do when I finished my internship because I had – you know – *this* is what I wanted to do. I knew that I really liked the atmosphere here [Thaxton State College]. And um – I thought, “I’m having so much fun at this. I really enjoy it. I don’t seem to get tired of it. So maybe these are all good signs that I should do this full time.” (1)

Maggie’s part-time teaching experience was the trigger that redirected her professional path from therapy to teaching. Upon being offered a full-time position, Maggie was delighted to accept. The happenstance of meeting a TSC professor led to Maggie’s becoming a college faculty member.

As a psychology professor, Maggie finds similarities between therapy and teaching. She explained noticing the similarities as she observed her doctoral major professor:

And he was my major professor for my dissertation and everything. And – but I think seeing him teach also influenced me to some extent because I saw how much he enjoyed it, too. And I think that I – He kind of saw both therapy, doing therapy and teaching as something that’s just as much of a



growth experience for the therapist or the teacher as it is for the client or the student. And so I think that was an influence on me as well. (1)

Her own description of the best parts of being a psychologist and being an academician are similar to her observations of her professor. She acknowledged,

I think the best part of being a psychologist is the sense – they may be very similar – the sense that you’re making an impact on people’s lives....And so I guess that interpersonal connection and that sense of accomplishment at being able to help someone and impact their life in some way.

And I think that’s to me the important part of academia as well – is the sense of helping individual students and feeling like you’re making an impact with individual students. So, since research is not a huge focus for me, that’s not where I get satisfaction from, thinking like I’m changing the world with my research or thinking somebody’s going to read this down the line, and it’s going to change the field or something. That’s not really important to me. It’s more the connection with students and the sense of – just feeling like you’ve maybe changed something about someone’s life, even if it’s just a small piece. (2)

In both therapy and teaching, Maggie finds meaning in developing interpersonal connections and having an impact on individual lives.

As we concluded our interviews, Maggie was uncertain about the next step on her professional journey because she was pregnant. Before becoming pregnant, she had expected to continue teaching in her tenure-track faculty position while continuing to pursue licensure on a part-time basis. As a result of our interviews, Maggie took a closer look at her interest in obtaining licensure and decided against continuing that pursuit. Her best guess during the time of our last interview was that she would return to teaching full time after the birth of her child.

The stories of these three women, Sarah, Diedre, and Maggie, are unique as are their personalities. Sarah’s shy introversion and thoughtful communication contrast with Diedre’s dramatic, exuberant personality. Maggie is outgoing and personable, but

communicates more succinctly and factually than Diedre does. Their paths to becoming faculty members took different routes with Sarah's being a relatively straight path, Diedre's being circuitous, and Maggie's being serendipitous. In spite of their individual stories and personalized ways of sharing their stories, their experiences share commonalities. Next, I will discuss the five themes that emerged from my in-depth interviews with the women.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE THEMES

I began this research seeking to understand the experiences of women in the academic disciplines. Consistent with the characteristics of qualitative research, the interviews redirected the focus of the research. The themes that emerge from my analysis of the data offer insights into the experiences of women who first fell in love with a discipline but then became committed to teaching. As they completed graduate school, each woman made a transition to a junior faculty position at a teaching institution. In the transforming process each woman overcame potential limitations and moved into conditions of possibilities. As faculty members at the same institution they share common experiences with students, colleagues, and in their personal lives. Nevertheless, their unique identities are developed and informed through the multiplicity of relationships that each experiences. Franz, Cole, Crosby and Stewart (1994) label these “constellations of relationships,” (p. 326) suggesting interconnections and fluidity. Throughout the women’s narratives about their lives and their relationships, I encounter “conditions of possibility” (McCoy, 2000, p. 238) as well as prospects for containment (Martin, 2000). As I report the themes that emerged from the research, my goal is to “preserve the coherence” of the lives and identities of the women who shared their stories, including their “remembered pasts and anticipated futures” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p, 746). The stories of the women who participated in this research reveal the “multiplicity of women’s experiences” (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996, p.100) and are not intended to be

generalizations. Rather, I uncover themes that emerged as family resemblances (Martin, 2000) in these women's paths to becoming academicians and in their experiences as junior faculty members in a small public college. Although the interviews concluded at a specific moment in time, their lives and their stories continue in fluid, ever changing ways (Steinberg, 1999).

“Falling in Love with the Discipline” (Diedre)

Sarah, Diedre, and Maggie each fell in love with her discipline. Diedre described graduate school as a time of “taking fascinating classes and making good friends and just falling in love with the discipline.” (1) Graduate school provided experiences that nurtured the women's attractions to their disciplines. However, these women's stories of falling in love with their disciplines are more consistent with Sarah's synopsis that “it all started when I was very young.” (1) During their childhoods, significant individuals provided the foundations for their later attractions to their disciplines.

Sarah's early path was guided by her older sisters' interests and by their investment in her life. She explained their influences:

I was probably about seven or eight years old. My sisters were in high school. I had one sister in high school who was also pre-enrolled in a nursing program. And when she was learning all of the muscles and bones of the body, she would point them out on me. And in some cases even mark them on my arms and stuff. And so she taught them to me.

So I knew more than your typical six year old did in terms of anatomy and physiology. And so then my other sister, as I got older – I think I was like maybe 9 or 10 – and my other sister started attending college – community college. She was also sort of in charge of taking care of me. And so sometimes she would periodically take me to class. And I liked to go – She actually taught me algebra at a pretty young age because I was really into math. (1)

Sarah's sisters taught her information about anatomy, physiology, and mathematics while influencing her in a more overarching pattern. “It all has to do basically with my sisters

being sort of a role model [sic].” (1) As the youngest child in the family, Sarah admired her older sisters who often had responsibility for her care. She was drawn emotionally and academically into their worlds where they nurtured the seeds of scientific interest.

Diedre’s childhood world revolved around her mother and grandmother whom she described as “two powerful women who are kicking butt right and left all over the world.” (2) From learning to read at an early age to writing her first poem when she was five or six years old, Diedre reported that her early years were immersed in language:

When I was a child, I guess a very young child, I started writing. When I – I guess I was five. I wrote my first poem when I was five or six. I was always a voracious reader. My grandmother taught me to read when I was three years old. (1)

Diedre’s role models, her mother and grandmother, brought her into the world of language and creativity that laid the foundation for her path into the discipline of English.

Maggie’s early path into psychology emanated from her childhood experiences rather than from individuals’ influences. She mentioned almost lightly that her parents divorced and that she participated in family therapy. She explained that the therapy was interesting and was her first attraction toward psychology, saying,

I found it fascinating to think about the reasons why people do things they do and why people are so different. And um – as clichéd as it is, I *was* one of those people who liked to talk to my friends about their problems and that kind of thing. (1)

Maggie’s attraction to psychology was founded in her childhood experience with a therapist and her interest in people and their problems. She remembered that she “found one of those things, those school record things that I filled out every year about what I wanted to be when I grew up. ‘Psychologist’ showed up in there a few times, when I was in like middle school.” (1) Although she did not have the strong influence of family

members that Sarah and Diedre experienced, Maggie did begin falling in love with her discipline as early as middle school.

These three women share the commonalities of early influences toward their adult lives in academia. They also share the experiences of having grown up in middle-class families with clear expectations that children will go to college. Sarah's family identified and encouraged her intellect as she progressed through high school to college. Diedre's mother and grandmother emphasized the practicality of her obtaining education that would enable her to support herself financially. Maggie's family did not express specific educational expectations beyond the indisputable message that she would go to college. Positioned within these families, the women were offered conditions of possibility, especially the possibility of a college education. They grew up in worlds in which they were expected to attend and complete college and worlds in which emotional support helped make those expectations possible. Their experiences are reminiscent of the stories of the early faculty of Wellesley College (Palmieri, 1995). The Wellesley women shared the commonality of being reared in middle-class families in which they were encouraged to pursue education and career preparation and in which they received love and support that made their pursuits possible. The women in this study also received encouragement and emotional support. That none of these women mentioned any concerns about having access to college emphasizes the privilege of their lives. Because the participants did not address this issue, I do not address it as a theme, but rather acknowledge that their family experiences and their conditions of possibility as children and adolescents were positioned in a majority race, middle-class world that provided a foundation for

expectations quite different from what they might have experienced in a different socio-economic position.

As they navigated through their high school and undergraduate years, Sarah, Diedre, and Maggie experienced potential limitations to their existing possibilities. Following the pattern established in childhood, Sarah further developed her tendency to heed and follow what others told her. She reported how her sister gave direction to her:

At first I wanted to be a nurse, but then my sister sat me down – who was a nurse – and said, “No. You have the brain to be a doctor. Doctors don’t have people telling them what to do. Nurses do. You just don’t want to do that.” And so, of course, I changed my mind. “No. No. I’m not going to be a nurse. I’m going to be a doctor.” (1)

When her older sister told her she should be a doctor instead of a nurse, Sarah adopted that career goal. She also heeded advice from her brother-in-law about classes to take in high school. When Sarah told him that she wanted to go into pre-medical, he said,

Well, if you’re going to be pre-med, a lot of schools won’t accept Advanced Placement credit for science. You’ll have to take it anyway. So, in high school you might as well get the good grades and just take the easier class. Take the easy route. (1)

When her brother-in-law told her she should take easier high school classes in order to get better grades, Sarah avoided taking Advanced Placement classes. From listening to family voices, Sarah entered college and followed the voice of the professor at the small Catholic college who wanted to convince at least some of her students to change from pre-medical studies to what she called “real biologists” or “real scientists.” Sarah reported that Dr. Butler “totally changed my mind.” (1) Following the professor’s challenge, Sarah again changed her career goal from medicine to scientific research. Living adolescence and young adulthood with the tendency to rely on others’ guidance, Sarah was slow to develop her own voice, a potential limitation for her professional life.

Diedre's potential limitations were in some ways the opposite of Sarah's limitations and were a result of her expressing her own voice through behaviors. Diedre described herself as an undergraduate student and her family's responses to her:

I also, as a side note, as an undergraduate, hadn't been the most devoted student. I was very young when I went to college. I was seventeen. And when you're seventeen in College Town, unsupervised for the first time in your life, sometimes you don't go to class. A lot of the time.

And it was a sick disappointment to them [mother and grandmother], like I talked about the other day, that I wasn't the most motivated student in high school and undergraduate. Oh, my grandmother was just beside herself. So, I got really good at hiding my grades from her. (1)

Diedre's independent behavior and poor grades in high school and college gave voice to her separateness from her mother and grandmother. Those same poor grades became a burden for her later in her academic career. She reported being "regretful about a couple of things:"

As I told you, I wasn't a great student when I was an undergraduate. And I ended up at State University, as a matter of fact, because I wasn't such a great student when I was in high school. I'm too easily distracted. And if I don't have the goal in front of me, I'm not performing....I know I had the ability to go to any school I wanted to go to. I opted out of that by being such a spacey, crazy teenager. And I opted out of going to whatever graduate program I would have wanted to go to by being that as an undergraduate....I cannot blame anybody but myself. I did not care. (1)

Diedre regretted her poor academic record and described how it followed her to graduate school, saying, "I'm dragging my undergraduate GPA around like it's a tail or something – a singing tail. 'I'm an idiot. I'm an idiot.' But, so I had to play catch up like that." (1) What began as immature adolescent decisions and behaviors manifested themselves as personal criticisms and perceived limitations when she entered graduate school.



Maggie's potential limitation is unveiled in her descriptions of herself during the time she was completing her undergraduate degree and progressing toward her graduate program:

I didn't think that I was going to end up in academia. That was just sort of a happy accident....So I got the APA book and the first, the first thing in – Well, "counseling psychology," I thought, "sounded nicer than clinical psychology." See my entire professional history is a series of me falling into the right thing because I was completely green. (1)

Maggie selected her doctoral focus because one field sounded nicer to her than the other option. Just as she had chosen Adjacent State University because it was first in the alphabet of an American Psychological Association guide, Maggie chose counseling psychology because it sounded nice. Maggie perceived her life as a series of happy accidents and felt "very, very naïve, very young, very green going into" (1) graduate school. Viewing life as a series of happy accidents suggested a lack of agency, and a perception of self as young and naïve held potential for limiting Maggie's graduate school success.

Maggie, Sarah, and Diedre described unique potential limitations, but the existence of limitations at all and their emergence in the interviews revealed a shared pattern of doubting themselves. Maggie described herself as young and naïve as she entered graduate school. Sarah discussed reliance on others and then her feelings of inadequacy. Diedre's nemesis of bad grades loomed in her awareness. Consistent with the Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) quest plot model, the women began tentatively as they followed their disciplinary love into graduate school. Aisenberg and Harrington reported that the words "naïve and innocent" (p. 45) probably occurred more often than any others as they interviewed tenured and non-tenured female faculty members. The participants in

this study also verbalized these words and synonyms as they discussed the early stages of their professional lives.

Maggie incorporated these descriptors in her explanation of the graduate school interview process, recalling that she thought, “Oh My God! I’m twenty-one still. And I have no idea what I’m doing.” (1) Beyond her entrance into graduate school, she described a consistent sense of not knowing what she was doing: “See my entire professional history is a series of me falling into the right thing because I was completely green. I had very little guidance. I knew not what I was doing.” (1) Maggie’s word for how she felt was “green,” a word consistent with “naïve” as used by the Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) participants. Sarah described herself as “clueless” when she visited the university campus during her application process. Diedre “felt really insecure about my abilities because I hadn’t gotten a degree in English” (1) and referred to herself as an “idiot.” In spite of their self doubts, each woman continued her quest for academic attainment in graduate school (Aisenberg & Harrington). There, each woman further uncovered and developed her passion for the discipline to which she was attracted as a child.

The graduate school years were more than falling in love with a discipline or finding a passion. They were times when the women immersed themselves in what were already areas of interest. In that process, they developed intimacy with their discipline and emerged as professionals in their fields. Clark and Corcoran (1986) propose a three-stage process through which individuals progress as they become professionals. The experiences of the women in this study are consistent with the three-stage model. During the first stage, anticipatory socialization, persons are recruited for and choose their

occupations. The participants in this study in many ways encountered stage one of the socialization process as children with specific interests related to academic disciplines. Their more formal entry into stage one occurred at the point that they decided to pursue graduate degrees. Stage two, occupational entry and induction, parallels their time in graduate school as they immersed themselves in the disciplines and began developing into professionals. Stage three, role continuance, is the point at which new academic professionals obtain job satisfaction and involvement. The progressions of participants in this study are individualized and flexible, but nevertheless consistent with Clark and Corcoran's stages. Maggie, Diedre, and Sarah encountered anticipatory socialization before experiencing occupational entry as professionals. Their versions of the third stage will be discussed in a later section.

Maggie's process of developing from a youth who "wanted to help people" into a psychologist was an integral component of her graduate school experience. She elaborated about the process:

I found it fascinating to think about the reasons why people do things they do and why people are so different....I think the longer I was in graduate school, the more – well, as it should, the more complex it got. You know, at the beginning it's very much like, "I want to help people." You don't know a whole lot beyond that. And um – I think the longer I went on, the more interested I got in like personality differences and theories of – counseling theories. I really like counseling theories and all the, you know, different perspectives on what makes people have problems and what makes them get better. And trying to see how all of those things are really kind of looking at the same problem from different perspectives, maybe aren't as disparate as people think they are. So, I think it got more intellectual and maybe a little less, you know, "I just want to help people." Deeper reasons as I went along. (1)

Maggie first shifted from her adolescent interest in helping people to an intellectual interest in counseling theories. She began developing insights into people's problems and

solutions to those problems. She described the process of moving from that point into becoming a psychologist:

To me it was more like becoming a psychologist as a person. So in terms of connection with the discipline, it was like becoming a different kind of person than I was when I started. And I guess maybe, maybe a lot of disciplines are like that. I don't really know, but psychology in particular, I think, changes you in many ways, and so I think, to me, it was a real growth process. I felt like I was definitely somebody different at the end than I was at the beginning – We have talked about it before, my husband and I, as a passion because that's one of things that our major professor used to – Freud had a quote where he said everyone – something like “Everyone has to find their consuming passion, and I finally found mine, and it's psychology.” (2)

From a social interest in helping people to an academic interest in personality theory, Maggie evolved into a “psychologist as a person.”

Diedre had loved reading and creative writing since her early childhood days. In graduate school she gained the opportunity not only to immerse herself in these activities, but also to share them with others. She communicated her pleasure, saying,

I guess what I'm drawn to. I love to read. I've been reading since my grandma taught me when I was three. And I had told you the other day that my major professor had that wonderful, wonderful thing on her email signature: “What could be better than to write articles and to buy Persian cats with the profits?” I mean, wow! Reading articles, reading books, getting together with people, talking about these things.

But the other side of what I love in English is I love the whole creative writing aspect. That was what drew me to it in the first place when I was a child. That was what I wanted to do. (2)

In the discipline of English, Diedre found a context in which she could live and work surrounded by reading, creative writing, and people. She reported on how she evolved into an academic professional as she studied in her graduate program:

I learned the language of theory and developed a theoretical approach to what I wanted to do. I do psychoanalytic feminist criticism, and that's what they were teaching me how to do. (1)

As far as the language of it, I jumped right in and got into critical theory when I was in graduate school. And not everyone did. There were some anti-theory. I'm very interested in it. It gave me a lens, as we talked about the other day, through which to read the material I wrote my dissertation on. That was really exciting to me. (2)

Diedre progressed in her professional life from only reading and writing to learning a theoretical approach to studying texts and employing a language within the theory.

Just as Diedre had loved reading and writing as a child, Sarah had been drawn to science since she was very young. As she progressed academically, her love for science deepened and her understanding of what she loved became clear. She loves the adventure of investigating a question that leads not to answers, but to more questions. Sarah indicated that the unpredictability of her research is a match for her personality because "I'm the kind of person who gets bored easily. And so, if new questions didn't arise from that, I would be completely and utterly bored." (2) Sarah loves the process of asking questions that lead to more questions. Scientific research was and is an "adventure" for her. In spite of her love for research, Sarah encountered barriers on her journey toward becoming a professional scientist.

The first professor with whom she was assigned to work was out of the country for the first half of the semester. He had left without giving Sarah clear instructions about what to do, and she recalled how her interactions with him influenced her experiences during her first year of graduate school:

My first year of graduate school was horrible. My first semester because when he comes back from Germany in – the end of October, he asks me what I've completed, what I've accomplished. And I said, "Well. I really wasn't sure where to start. Um. You know, we didn't really talk about the project that I wanted to do yet. And I was afraid to get started on something, and I'm sort of just a little lost. And no one in the lab really could help me. They were all busy." And I said, "Do you think we could maybe get started now?" And he said, "Sure." So, once again another

person in my life who I found – I thought was unreasonable, you know, and very discouraging because that year, after experiencing him, I almost decided to leave graduate school because I thought, “I’m not cut out for this.” I just thought, “I’m just not cut out.” (1)

The professor’s expectations and unclear communication generated doubts for Sarah about whether or not she should be in graduate school at all. She recounted the unfamiliar experience of feeling academically unprepared:

The funny thing was, in grad school, all five years – my first year was horrible, but even the second, third, and fourth, I felt inadequate. My – I felt very inadequate compared to some of the other kids in the department. Now some of them dropped out. Those were the ones I felt at least more adequate than them. But I felt ill-prepared for grad school. (1)

Sarah felt unprepared as a student in the classroom and reported that she also felt incompetent in her research efforts.

I *always* felt – when I did my research I felt like it was – I was so far behind my other colleagues. I felt like half the time I was faking it....When I was doing research, sometimes I was like, “I feel inadequate. I feel like my research project is much less, you know, advanced than my partner over here. I feel like I know fewer techniques than anyone in the lab. I feel like I have to get help all the time.” Which probably wasn’t necessarily true. I think it was just a psychological thing. (1)

Sarah’s feeling of inadequacy permeated her graduate level classroom experiences as well as her research experiences. Although she loved her discipline, she doubted her abilities to continue through the doctoral program. Her perspective changed when she moved into the arena in which she found her other love and her niche: teaching.

Graduate school offered each woman conditions of possibility. They benefited from their educational opportunities and were able to merge their little girl interests and inclinations into the love of their academic disciplines. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) noted that women may choose an academic discipline based on inner promptings and establish a love relationship with the subject matter. The women in this study reflect that

tendency. As these women traversed their graduate school pathways they faced their feelings of doubt, and each woman encountered her personal potential limitation. Maggie depended on happenstance; Diedre had poor undergraduate grades; and Sarah felt unprepared and incompetent. However, they successfully navigated the processes through socialization as they chose their disciplines and through occupational entry as they immersed themselves in their disciplines. Their educations developed their professional identities consistent with the Clark and Corcoran (1986) model of anticipatory socialization and occupational entry. As they completed their doctoral programs, they emerged as disciplinary professionals with yet another commonality and condition of possibility. All three women had become teachers.

“It’s a Teaching Thing.” (Sarah)

When presented the question “What do you do?,” the three participants offer similar answers. Maggie said, “I say I’m a psychology professor.” (2) Diedre answered, “I’ve been an English professor at Thaxton State.” (3) Sarah responded with a related, but more limited answer, “I teach.” (2) During graduate school, each of them had worked as teaching assistants. In doing so, they discovered both their abilities in and attractions to teaching. As suggested by Aisenberg and Harrington (1988), graduate school developed their professionalism and helped shape their identities. Consistent with the Clark and Corcoran (1986) model, they had identified role specifications for their careers. Tomlinson-Keasey’s (1994) exploration of achievement differences between males and females suggested that “very few women develop personal career goals and pursue them in a single minded way” (p. 242). Although the women in this study pursued their goals of completing doctoral degrees, they did not initially pursue goals of teaching. Becoming

teachers was more a result of personal inner proclivity than of practical decisions about shaping their careers.

Each woman told her story of discovering her position as a teacher. Maggie included exposure to teaching as a “happy accident.” (1) She had not considered a career in academia because her understanding of teaching in higher education was based on what she had observed at the two large research universities where she had been a student. On the one hand, she did not like what she saw and was not interested in the kind of academic career that involved a significant amount of research. On the other hand, she recalled how her experiences in teaching situations provided a different understanding of post-secondary teaching:

I had done some teaching in grad school. I taught, as part of a teaching assistantship. In my program, because it was not really very academically focused, many people did not do any sort of teaching. They did other things as assistantships – research, or they worked at other kinds of clinically-related jobs. But I did assistantship teaching. So I taught, I guess, a total of about three semesters of a class that our department did for teacher education majors. It was like a basic “helping skills for people who are going to be teachers” kind of class. And I really liked it a lot – liked teaching a lot. (1)

Maggie had not considered a career in academia because she was only familiar with faculty members at research universities. Through her teaching assistantship, she discovered that she very much enjoyed teaching.

Sarah also experienced teaching as part of her graduate program. She was expected to teach during her first year of graduate school in spite of her terrible fear and reluctance. She thought, “I have to stand up in front of people and talk?” and acknowledged that “just the thought of having to stand up in front of a bunch of college kids and teach ‘em stuff was *terrifying*.” (1) Sarah’s career goals did not include teaching at that time, but she did what she was required to do in her program of study. Diedre had



considered teaching high school at one time, but she explained how the idea of teaching at the college level developed after she started graduate school:

I went into the master's program in the Department of English in the Creative Writing track. And within probably two semesters, or at the time quarters of doing that, I knew that I loved teaching. I got really lucky. So the first class I ever taught, my second semester in graduate school, I had six students in there. It was an English 1101 class. And I loved it! And I remember the students to this day. I remember who they were. I can see their faces, and I remember their names. And I said, "Gosh. This is really fun. I like teaching college." (1)

Diedre did not have Sarah's reluctance to teach, but she, like Maggie and Sarah, discovered her love for teaching while working as a teaching assistant.

While teaching assistantships in graduate school opened new career possibilities for Maggie, Diedre, and Sarah, each woman expressed the unique attraction that teaching provided her. Maggie discovered that teaching was energizing. Diedre found a position that connected her love of reading and writing with her free-spirited creativity. Sarah experienced a sense of competence and confidence that had been absent from many of her graduate school experiences.

Maggie's counseling-focused graduate program required an intensive internship experience. While she was working full time as an intern therapist, she had an opportunity to teach psychology classes part-time at TSC. She described that time in her life, saying,

I was really, really starting to freak out about what I was going to do when I finished my internship because I had – you know – *this* [teach] is what I wanted to do. I knew that I really liked the atmosphere here. And um – I thought, "I'm having so much fun at this. I really enjoy it. I don't seem to get tired of it. So maybe these are all good signs that I should do this full time." (1)

As she enjoyed teaching, she also compared her responses to time spent teaching with her reactions to doing therapy. She indicated that she liked teaching and furthermore "found

it very – and I still do – I find it really energizing. It’s one of the only things that – doing therapy sometimes I find really draining, even though I like it.” (1) She elaborated further about her reactions to teaching:

When I teach, even though sometimes when I go in I’m tired, and kind of like, “Gosh. I wish I didn’t have to teach today.” I always feel good when I leave. Like I always feel kind of energized and excited. And that’s probably the only thing I’ve ever done career-wise where I’ve felt that way. So, I guess that’s one reason why I was so – you know – I was really excited when the possibility of a teaching job came up here. (1)

Maggie’s awareness of her responses to teaching led her to relegate practicing psychology to a secondary career position and to choose to focus on teaching, the career activity that she found energizing.

Diedre’s educational and career paths had always been influenced by the practical aspects of needing to support herself financially. But when she began teaching, she embraced the creative aspects of merging her love of reading and writing into her relationships with students. She explained why she refers to her class times as “meeting with my students”:

One of the things I love about teaching is I love what they have to offer. And – sometimes what they have to offer is just as valuable as what I have to offer. I like to keep a space where they can put that out there....I think it’s [teaching style] a little unconventional, and I don’t think it would work for everybody....People have looked askance at it. I have a lot of fun with them, and some people don’t. (2)

Diedre values her students and their ideas and incorporates that valuing into her teaching style. Her interviews were peppered with anecdotes about how she incorporates her enthusiasm and fun-loving spirit into her teaching. For example, she told about teaching a particular text:

One of the texts I *love* to teach, *Love to teach* is a *Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner because it’s such a creepy story. And I used some psychoanalytic theory to talk about that because a horrifying measure to

that is, “Oh my gosh!” At the end we realize this old lady’s been sleeping with her dead boyfriend. She’s like been all loved up with this corpse here. [guttural sound] And without fail, the students are just disgusted by this. So, “why are we disgusted by this?” becomes the question....It made the story – even though the theory was complicated, it made the story say something new to them. It was a way to get into it. So, when I talk to my students, and what I try to be mindful of in my own work, this is simply a lens through which we look. (1)

Diedre found enjoyment in guiding her students to a disgusting image and helping them to understand the text. She also described creating fun outside the teaching context:

I mean for example, one of the things that I did at State University that everybody was just, “What are you doing?” The kids wanted extra credit. They always want extra credit. I had put as a joke on their syllabus – their final was at 7:00 at night. And they were, “We don’t want to come to a night final.” But I had put on there “Final Exam, 7 p.m., black tie optional.” And the idiots read this, and they go, “Oh, really? For extra credit?” And I thought, “Well why not,” because usually extra credit is just an exercise in breathing anyhow. “I’ll give you points if you’ll do this silly activity.” So, okay. And I said, “Yeah, we’ll do that. I’ll give you extra credit if you come in formals to the final.” And I gave my final in this huge room with about three other classes. My kids showed up in prom dresses with their hair up. They had on tuxedos. They were gorgeous. . . . They *loved* it! They *loved* it! But everybody else was going, “*What* are you doing? What is it?” The other teachers that were in there go, “Why are your students wearing prom dresses to the final?” But they loved it. Well, and it’s not so far a field from saying, “Read this article and answer questions about it.” So, I do things like that with them. I have a lot of fun with them, and some people don’t. (2)

While teaching English at State University, Deidre was in a position that gave voice to her creativity and voices to her students while incorporating her disciplinary love of reading and writing. Although her disappointments at TSC have negated some of her joy in teaching English, she expected to incorporate creativity and student voice in her new position teaching advertising.

Sarah’s attraction to her discipline was tempered during graduate school by her feelings of inadequacy as a student and as a research assistant. In contrast, her

experiences as a teaching assistant revealed an arena of competence and enjoyment that she described with enthusiasm:

And so, my first semester of teaching was *fabulous*. I loved it. I spent a lot of time – I probably spent too much time preparing lessons....When I got into Charlie's lab, he's like, "Can you at least – the time you spend at least spend it at night at home? I mean you need to be doing research here." He wasn't very encouraging about the teaching. He was like, "As a matter of fact, as soon as I have money for you to have a research assistantship, we're going to get rid of this TA-ship because you're spending too much time on this. This is not important." I said, "Well, it is kind of to me because I like it." (1)

Sarah loved the teaching she was doing and was able to verbalize to her professor that the teaching had an important place in her life. She also experienced feelings of adequacy based on positive student evaluations and encouraged through recognition as she won teaching assistant awards from the department and the university. Sarah had progressed from feeling terrified of the thought of teaching to investing more of herself into her new-found interest. She indicated that receiving awards for her teaching validated her investment and her interest:

The funny thing was, in grad school, all five years – my first year was horrible, but even the second, third, and fourth, I felt inadequate. . . . But then when I was teaching, I felt comfortable. And so, that's one of the reasons I really liked to do it. . . . I actually won awards for teaching, so it proved that I had a knack for it. (1)

From recognizing her "knack" for teaching to affirming that she enjoyed teaching, Sarah refocused her career path away from scientific research, saying, "The main aspect of my career is teaching – teaching in research and teaching in academia." (2) Sarah has immersed her love of science and investigation into her teaching career. As she talked about relationships with colleagues in other disciplines at TSC, she clarified, "When we get together, we're teachers. It's a teaching thing." (2) The participants in this study have defined their careers as "a teaching thing."

As Maggie, Diedre, and Sarah related their stories of becoming teachers in academia, they told stories of “individual inclinations and personal agendas” (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988, p. 19). Each woman had a moment of awareness that teaching was the right professional focus for her. Maggie experienced energy in teaching. Diedre had fun when teaching. Sarah felt competent when teaching. Miller (1997) asserts that choosing one possibility automatically makes others unavailable. The women’s decisions to embrace the teaching aspect of academia made other possibilities less available to them. For instance, Maggie described having difficulty completing her required hours for obtaining licensure:

Getting licensed is the biggest thing because I haven’t been able to do that. And now I’ve gotten to this point where the – it’s too soon....I can’t get everything done, and I’ve had to kind of drop that. So, if I wanted to do clinical work full time, that would be a huge hurdle. I’d have to go back and basically start going through that process again. (3)

Maggie did not have the time to invest in the supervised clinical hours required for licensure. Diedre shared that she has not had time to invest in writing creatively:

I’m working on a book of poetry right now. I’m working on a novel. I have all kinds of projects in my head. I want to be published. I want to make that happen. The students here really are a little bit too unprepared to do the kind of work that I’d like to do, which has been a problem. (1)

As a teacher at TSC, Diedre’s work with under-prepared students limited her time to work on her poetry and her novel. Sarah does little research except in a teaching setting, explaining,

I kind of moved away from research on my own. I get bored with research, and I don’t feel like I’m as good at it as I should be. I don’t put enough into it, I guess. So research by myself, I have no interest. That’s why I couldn’t go into a career in industry just doing research. (3)

Although Sarah perceives this as her career choice, her positioning as a teacher makes a career in research less available to her.

The women who participated in this study all had other career paths available to them as they entered graduate school. While each has a personal reason for her choice, the result is three women in the traditional female career of teaching. They have chosen a career in which relationships with students and “caring, concern, and connection” (Martin, 2000, p. 131) typify their daily lives. In their academic setting and by their personal choice, they give of themselves and perform nurturing roles traditionally associated with women. In the context of research data, their stories reverberate with traditional positioning of women in academia. Their careers are aligned with teaching, one of the private sphere functions stereotypical of female professions. Consistent with employment patterns for female faculty members described by Miller and Miller (2002), they are employed at a smaller, teaching institution rather than in a large research university. The participants in this study fit the statistical consistency of women’s over-representation in careers traditionally female, such as teaching, and under-representation at more prestigious institutions.

In contrast to the statistical realities, I view the women’s positions in the context of their stories and view the familiar statistical problem with a different perspective that McCarl Nielson (1990) suggests is consistent with feminist research. In the Hulbert and Schuster (1993) review of studies related to women’s processes of making sense of their lives, they presented evidence that women assemble the aspects of their lives in ways that create individual meaningful wholes. I encounter three women who explored their options and themselves and pursued a career that made sense of their professional lives. The three women in this study had other career options available to them. Their decisions to pursue teaching careers emerged from their experiences and their understanding of

contexts in which they find meaningful work. They demonstrated agency in their decisions as they rearranged their professional paths in their fluid, ongoing lives. Sarah rejected pressures from her professors and some friends to continue in research. Diedre acknowledged the realities of being able to earn more income in other fields, such as advertising, but chose teaching. Maggie was on her way to psychologist licensure, but discovered that teaching is a better fit for who she is. I encountered strength and agency in these women's stories of forging their career paths in the directions that are consistent with their understanding of themselves, an understanding at variance with male norms for their academic careers. Studying these individuals balances the statistical picture of academic women and "represent[s] more accurately the complexity, heterogeneity, diversity of human personality" (Stewart, 1994, p. 1). Their decisions to be teachers have opened conditions of possibility for how they live their lives.

"A Place That I Could Kind Of Fit In and Focus Mostly on Teaching" (Maggie)

The three women interviewed for this study fell in love with their disciplines beginning at young ages. They entered graduate school with expectations of exiting as a writer, a scientist, and a psychologist. Consistent with the Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) participants who experienced identity transformation during graduate school, Diedre, Sarah, and Maggie each exited graduate school having transformed her identity to "teacher." Finding a place to "fit in and focus mostly on teaching" was incorporated into their searches for employment and their entries into full-time faculty positions. Tierney and Bensimon (1996) identified four reasons that the women in their study accepted their academic positions: it was the only job offered; the location was in a community that was favorable for a spouse or for children; the department or institution had characteristics

they were seeking; they were following a partner. These participants reported motives consistent with these four reasons.

Diedre accepted the position at TSC because it had characteristics she sought in an institution where she would teach. She elaborated on her job search experiences:

When I went on the market the final year when I ended up getting this job, I had two other interviews. And I got those jobs as well. So, I was juggling multiple offers when this one came through. The other ones were at community colleges in Maryland. And when it came right down to it, I really didn't want to be at a community college. Even though the money, the financial package was a lot more attractive, the teaching loads were heavier. I guess, ironically, I didn't know how much of a community college this institution was still like. I had decided that I was pretty happy staying in state. I was pretty happy with the notion of being near College Town if not in College Town. Metropolitan [large nearby city] was intriguing to me. And I do think that most people are dictated somewhat geographically. This was the best location. So, that had a great deal to do with my choice even though the other people were offering me more money. So that's kind of what brought me here. (3)

Although Diedre was not seeking a location favorable for a spouse or child, she did find the location favorable for herself. She also preferred a four-year institution to a community college. Thus, location and institutional characteristics were key factors in her decision to accept the job offer from TSC.

Sarah's decision was also influenced by location and characteristics. In her case, she considered locations that were favorable for her spouse, noting,

At the time I had my husband. At the time he was my boyfriend, my fiancé. And his area of expertise is southeastern archeology. And so when we discussed finding jobs....It wasn't decided like, you know, completely, but we discussed that we would look in the southeast first. And start in Metropolitan and within the southeast. I applied to places in the southeast essentially. (2)

By only applying for positions in the southeast, she had narrowed the locations to those that were favorable for her husband. When Sarah received two job offers, she chose based on the responsibilities of the position. Her explanation of her job search indicated



that institutional characteristics were significant in framing the kinds of expected responsibilities:

So I applied, and I was offered an interview at Thaxton, and I was offered an interview at Small Private University (SPU). And SPU was looking for somebody – they were actually looking for someone to, I guess, to be more of an administrator slash teacher for their satellite program. And they wanted someone to do the general ed science stuff. And they wanted someone who actually would be a department – All of the duties that they described to me, they didn't list it as department head position. It sounded like a department head. But they still just listed the position as an assistant professor of biology. And so I thought that was kind of strange. And I wasn't ready for that.

I was offered both jobs, and I took Thaxton. So it was actually really easy. I mean, I got two interviews, offered the jobs, and it was an easy decision for me which one was more suited to me. (2)

Sarah preferred the position that was distinctively teaching within a natural sciences department of a teaching institution rather than a position that was administratively focused in a university satellite campus.

Maggie's decision was somewhat different because she applied only to TSC. Thus, she was offered only one job. Although she did not follow her husband to the location, she did prefer the location because his career was already established in the geographic area. She explained, "I got married my second year in grad school. And uh – so that was something of – that was a factor because my husband was ahead of me....And my husband's really happy with his job." (1) After seeking and obtaining her graduate program counseling internship in a location near where her husband worked, Maggie had the opportunity to teach part-time. His location was an influence on her internship and therefore on her applying to the position at TSC. She recounted her job search process saying,

I just taught that one [class] that semester. And at that point they [TSC Psychology Department] thought they were going to have a position open in the fall, and they told me, you know, when it was – it was clear I was doing okay, they suggested that I apply for that. I don't think that – it was right at the end of spring. You know these things always happen last minute. They never figure out their budget until they are like *way* into the process. So I don't think it was until the end of that spring semester or maybe right at the beginning of summer that I actually applied. (1)

After teaching at TSC one semester, Maggie applied for the full-time faculty position that became available in the Psychology Department. She described the apprehension that was part of the job search process:

I was really, really starting to freak out about what I was going to do when I finished my internship because I had – you know – *this* is what I wanted to do. I knew that I really liked the atmosphere here. And um – I thought, “I'm having so much fun at this. I really enjoy it. I don't seem to get tired of it. So maybe these are all good signs that I should do this full time.” And – but I didn't, you know, didn't know for sure that it was gonna happen....I was very, very anxious about this whole process in getting a job and everything. And I was looking at some clinical jobs as well. But I ended up signing – getting this job. (1)

TSC offered Maggie the position she wanted, and she accepted the job. Her reasons and the reasons described by Diedre and Sarah were consistent with the four that Tierney and Bensimon (1996) extrapolated from their interviews. Obtaining employment in an institution with a teaching focus provided what seemed to be a good match for these junior faculty members who love teaching. Their decisions parallel the groups of faculty identified by Finnegan (1993) who chose employment at comprehensive universities where they could focus on careers in teaching.

These three women arrived as junior faculty members within the School of Arts and Sciences at a teaching institution. Maggie had found a “a place that I could kind of fit in and focus mostly on teaching and a lot less on the research side of it.” (1) Diedre was expecting to be in a compatible department “doing some interesting teaching and some

interesting work.” (1) Sarah had “an easy decision for me which one [position] was more suited to me.” (2) Having made the transitions from being students to professionals and having found their first full-time academic positions in a teaching institution, they began the early stages of the third stage, role continuance, in the Clark and Corcoran model (1986). This stage is characterized by investment in a professional position and job satisfaction. The women entered an institution that provided conditions of possibility for having the teaching careers they desired and anticipated. As these women began their careers, they demonstrated what Clark and Corcoran (1986) identify as job involvement and commitment. Their emerging careers were also framed in specific expectations.

Maggie’s experiences at TSC have been consistent with her expectations for her career. She explained,

I expected to enjoy it because I knew that I liked teaching. And I have enjoyed it. I expected to get tenure. Of course, I still don’t know about that, but I know that I’m on track for it. I’ve at least gone through that three-year check thing where they say you’re making good progress. So, I expected to do well in that sense, to be able to be successful at it. I expected to enjoy working with students and have good relationships with them. And I do. I think – I have enjoyed that and have pretty good relationships with my students in general. So, I think my expectations were more in line. (3)

Her expectations that she would enjoy teaching and have good relationships with her students have been validated. Although she has not yet obtained tenure, she believes that she is making the necessary progress toward that expectation and goal.

Sarah described how she expected to begin a teaching career at TSC and move on to a different institution:

When I started my career here, I guess I expected to not be here very long. I expected this was my chance to start teaching. And that I figured I would be applying places a year later or two years later and that it was going to be a stepping stone. I totally didn’t expect to still be here....I was hoping to move, I guess – not necessarily to a larger university, but – I don’t

know. I always had this dream of working at like a small private, smaller, you know? And so, I was using this sort of as experience to move on to that. It's harder to get those positions right out of graduate school. They want to *know* that you can actually support undergraduate research. Not just – you know what I mean? Like that you could actually write grants and stuff like that. (3)

Sarah began her teaching career anticipating that she would gain the experience and credentials necessary to move to a small, private institution. Instead, she has remained at TSC and at the point of the interviews, had no specific plans to leave.

Diedre also had expectations as she began her career at TSC, but having them unmet has been a factor in her decision to leave for a different institution. She recalled,

Well let's see when I got here, okay. I think I probably articulated to you in some ways that this has turned out to be somewhat disappointing. Because I had had such a wonderful experience in my graduate institution, I expected to come to a campus where things were organized and people were on top of stuff. Because I didn't really understand how you could function without these things being in place. So, I did expect that. I expected the people above me to know what they were doing. And I expected them to be people that I could admire and follow instruction and – I think I expected a more evolved place than I ended up at. What else? I expected, because I walked in the door and saw who the students were, I expected there to be resources in place to help these people because they weren't prepared to be here. I was appalled to discover that they weren't. (3)

Based on her life in graduate school, Diedre expected to begin her teaching career in an institution with leaders she could respect and with resources students need. She continued,

What else did I expect? I expected to have more time to call my own, and they ate me alive with service, especially in the first year....Oh, it was awful. It was awful. I had barely a moment to call my own. And it was very uncomfortable for me. I was very unhappy with it. (3)

Diedre also arrived with expectations for how her personal life and her professional life would intersect. Unfulfilled expectations about the institution combined with dissatisfaction in her personal life to influence her decision to leave TSC. In the role

continuance stage of the professional socialization process as identified by Clark and Corcoran (1986), Maggie and Sarah have obtained a sense of satisfaction in their careers and are committed to teaching in their disciplines. They encounter conditions of possibility for their careers. In contrast, Diedre found neither satisfaction nor commitment at TSC. Encountering more limitations than possibilities, she has made a career change. While Diedre's experiences were much more negative than Maggie's and Sarah's have been, all three women have encountered some of the tensions of the academic workplace. These come into play as the women seek to live satisfying lives and will be discussed in the next section.

“Ways to Keep Your Life the Way You Want It While You're Doing This” (Diedre)

Some of the tensions in faculty teaching careers are inherently connected to students. In managing their professional lives, each of the women in this study faces similar issues related to teaching and to students, including the amount of work required and challenging student issues. Tierney and Bensimon (1996) found that junior faculty members tend to work numerous hours in efforts to meet their responsibilities. The women in this study confirm that finding. Diedre said, “It's kind of never ending – the work of it.” (2) Sarah's words summarize the comprehensive challenge. “Teaching...is a lot of work if you do it right; it's a lot of work.” (3) Maggie's biggest challenge occurs at the individual level of communicating effectively to the students. “I guess I should say, to make the information understandable to students, I think, is sometimes a challenge.” (2) These academicians are committed to being good teachers, and fulfilling that commitment is time-consuming. Sarah described her conflict between preference and reality, saying, “I hate to compromise what I do with my students just because I run out

of time. I think that's the biggest challenge – finding the time to do it all and do it right.”

(3) Sarah encounters difficulty having adequate time to maintain her teaching standards.

Other challenges involve the student population at TSC.

Diedre and Maggie both expressed concerns about students' lack of preparation for college work. Diedre's frustrations extend beyond the actual students to disappointment with the lack of resources for the under-prepared students. She clarified the assumptions with which she arrived at TSC:

We're not going to have students who are as prepared. I expected, because I walked in the door and saw who the students were, I expected there to be resources in place to help these people because they weren't prepared to be here. I was appalled to discover that they weren't. For example, I had students from other countries, non-native speakers in an 1102 class I taught last summer, who could barely speak English, much less write it. And I was amazed somebody had put them through 1101. So, I did some legwork, and I discovered there's no ESL support on this campus, yet we are admitting international students. I didn't know students this poor could get into college. And that is not their fault. I don't blame them. (3)

The students whom Diedre encountered in her classes at TSC were not as academically prepared as she had assumed they would be. Then, her frustrations increased as she was unable to identify the services and resources she thought they needed.

Maggie voiced her concerns about students' academic preparation specific to their writing skills:

People come in completely and totally unprepared for writing even the simplest things. And in psychology, if we're training people to be helping professionals, every helping profession that you could possibly enter always involves writing: note-taking, report writing, anything. So that's always a big challenge and how to do that and how to give feedback to people in a way that they actually can understand it and hopefully make changes. (2)

Although Maggie is a psychology professor, she shares Diedre's concerns about students' writing abilities.

Another shared concern is the issue of boundaries with students. Maggie explained the challenge of balancing her concerns for students with her academic standards, saying,

I think you're always walking a line with how rigorous to be versus how understanding and, you know, flexible to be with student needs. And making – That's always a challenge when people come to you with, "Here's why I missed this." And "Can I please do this?" So when to make those decisions in terms of when to let people make things up and how hard to be versus how "soft" to be, I think is always a challenge. (2)

As Maggie faces her dilemma of being strict or lenient, she also described managing the boundaries between teaching and therapy:

I have had situations where I think people wanted to talk to me about problems, and I had to listen and be understanding with that, but then also try and steer them toward someone who could actually be their therapist because that's obviously not me. I have had a few situations, very few but some, with students being challenging or angry at, you know, a grade they've gotten or the way I graded something. But that hasn't happened too often. Those are – I think those are a lot harder for me to deal with than too clingy or too needy, is somebody being openly hostile. (2)

Maggie stated that she manages situations with both needy students and hostile students, maintaining appropriate relationship boundaries.

Another boundary issue the women confront is the boundary between their personal time and student expectations for their time. As Tierney and Bensimon (1996) found in interviews with junior faculty members, these women also describe student expectations that faculty members will be available whenever a student wants to communicate and face the dilemma of being evaluated on their accessibility to students

Maggie voiced her anger about student expectations, declaring,

I've said before, when I was an undergrad I would *never* have expected to have this kind of access to a professor. I would *never* have expected a professor to answer emails over a break, over Christmas holidays. I mean it would never even have occurred to email them or to try and contact them or to leave them a phone message or whatever. That wouldn't even

have been a possibility. And I have people who've come up here before on, during Spring Break and been like, "Why isn't Dr. Maggie in her office?" Look it's Spring Break! I'm not in my office! It is a *break*. (2)

When Maggie compares her own undergraduate perspective with her students' behaviors, she is incredulous. She described maintaining her needed boundaries in spite of the students' expectations:

And this kind of idea that we exist to constantly serve their needs gets frustrating at times. And that kind of stuff – That will bring out the hard ass in me more than anything. You know? That will make me say, "No, I didn't, and I just got here. I'm definitely going to deal with that, but it's going to take me a little time." Or something like that. I'm not – That kind of stuff I'm not overly – I can't think of the word – but, accommodating to this sort of expectation that I be constantly on call. I'm not really willing to accommodate. And I know some people who are, who will apologize, "I'm really sorry I didn't get back to you since you emailed me two hours ago." And I'm just not willing to apologize for that kind of stuff. I think that's part of setting boundaries and helping people understand the expectations of the real world. People do not respond to your needs instantaneously in the real world. (2)

Maggie is appalled that students have expectations that she will be constantly and immediately available to them. She establishes boundaries that include not apologizing for the time it takes her to respond.

Diedre's reaction to student demands on her time echoes Maggie's observation that the expectations are not consistent with the "real world":

They can be tiresome with it. They definitely can come when you don't want them to come. They can definitely be intrusive, invasive. And I think sometimes people get confused. You can be a really good teacher and not have to be on tap for them all the time. I think some people think part of being a really good teacher is this unlimited accessibility to them that eats away at your time, your privacy. And really, I don't think you're so effective when you're so available to them because in the real world, who's that available to you? Well, they will eat you alive. (2)

Diedre shares Maggie's frustration with students' intrusiveness and is adamant that unlimited accessibility is not a prerequisite for being a good teacher.



In addition to the continuing student demands, Sarah faces the repercussions of student expectations of her time when they voice disapproval on end-of-semester evaluations. She explained her frustration, saying,

If a student comes by and it's not during your office hours and you're not there, sometimes – not with all students – but sometimes it'll end up on your teaching evaluation that you're not available. Because when they showed up – it doesn't matter if you're teaching or anything – they showed up and you weren't there at the moment that they wanted you and they didn't email you ahead of time. It's real frustrating sometimes. (2)

Sarah is exasperated when students rate her as “unavailable” on evaluations without considering the circumstances of her being out of her office. Consistent with experiences of the Tierney and Bensimon (1996) participants, Sarah recognizes that “accessibility to students” (p. 62) is one measure of her professional accomplishments. She described experiencing student demands through email as well:

And I check email quite a bit. But yeah, I have some students who will email you. They'll email you at midnight the night before. If you haven't gotten back to them by 9:00 the next morning, you get a second email that's like angry now about how – “Are you ignoring my emails?” (2)

Sarah is aggravated by the student demands of instant communication and being available on their terms. While she and Diedre and Maggie confront the student expectations with a sense of incredulity, they establish and maintain boundaries that enable them to have the kind of lives they want while they deal with under-prepared students and overly demanding students.

Having the kinds of lives they want is also a function of the relationships and atmospheres within their academic departments. For three women at TSC a consistent theme was the importance of the department, its culture, and relationships within the departments. Austin (1996) defines culture as the “norms, beliefs, values, and assumptions that are fully integrated” (p. 57) into the department and suggests that the

departmental culture provides a framework through which the women experience events and every day lives. Their daily lives are also influenced by the climate of the department, which Anderson et al. (1994), define as perceptions and Austin (1996) identifies as departmental members' views. These women's perceptions and views are inextricably intertwined with relationships within their departments. Maggie in the psychology department and Sarah in the natural sciences department both experience support and positive relationships. Diedre's departmental experiences have been so negative for her that she has decided to leave TSC.

Maggie values the role of the department and described her department as one in which she and her colleagues are comfortable:

I think the department is what sets the tone. So, I think just in terms of people's satisfaction, how much they feel comfortable with the department as a whole, with the other people that they work with really makes a difference in their satisfaction with their position. (3)

In Maggie's opinion, the departmental tone influences job satisfaction, and she described a positive atmosphere:

For me, the department here is really important because we all get along really well. We're all pretty close. And that makes a big difference in the work environment in general, I think. You know, we occasionally do things together socially – not a lot just because we're all really spread out, living really far away from each other. But we got together this weekend and had a departmental party thing. (3)

Sharing social time reflects Maggie's view of a department with a positive tone. That tone is so important to Maggie that when asked if anything would prompt Maggie to leave her teaching position, she replied, "If the tone of the department somehow changed significantly." (3) She elaborated on the relationships within her department:

Within my department I feel like we're very – I feel like our relationships are very functional, I guess I should say. And I mean that in the best sense of the word. I think we're relatively close; we get along well. There isn't a

lot of strange tension. There isn't a lot of politics – the political kind of stuff going on. I don't think people are very manipulative of situations or, you know, trying to climb over each other or to climb up the ladder of success. A lot of the kind of things that I've seen in other departments, in terms of being a student, you really don't see in our relationships. So in general, I've felt like they were very good. (2)

With functional and relatively close relationships within the department, the faculty members work collaboratively and without political friction. Maggie indicated that they also work within a cultural norm that the department be student-centered:

I think “student-centered” would be a short version – that there's a focus on doing what is best for the students in terms of how best to teach them the things we think that they need to know. I don't mean that in terms of whatever the students want to do, because obviously nobody wants to do any work, you know, pretty much. But doing things that – using methods that we think are going to be the most helpful to help people learn, trying to be as available as is reasonable, and be open to answering questions and talking to people, and giving additional help I think is a big philosophy of our department. So, I'd say it's very student-centered, but also certainly a desire to be academically rigorous is something we talk about as well. (2)

The Psychology Department focus is consistent with Maggie's personal approach to teaching and allows her to relate positively to the others in the department.

Sarah also described a student-centered department in natural sciences with a permeating value of student research:

But I guess that underlying theme we really like the students to do research before they move on even if they're going to go to med school because it helps with critical thinking skills. Other than that – to make sure the students get a good experience in the classroom. We're all very concerned about that. If there's ever a problem with one class, Jack Fairburn [department head] presents it to us, and we try to solve the problem. We had an issue where a variety of students were complaining that tests were too hard in a certain class. As a group, we reviewed the tests for that particular section of class – everyone's version of the test. We came up with our professional opinion about how they compared to one another. And so, we're all concerned. (2)

The faculty in the Natural Sciences Department share a goal of providing research opportunities for their students and providing consistency within the department. Sarah

explained how the members of the department work collaboratively to resolve issues that might affect student experiences and share comfortable interpersonal relationships with each other:

I think we all get along pretty well so far. I mean, we had trouble, I guess, when Chad Harrison [former faculty member in department] was here. Many of us didn't get along or have the same philosophy as he did. His philosophy was much different than I think the main ideas we all had for our department. There was some strife and a lot of disagreement in our meetings, but that's changed, I guess this year. I mean it's sad. But I think he envisioned bigger things for our department, things that we weren't really ready to even consider. (2)

In the Natural Sciences Department where Sarah is affiliated, colleagues share a student-focused philosophy, and relationships within the department have been more positive since the departure of one particular faculty member.

In contrast to Maggie and Sarah, Diedre presented a negative view of her departmental experiences at TSC, saying,

I philosophically do not agree with the way that they've set the program up. And, I mean I don't broadcast that a great deal, but it wasn't preparing the students for the things I needed them to be doing in my classes, and I still don't think it prepares them well for what they're going to be doing later. I think that's great if you're Oberlin. I think that's great, you know, if you're some of these other small liberal arts colleges, but I think here it's extremely unrealistic. (2)

Diedre's ideas for how the curriculum should be developed and delivered are founded on her perceptions of student needs and are inconsistent with those of the overall department. She explained her opinion about how the department should respond to students:

One of the things that informs the way that I feel about that degree here is the needs of the students. And the students, I found, are very vocal about what they want and need and what they don't want and need. And it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out who these people are. Like we were talking about the last time and where they see themselves going. So, in my opinion, the responsible thing to do is to target your program for

who your students actually are, not who you wish they were. Because I think, as a teacher, there are a few students you're going to run across that you might be able to inspire to go in a different direction than they originally intended. And that's a beautiful thing. With me, I think it's always going to be a practical direction because that's how I communicate with them. Like I said, I think some disciplines are simply luxury. And the students on this campus, very few of them have time or room for luxury. So I feel that you have to be thinking about who they are and what their needs are. And they can articulate those up to a point. But they can't tell you how to structure and deliver what it is they're looking for because language, again. They don't have the language to talk about what it is because they haven't been trained yet. "I want – I want" and they're vague. So you have to sort of figure out what that is and then, I think, offer them that. (3)

Diedre's personal concerns with making practical decisions and living life pragmatically are evident in her opinions about the curriculum that should be taught. She believes strongly that the degree should match the characteristics and preferences of the students. What she encountered were curricular decisions that she perceived to be meeting the needs of faculty rather than students. She reported,

One of the disappointing things that I learned here is I saw that not being done. I saw people [faculty members] creating situations that were more beneficial for themselves and their own interests and desires than the students. And we all do that to a point. We're not immune from that. We all want to have lives that we enjoy and teaching that we enjoy. But – to me this population here is so easy to get, discern, and figure out what their needs are that I'm stymied when it seems that there's any discussion of some of these, as I perceive them, luxury disciplines being what these kids ought to be thinking about. (3)

Diedre was frustrated by a curriculum she considered "luxury" and by the faculty members who developed courses to meet their own interests rather than student needs. In addition to her incompatibility with the department's philosophy, she verbalized her frustration with the department head's personnel decisions:

There were some inequity going on with the way that perks and all that were handed out. I wasn't getting them. They hired a new person at a salary much higher than I was making. And I knew these things. Somebody was given a course release, and you know, I'm never going to

get a course release. And that made me really angry because I had worked hard, too, with service and could have used some time to myself. And I just went, “This is for the birds.” (3)

Diedre was angry about what she perceived as inequities in the department and frustrated by the unprepared students. Because she was unable to keep her life the way she wanted it at TSC within her department, she sought and obtained employment elsewhere.

Differences in departmental experiences for Maggie, Sarah, and Diedre are reflected in their discussions of tenure. The TSC Faculty Handbook<sup>5</sup> provides the following generic statement regarding tenure: “Professional excellence is reflected in the record of a faculty member's teaching, service, scholarly activities, and professional development.” The allowance for departmental differences emerges in the later statement, “An academic unit may also establish more specific criteria for tenure in that unit.” The departments in which these women work have identified specific criteria that at least partially account for their differences in managing tenure-related requirements.

Maggie, as a tenure track assistant professor, is comfortable with her positioning, saying,

I expected to get tenure. Of course, I still don't know about that, but I know that I'm on track for it. I've at least gone through that three-year check thing where they say you're making good progress. So, I expected to do well in that sense, to be able to be successful at it. (3)

Maggie feels positive about her professional reviews and believes that she will be able to obtain tenure. She framed her hesitations about tenure in the context of her pregnancy and the unknown territory of becoming a parent:

But sometimes I think, you know, “What if I want to work part-time some? What if I feel like once the baby's born, I don't want to go back to work full-time?” I don't think that's going to happen in part just because my career is still important to me. And if I'd only been teaching like a

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<sup>5</sup> I omit exact reference information to maintain anonymity.

year, it would be different. But I'm really so close to tenure at that point that it would seem like throwing a lot of years away to not stick with it full-time and get tenure at that point...I still think most of the time that I might end up doing what I thought I was going to do – you know, staying here and get tenure and move up the ranks. (3)

Although Maggie feels uncertainty about how her career meshes with parenthood, she settles back into her early expectations of remaining at TSC and becoming a tenured professor. Maggie recognizes that a part-time parent career track will not lead to tenure, but asks no questions about the gender disadvantage inherent in that recognition. Her unquestioning position reflects the invisibility of gender discrimination that Tierney and Bensimon (1996) identified in promotion and tenure processes that make no allowances for maternity or parenting leave and that Dooris and Guidos (2006) found slow the career progress of female faculty members. Maggie represents many female junior faculty members whose family decisions intersect with professional decisions and impact their career progress.

Sarah is the only one of the three women who already has tenure. She described tenure in the context of her career path, saying,

I did apply [for other positions] this year to try to move on, but things worked out where I stayed. What I was looking at wasn't really better or put me in a better place than I would be here. If that makes any sense. Because I got tenure this year, too....The thought of going somewhere else now – losing tenure, because, you know, when you start somewhere new, you have to start over. And stepping down possibly to assistant professor if you leave to go somewhere else. (3)

She had expected TSC to be a “stepping stone” in her career, but is less certain of that since being granted tenure. She is not eager to relinquish tenure or return to assistant professor rank. She also expressed her view that tenure is affirmation of her success as a teacher:

I just got tenure, so I guess that's a good indication that I'm doing okay professionally, too. . . . I was pretty excited. That felt good. But I think if I found out – if I didn't get tenure – and I found out that maybe I wasn't – If it dawned on me one day that I really wasn't good at doing this, I wouldn't want to do it. (3)

Sarah interpreted receiving tenure as an indication that her career is satisfactory and as validation that she is a good teacher. In a department characterized by congeniality and cooperation, Sarah earned tenure. Maggie, also in a positive department culture, is on track to being tenured.

In sharp contrast to their experiences, Diedre disliked her department and is repulsed by her experiences in a tenure track position. She labeled the tenure track requirements “insane” and “the carrot that you dangle while you're working us like field animals.” (3) Diedre is disgusted with her experiences on a tenure track position, viewing tenure as a manipulative system designed to overwork faculty members. She sees the excessive demands as unnecessary even within the tenure-track system, saying, “You cannot tell me that all this is necessary for tenure because I could be doing half of this and get tenure.” (3) As Diedre described her anticipation of life at a different institution, she expressed belief that being away from tenure would improve the quality of her life:

I think that my life, my day-to-day life is just going to be easier. . . . The fact that the job is not tenure track is just fine with me because the taste of it I got here – not interested. I kind of – what did I call it? Indentured servitude, at one point. It's like, “Okay the trade off is you can do anything you want to me because I'm looking to get tenure.” And that power structure doesn't really work. So, even though I won't get tenure, I don't have to meet the obligations of tenure. (3)

Without the demands of a tenure-track position, Deidre expected to have a better quality of life.

Diedre's negative experiences with the tenure-track system and within her department resound in contrast to Maggie's and Sarah's positive experiences. The



differences in departmental culture influence the women's contrasting experiences. Their positions within the department also provide conditions of possibility or limitations in the promotion and tenure process. As TSC's leaders changed promotion and tenure policies to require publishing, Maggie and Sarah were in position to comply with new standards as their departments had defined them. Having participated in institution-wide research related to pedagogy, Maggie explained that reporting and publishing her findings in that arena were acceptable. She said, "I was doing research with my active learning grant. And I got that published....And so I think – as far as our department goes – all the research that people have done has been teaching-related research in some way." (2) As a faculty member in a department that rewards teaching-related research, Maggie is able to maintain her teaching priority while also meeting the institutional publishing requirement.

Sarah clarified how her position in a department that incorporates undergraduate research into its curriculum provided a forum for her publishing:

But doing research with students, where you can kind of share with them *your* knowledge and have them think of ideas and ways to test this, is exciting to me. And so that's where I've kind of made that aspect of doing research and developing myself professionally. So, not just write my own publications, but get students involved and have them write publications with you. (3)

Sarah has been able to meet publishing requirements by continuing her department's practice of researching and writing with students. As TSC leaders have revised promotion and tenure requirements to assign more value to publishing and less to teaching, departmental differences affect the process. On the one hand, Maggie and Sarah have been positioned in departments that enable them to accommodate the changes while maintaining teaching as a primary emphasis. They have had conditions of possibility and

have kept their lives the way they want them. Diedre, on the other hand, has felt overwhelmed with extra college service responsibilities and experienced limitations without time to fulfill the publishing requirement.

I was having a lot of anxiety last year when they changed the publication standards here because honestly my fear was, “I know I can write. I know I can publish. I know I can do research. When am I going to have time to do this?” Well, summer. But then they do the searches in the summer. So, I was really thinking, “I’m going to go through all this and I will not get tenure because nobody here has allowed me any space and room to do the things that I need to do for tenure.” And what’s the point, if you feel like that? And I didn’t see any relief in sight for that either. (3)

In addition to her lack of opportunity to do the research and writing, Diedre suspected that she would not get tenure regardless of her performance. She experienced her department as a site of limitations. The combination of the pressure to publish and the time demands to fulfill her teaching and service responsibilities created a life that was not the kind she wanted. In accepting a new position, she expected to have the kind of life she wants, saying,

It’s kind of a quality of life thing. I think I’m gonna be much more peaceful and controlled and not running around like a chicken with my head off because some of the things that have bothered me are not going to be like that. I think I’m going to have a nicer, more peaceful life, and I think I’m going to actually end up being able to thrive better professionally. (3)

Diedre expects to have agency to fashion the personal life she desires and to experience conditions of possibility for her professional life.

Diedre verbalized one of her goals as “finding ways to keep your life the way you want it while you’re doing this.” (2) Each woman strives to maintain a satisfying life while managing the common demands of her role as a junior faculty member. The three women encounter challenges with students and with the amount of work required of a junior faculty member. Although their experiences within departments vary, the recurring

theme in their encounters has been the correlation of departmental culture with tenure, expectations, and relationships. Each woman lives and works within “unique constellations of relationships to other people” (Franz et al., 1994, p. 326) that have provided conditions of possibility or potential limitations and have helped shape the women’s identities. Relationships continue to inform the intersections of their personal and professional lives.

“Personal Connection . . . That’s Spiritual” (Diedre)

The stories and experiences of the women in this study are intertwined with relational connections. Each woman is unique, but the uniqueness of her identity is founded, as Franz et al. (1994) suggest, in a variety of evolving relationships with others. As the interviews portrayed each woman as separate, distinct, and unique, the conversations also revealed the role of relationships in creating the individuality. Each woman is who she is because of her “constellations of relationships” (Franz et al., p. 326). Her earliest connections with family and with specific family members paved the early path toward her discipline and created conditions of possibility. Sarah’s sisters influenced her in significant ways. Diedre’s mother and grandmother directed her educational course. Maggie’s course was affected by her parents’ divorce and her family’s insistence on education. While the women mentioned high school in passing, the next significant connections they discussed were those in undergraduate school.

The two types of undergraduate schools that Sarah attended influenced her relationship connections. She first attended a small Catholic college that provided small classes and opportunities to develop relationships with faculty members. She described Private Catholic College (PCC) as a place “where you could *talk* to your professors. I

could walk into their office at any point and say, ‘Hey, I have a problem.’ They were very open to that, and I *liked* that.” (1) She could communicate with her professors and obtain assistance with specific concerns. She continued, “Because I got to write papers at PCC, and my teachers actually were the ones who spent the time to give me comments about my writing and what not.” (2) Sarah’s connections with professors were beneficial to her as an undergraduate and later influenced her own career path toward a teaching institution. After transferring to City University for her junior and senior years, she encountered an environment in which relationships with faculty members were quite different from those she had shared at the small private college. She recalled,

Transferred to City University. Really didn’t get much out of it – as an undergraduate. Didn’t care for it too much when I took the big classes because I felt like just a number. You didn’t have a lot of contact with the professors....But the problem is, if I were the type of person who didn’t do well in school, I would probably fail out – being so – having not a whole lot of attention. (1)

At the large research university, Sarah did not have relationships with professors as she had experienced at the small college. Having experienced both types of institutions, she related being attracted to TSC as a place where she could focus on teaching and developing relationships with students:

The experiences you get at a large research-based institution versus the experiences you get at a smaller undergraduate institution. I think perhaps there are schools out there that target both, but I think they are very few. And it’s hard to find them....I keep coming back to Thaxton because I think it has the best of both worlds. (2)

Sarah’s career at TSC reflects her own undergraduate experiences. Her focus on teaching and relating to individual students parallels her undergraduate experiences at Private Catholic College while incorporating some research that is more typical at a larger university. She said, “The main aspect of my career is teaching. Teaching in research and

teaching in academia.” (2) Sarah’s relationship experiences in undergraduate school are factors in her professional identity of “teacher.”

In addition to the overall relationship connections that influenced Sarah’s identity, the specific relationship with her zoology professor had a major impact on Sarah’s career as the professor convinced Sarah to change from a pre-medical major to a science major. Sarah’s undergraduate connections with this professor as well as her experiences of being able to connect with professors at the smaller college and less able to connect with those at the larger university helped shape her identity as a faculty member at a teaching institution. Diedre and Maggie mentioned undergraduate relationships, but in much less detail than Sarah provided.

Although Diedre mentioned undergraduate relationships only briefly, the connections nevertheless influenced her decisions and her identity. She reported,

I was going to be in the journalism school. The first week I was at the State University, I started working at the campus radio station. And I really enjoyed that, and that’s where all my friends were and everything. So, you had to do pre-journalism work to get into the journalism school. And once you got in, there were tracks to it. So because I was already involved in and liking the radio thing, the track that I decided to do – which I believe no longer exists there – was Radio/TV/Film Production. So, I ended up getting my degree in that with a minor in English because I was still very interested in that. So I made it – I kind of made a compromise with my mother that I would do something more lucrative. And when I got my degree, I went out and I actually worked at a radio station. (1)

Diedre made an academic decision based on a practical compromise with her mother and the relationships with her friends who worked at the campus radio station. At this point in Diedre’s life, her career path was not moving toward either English or academia. The connections that influenced her professional identity emerged later as she approached graduate school.

Maggie also explained that her undergraduate school experiences included minimal relationship connections that influenced the development of her individuality:

In undergrad I didn't really have a lot of – I had some professors I really liked, but not a lot of experiences of feeling really like connected to a particular professor. I think the two people who supervised us being peer sex educators actually had an influence on me. And they were not who you would consider academics. They were – one of them was a master's in public health and one of them was a nurse. (1)

These supervisors helped shape Maggie's interest in teaching by developing the skills she needed as a peer educator. She described “a course for credit - on how to do presentations and how to talk about difficult topics with people and that kind of thing”:

Certainly I think that had an impact on my comfort level. Because we did a lot of practicing in front of each other and doing our presentations in front of each other, a lot of this more structured basics stuff that you don't always get when you go into a teaching assistantship or something. (1)

Maggie learned some teaching “basics” through her relationships with the supervisors of the peer sex education program and developed a comfort level in teaching settings that would help her develop into a college faculty member.

Relationships in graduate school played critical roles in the women's identity development within their disciplines as well as in their transitions toward identities as teachers. The relationships were factors in creating the conditions of possibility for the women to develop their professional identities. Sarah's experiences in graduate school were intertwined with two particular professors. Diedre's constellation of relationships included many friends and professors. Maggie's relationship with her major professor/advisor was the strongest academic influence in her identity development. Support or lack of support from their graduate school connections influenced these women's unique progressions and paralleled the stories shared in the Aisenberg and

Harrington (1988) interviews about the significance of encouragement and direction from graduate school professors.

Sarah's relationships with graduate school professors fall at the two extremes of the support continuum. Her first professor demonstrated lack of understanding as he expected her to begin work in his lab before the semester began, simply because she was in town. She recalled,

In Dr. Fritz's world, if you're in College Town, you should start research in the summer – even if you're not getting paid an assistantship. And in Dr. Fritz' world, my parents should have been supporting me while I'm there so that I could do this. So, anyways, he kept sending messages through graduate students who I had met and who I had known. They kept calling me up, saying, "Dr. Fritz is wondering where you are."...And so he left town actually in August and didn't leave anyone any instructions for what I was supposed to do. (1)

Sarah did not begin lab work with Dr. Fritz that summer, and he left town before her assistantship with him began. When he returned to the university and asked Sarah what she had accomplished, she explained that with no instructions from him, she had done no research. Sarah experienced Dr. Fritz as someone with unreasonable expectations for a new graduate student. She also described experiencing him as someone with sexist views about students, saying,

When he asked me finally, "What project do you want to work on?" And I told him which project I wanted to work on, he said, "Well, you *can't* work on that one." And I said, "Well, why not?" And he said, "Because Albert's working on that." And I said, "Well, sir, Albert and I talked about it, and he said that he wanted the other one that you want to give me." (It was purifying this enzyme.) "And I had said I wanted this one because we wanted to make sure we both didn't want the same one because we'd draw straws for it." And he said, "Well, I want Albert to do this one." And I said, "Well why?" And he said, "Well, because it's – women usually like to do the molecular work, and guys usually do better with the ecology. That's just, in my experience, the way it works out." And I said, "Well why does that matter? What if I want to do the ecology, and he wants to do the molecular?" And he said, "Well, let's just try it my way first." And I said, "Okay." (1)

Sarah was able to voice her questions and her preferences, but in her position as a student, already feeling out of place, she acquiesced to Dr. Fritz' preferences. His sexist reasons for her assignment were included in her overall negative experiences in his laboratory. After that discouraging semester, Sarah made arrangements to work in a different laboratory. She explained her decision to Dr. Fritz:

I told Dr. Fritz that I would be leaving his lab. And, you know, as bad as we hit it off, he was just like, "I wasted all this time on you." But I was just – "I sort of feel like you didn't waste any time on me. That's why I'm leaving." That's what I wanted to say. But, of course, I said, "Well. I think there's, you know, you would probably be better off with a student who – would work better with you. And that maybe I don't – You and I aren't a good match." And so he said, "I agree." So, I left his lab. (1)

Sarah was able to break the connection with the professor who was unsupportive, but his influence was almost catastrophic to her graduate school progression. She recalled, "That year, after experiencing him, I almost decided to leave graduate school because I thought, 'I'm not cut out for this.' I just thought, 'I'm just not cut out. I mean, I should have showed up. I showed have –'" (1) As she struggled with her self-doubts and her inclinations to believe that she was the problem, she found support from other students whom she said "talked me back to reality," telling Sarah,

"Look. I didn't show up until August, and the person's lab I worked in thought I'd be crazy if I just showed up to start a project when I'm not even supposed to be here. And most people don't show up until August. I think you're okay." And so – So, I had friends who basically helped me through that first year and made me feel okay about staying. (1)

Support from friends helped Sarah persevere through her first year of graduate school and find her way to a professor with whom she connected. As unsupportive as Dr. Fritz was in Sarah's experience, Charlie was the contrasting supportive professor. She described the difference:



I found Charlie W's lab – who is actually doing work that I'd like to do. And I sort of felt like I could mesh with his personality a lot better. He wasn't as [pause] – he didn't have those weird, unreasonable expectations. And I think we were more on the same wavelength after talking to him. . . . And so I hit it off really well with Charlie W, and I felt like we meshed well and that the ideas I had, the research I wanted to do matched his, and I sort of felt like his expectations – after talking to other grad students – were reasonable and not weird, like I should have shown up, you know, before grad school even started. (1)

Sarah sought a new laboratory in which to work and in doing so began developing a connected relationship that influenced her graduate school experiences and the development of her professional identity.

Charlie communicated a personal preference that Sarah should focus on research rather than teaching. After she expressed her preference for teaching, he helped her pursue what was becoming her career path. Sarah reported, “It was always sort of a joke between us. He's like, ‘Oh my gosh, you know, you're going into teaching. I know it’” (1). Sarah recounted that as she communicated her interest in teaching, he demonstrated his respect for her position. “He started to realize that I liked it so much he let me continue to pursue TA-ships. . . . He was supportive enough of my teaching.”

Charlie's reluctant support of Sarah's teaching enabled her to develop her individual career path. She connected with him in a relationship that she described as a mentoring relationship, explaining, “I definitely clicked much better with Charlie, and he still helps me out a lot. He's a *great* mentor for – research wise. Not a great teacher. But a great mentor.” Charlie became Sarah's mentor in research and through the interconnection of their relationship allowed her preferences to prevail as she developed the foundations of her professional identity.

Diedre's professional identity was forged with numerous relationship connections. She recalled how her earliest steps into graduate school came as a result of influences from people in her community:

And then I was doing community theatre, and I met a professor there, Dr. Thomas, Frieda Thomas, who directed me in a play. And that was about the time that I was sick of my job at the radio station, and they didn't like me because I was young and crazy, and they were real stiff. And she said, "You know. You want to write. You want to write poetry. Why don't you come back to school? Why don't you come to graduate school?" So, Frieda really talked me into it. (1)

Diedre's connection with Dr. Thomas provided the influence for her to consider going to graduate school. As Diedre began graduate studies, she was uncertain of her abilities and doubted whether or not she should continue. She described her uncertainties, saying,

And when I got there, I took classes with some of the people that I already knew from the theatre – who really were friends. And they knew that I was tentative, nervous. I had been out working while a lot of other people were being all pointy-headed. And I felt, yeah, honestly I felt really insecure about my abilities because I hadn't got a degree in English. (1)

Her doubts were exacerbated as she began writing at the graduate level. A professor again provided a connection that encouraged Diedre to continue on her path to becoming an English professional. She recalled a pivotal conversation with the professor:

I remember one day, I had actually been trying to write a paper for one of my professors. And it was the first *real* graduate level paper that I had written. And I had no clue what I was doing. I hadn't written these papers when I was an undergraduate. I was over playing the Psychedelic Furs on the radio station across campus. And I went in and I handed her the paper, and she said, "It's just not there." And I sat in her office and burst into tears, and I was like, "You know what? Okay. I get this. I can't do this kind of work. Other people can. I'm not cut out for this. That's all right." I was crying because it made me sad, but it was also feeling good to me because I was copping to the fact that this was not something – And I said, "I think I need to be doing something else 'cause this is so hard for me. And I'm not like these other people." She said to me, "No. The only difference between you and these other people, all these people you're talking about, is you'll come in here and tell me you feel this way about yourself and the work. They all feel the same way, but they won't admit to

it in a million years.” And she said, “But you’re admitting to it, and that’s going to serve you well because I can help you because you’re going to ask for my help.” She was one of my favorites, very nurturing. And she explained to me how she wanted me to do it. And I went home and I did it. And I got an A on the paper. It wasn’t perfect. It wasn’t the best paper I ever wrote, but, you know, she was really kind about it. (1)

The professor listened to Diedre’s frustration and despondency and offered not only assistance, but also reassurance. She validated Diedre’s position as an English student. As one of Diedre’s first teacher-professor connections in graduate school, the relationship served as a precursor for many subsequent relational connections. She described how her major professor also encouraged her:

I think all students have a story of a professor who really inspired them. I’m lucky; I have more than one. But a wonderful professor named Margaret Greystone who knew that I was really, really green – that I didn’t have the benefit of an undergraduate degree in English even though I was an English minor. The work wasn’t as rigorous. She knew I was doing a lot of playing catch up, and sometimes that was very frustrating. But we liked each other a whole lot, and she took me under her wing. She was my first major professor, and I was going to, as a Ph.D. student, write my dissertation with her....And through Dr. Greystone and some other professors there, I learned the language of theory and developed a theoretical approach to what I wanted to do. I do psychoanalytic feminist criticism, and that’s what they were teaching me how to do. (1)

Dr. Greystone helped Diedre develop her theoretical approach to research. When Dr. Greystone moved out of state, Diedre connected with yet another professor who helped shape her professional identity. She explained,

Dr. Watson, my second major professor, is one of my best friends now. So that was a really positive experience, working on that with her. So, finally we got the dissertation done. And I wrote on [a female poet] and depression in her poetry. (1)

Dr. Watson directed Diedre’s dissertation and became a good friend. Diedre’s connections with professors such as Dr. Greystone and Dr. Watson created a nurturing

environment in which Diedre thrived during graduate school. She spoke warmly of her graduate school experiences:

But I felt very nurtured. I felt very well taken care of. The entire time I was there, I never had a bad experience in a class. I never had a bad teacher. The people that I knew and liked directed me to their friends. They told me who to avoid. I was able to do that. And – a lot of graduate students and people who've come through graduate programs describe their experience as more of a business relationship with faculty. Mine was like a love bath. It was just being nurtured through. Really. And that was good for me because I work best that way. When I've talked about my friendship with my major professor, Jan Watson, with some people, they're just shocked by how close we are. (1)

In the nurturing environment of graduate school, Diedre studied and developed professionally. The multiple interconnected relationships influenced the unique English teacher she was becoming. As she taught her first English classes during graduate school, her supervisors helped shape her path. She recalled the man who supervised all Freshman English courses:

He was my boss, essentially. He was my supervisor, but he was a real warm person with me. He was very loving; he was very kind, not in any sort of sexual or inappropriate way, but he made me feel very good about my teaching. He made me feel very important to the department. I remember one time he said to me, "You don't have to come in here and ask me permission to do anything. You know what you're doing." (1)

The supervisor offered the emotional support as well as the academic autonomy that allowed Diedre to establish her uniqueness as a college-level teacher.

Maggie's emerging individuality in graduate school was positioned in her socialization into the psychology profession. Her connections with her major professor laid a foundation for the psychologist and the teacher that Maggie would become. She described his influence, remembering,

I guess my major professor was somebody who encouraged me – maybe not specifically in terms of teaching, because he was really my mentor in terms of doing therapy. And he was my major professor for my

dissertation and everything. And – but I think seeing him teach also influenced me to some extent because I saw how much he enjoyed it, too. And I think that I – He kind of saw both therapy, doing therapy and teaching as something that’s just as much of a growth experience for the therapist or the teacher as it is for the client or the student. And so I think that was an influence on me as well. (1)

Maggie’s professor verbalized his view of therapy and teaching as growth experiences and modeled his enjoyment of teaching. Within their interconnected relationship, these influences contributed to the philosophy Maggie adopted and the identity she developed.

Maggie also connected with students in graduate school and recalled how they provided support that kept her on the path to becoming a psychologist:

Once I started doing practicum it felt very different. I was really scared at the beginning, I guess as most people are, about starting actually doing work and how I was going to get through that, and how easily people would be able to tell that I didn’t know what I was doing. And that kind of thing. But I had a lot of, you know, support from fellow students. Like “Everybody’s felt that way, and you’ll figure it out.” That kind of thing. (1)

Maggie’s peers encouraged her to persevere in developing her clinical skills and overcoming her fears about doing therapy. The interconnections with peers and with faculty members were factors in her developing her identity as a psychologist. She elaborated about that development, saying,

I mean this is a growth process personally and everyone changes, and you learn a great deal about yourself while you’re going through this process. So, I think that was part of the socialization, you know, that there’s a – among faculty members and among your peers, an acceptance of talking about uncertainties and getting new insights into yourself and fears and all that kind of stuff, which I think is really great. Because I know now from talking to people in other programs that that’s not always true. In programs where there’s much more of a focus on competition, I think there’s much less of a focus on making yourself vulnerable in any way. And I felt like, with most of my – certainly not with all, but with many of my colleagues that was okay. That was, oh maybe expected to some extent – that you get some insight into yourself and consider how your personal stuff affects your work and how you think about people. (1)

In the socialization process that helped shape Maggie's individuality, she experienced acceptance from the students and faculty members with whom she had relationships. By relating collaboratively rather than in competition with them, she gained personal insights that impacted her work and her identity as a psychologist.

The socialization process through which Maggie, Diedre, and Sarah traversed is similar to that of other women. Their experiences were consistent with the Clark and Corcoran (1986) three-stage model of socialization. As the women in this study verbalized such words as "naïve," "green," and "innocent," they communicated a tentativeness that parallels that of women in the Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) study. Tierney and Bensimon (1996) describe a process through which women embrace the organizational culture during socialization. Sarah and Maggie have been socialized into the TSC culture while Diedre's lack of socialization has led her to another organizational culture. The socialization paths of women in this and other studies include stories of mentoring as a key factor in successful navigation. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) found in the 1980s that women lacked mentors. The women in this study included mentors as critical relationships in their professional realms.

Sarah identified mentors in both graduate school and in her faculty position. Her graduate school mentor was the professor with whom she did research after her miserable first semester experience. She said, "I definitely clicked much better with Charlie, and he still helps me out a lot. He's a *great* mentor for – research wise." (1) In Charlie's laboratory Sarah received guidance and direction that continues into her professional life. At TSC she has had both designated mentors and informal mentors. She recalls that her first mentor was in name only, commenting, "I never really had much contact with Shane

Plummer, so I can't say that he mentored me a whole lot. He was just kind of named as my mentor." (1) After that faculty member's departure from the college, another senior faculty member was designated as her official mentor although he had been her informal mentor from the beginning. She described her relationship with him:

Tom was placed as my new mentor. He was my mentor from day one. Like I would always go to his office for help because he's, I think, very wise when it comes to students. And has a lot of great advice and has helped me immensely. I've adopted a lot of his same philosophies in the classroom. (1)

Before Tom was named as Sarah's official mentor, she had already sought him out as a source of advice and guidance especially for classroom strategies and philosophies. Yet, another faculty member played a mentoring role in a different category. She said, "Chad helped me – mentor me, not in the classroom. I don't think that's his strong suit. But sort of just professionally....Not necessarily the teaching profession, but just being a Ph.D. in general." (1)

Sarah's mentoring has been somewhat compartmentalized with Chad's mentoring her as a Ph.D., Tom's mentoring in the teaching arena, and Charlie's mentoring for research. The mentors have all been male, indicative of the male-dominated discipline in which her career is positioned.

Maggie's discipline of psychology has provided both female and male and formal and informal mentors. Maggie shared a mentoring relationship with her graduate school major professor. She indicated that he directly influenced her practice of therapy and indirectly influenced her teaching, noting, "I guess my major professor was somebody who encouraged me – maybe not specifically in terms of teaching, because he was really my mentor in terms of doing therapy." (1) Initially she indicated that he had not mentored in the teaching realm, but later she acknowledged his influence in both teaching and

therapy, saying, “I think seeing him teach also influenced me to some extent because I saw how much he enjoyed it, too.” (1) She also embraced his perception of teaching and therapy as growth experiences for the teacher or the therapist. Observing her professor’s investment in both teaching and therapy, Maggie identified a seed of possibility for her own career. When she began teaching at TSC, she was assigned an official mentor, but did not develop a strong relationship with that person. Rather she described experiencing the mentor as just one of many helpful, supportive colleagues:

So that person was very supportive, someone I always felt that I could ask questions of. But I also felt like everyone was pretty approachable, and I could ask questions and get information from everyone. So maybe that’s another reason why it wasn’t as significant – You know, I didn’t feel like I had to turn to that one person a lot because if she weren’t here, I felt like I could ask anybody....So, I had somebody – always had somebody available to me, but it wasn’t something that I felt like I needed to call on a whole lot. (3)

In a department of all women, Maggie has access to many encouraging faculty members. Although she has felt comfortable approaching a variety of people for assistance, she has not felt much need for advice. Among those whom she feels comfortable approaching is her supervisor, the female head of the psychology department. She said of the supervisor, “The person who supervises me now is much more approachable. I feel like I have a lot more direct access to her than I did to the person who supervised all of social sciences.” (3) The department head functions as an informal mentor for Maggie and is included in the group of senior faculty members who offer the support she needs.

When Diedre described her time in graduate school as “a love bath,” she is including both students and faculty members. In her descriptions of relationships with faculty members, she does not use the word “mentor,” but portrays mentoring relationships as she described her two major professors. She described Dr. Greystone as



someone “who knew that I was really, really green” (1) and who “took me under her wing.” (1) When Dr. Greystone married and moved out of state, Diedre began working with yet another supportive professor, Dr. Watson. She described their relationship as a friendship that surprises other people. She said, “When I tell some people about this relationship, they’re just floored because it’s so – friendly. But that’s the best way for me to work.” (1) Diedre’s relationship with both major professors was warm and supportive, enabling her to be successful in her graduate studies. She also encountered supportive relationships with those who supervised her teaching at State University, explaining,

The key, critical people who held my fate and my future and who decided how I was going to be spending my time and what I could do, people who directed the Freshman English Program – I worked for about three or four directors while I was there. The Assistant to the Department Head is a dear friend and gave me lots of advice and was very helpful to me. (1)

At each juncture of her graduate school experience, Diedre encountered individuals with whom she connected, especially professors and directors who served as mentors. In contrast to the numerous connections she described in graduate school, Diedre did not identify a single supportive person at TSC. She described administrators as people who do not know what they are doing and spoke with disdain about decisions her department head had made. Diedre verbalized keen insight when she concluded her narrative about graduate school, saying, “I think I’m a little spoiled because with these people – I mean, I just had such a great experience that anything counter to that is sort of jarring to me.” (1) Her lack of support and nurturing is evidence that her life at TSC has been counter to her graduate school experiences in many aspects. Without the relationships, she has been unhappy and frustrated in her professional life.

The constellations of relationships that provide the foundation for these women’s identities revolve in their personal lives as well as in their academic and professional

lives. Their families of origin shaped their views of education, their disciplinary inclinations, and their inchoate career paths. As adults, their marital status emerges as a relevant factor in how their lives unfold, affecting their conditions of possibility or limitation. Sarah and Maggie are both married, and Diedre is single, having never been married. Although their experiences of how spouses or marital status intertwine are unique, each woman included this topic in her story.

Sarah initially incorporated information about her husband into her story as she talked about her job search, saying,

His area of expertise is southeastern archeology. And so when we discussed finding jobs – It wasn't decided like, you know, completely, but we discussed that we would look in the southeast first...I had a lot of friends – there's a lot of people who work in areas away from their spouses. And we talked about that issue. We hoped that it would never happen. But it was there. (2)

While Sarah was searching for her first job out of graduate school, she looked in the geographical area compatible with her husband's career. They grappled with the possibility of working in separate locations, but hoped that would not be necessary.

Sarah's job search and thus her ultimate positioning as a faculty member were connected to her spouse's career.

Her professional identity has also been shaped by her marriage relationship. As a junior faculty member facing the demands of long hours, Sarah told how she adjusted her schedule in response to considerations in her marriage:

I try to get out of here by 6 or 6:30. It was really bad when I first started teaching here. I'd stay until 8 sometimes. Jimmy [husband] and I had some trouble with it. . . . And so now I've made it a philosophy not to bring anything home. So, if I have to finish it, I'll finish it at home; and I'll let him know ahead of time, and I'll call him. I'll try to be home by 6:30 every night. And I won't do things on weekends unless I absolutely have to. . . . I think he's just worried that if I were left alone, I'd work myself to death. (2)

With encouragement from her husband, Sarah adjusted her work schedule to limit how late she stays on campus and what work she does at home. Her ways of being a faculty member are influenced by her marriage.

Maggie's marriage is an integral part of her identity as a psychology professor because her husband is also a psychologist. They met in graduate school and married while she was a student. Most professional decisions that Maggie described include a reference to her husband. She explained that being with her husband was a major factor in determining when and where to participate in her internship:

I had a few classes to take, and was working on my dissertation when he finished his internship. So he got a job in the Adjacent State area. That meant that I put off going on internship for a year because he wanted to stay at that job for at least a couple of years. Which was okay because it gave me time to completely finish my dissertation. (1)

Maggie postponed participating in her clinical internship in order to stay with her husband where he was working. As much as she likes her job at TSC, she indicated she would consider changing jobs now if her husband changed:

I guess if for some reason, my husband got an important job somewhere else, I would leave here. I don't know that I would leave teaching. But I know, wherever you go, tenure track positions don't just grow on trees. So, it's not like – I wouldn't necessarily assume that I could just stay in some sort of tenure track position anywhere. But he makes significantly more money than I do. So, his career really is the primary career. And so I would – It's not like he would just decide to do that and not consult me. But, if it were something that was really important for him and a big opportunity, and especially if he were going to move up somehow, I can see myself following him. (3)

With her husband's career being the one that provides more income, Maggie can imagine herself foregoing her current position and following him to another location. She recognizes the potential career challenges she might face if this scenario became reality,

but is willing to minimize her career in support of his career and the marriage. She explained how her decision to stay at TSC is also influenced by his career:

After I'd been here for just a little while, I thought, "I could probably stay here long term." I could see myself staying here long term. And my husband's really happy with his job. And so I thought, "You know, we may be settling into staying in one place for a long, long time." (3)

Maggie likes where she works and what she does, but as she imagines continuing in her position at TSC, she includes the factor that her husband is happy in his career.

Maggie's career and identity are indisputably intertwined with her husband's because he is a psychologist. When Maggie specifies her profession to others, she does so in contrast to her husband. She described how and why she answers the question "What do you do?":

I say I'm a psychology professor. And one of the reasons I say that is because my husband is a psychologist. First of all, I'm not licensed yet. So I don't call myself a psychologist because you're really not supposed to even though people don't really know the difference. I tend not to say that, in part because I'm not licensed as a psychologist yet. But also because I'm not on that treatment side as much, and I guess he's a psychologist. And I say I'm a psychology professor, and it sort of points out that we do somewhat different things, but both from the same kind of background. (2)

Maggie views her professional identity in the comparison with her husband's career position and introduces herself in that context. The intersection of the two careers is also evident in their professional affiliations. In describing her relationships with psychologists other than teaching colleagues in her department, she mentioned those whom she knows through her husband's job, indicating,

I have mostly through my husband and his work because he's a psychologist, practicing in a hospital. And he works with a few other psychologists....So I'm around psychologists on a pretty regular basis, but it's mostly people who work in that hospital setting. (3)

Her regular contacts with psychologists are those who work with her husband. When describing her attendance at APA conferences, she references which conferences and sessions “we attend.” Her professional affiliations are so paired with her husband’s that when she attended different conference sessions, the experience was unusual and unfamiliar. She said,

So, it’s funny because this last conference, my husband and I didn’t go to very many things together. We used to go to all the clinical things together, but I didn’t go to very many this time. All the big people, we went to. I still go to those. If it’s some big speaker, important person, whatever they’re talking about, I’ll go to hear them. But for the most part, I usually go to the teaching things. (3)

While Maggie’s identity as a teacher is reflected in her choosing to attend conference sessions related to teaching, she continues to position her participation in contrast to her husband’s career and his conference activities.

Whereas Sarah and Maggie both have aspects of their professions connected to husbands, Diedre is not married. The absence of a marriage connection is a factor in her professional life. She shared her view of the connection, saying,

And I think, too, that you look at your career, you look at your life differently when you’re single. I think that – and I’m single. You can go on record with that. I’ve never been married. I have no burning desire to be married. But my friends and colleagues that I’ve talked to who do have husbands, their experiences are very different because they don’t have to think about things the same way necessarily. If there’s a husband in the picture, there’s usually more room for self-indulgence because they don’t have to be the breadwinner. They don’t have to be the person who pays the rent and the insurance and does all that. It’s a nice arrangement, I think, for women a lot of the time to have somebody who can kind of help you with that. I think it opens up some doors. But, it’s different when you’re single because you have to gear it all towards – taking care of yourself as well, in your life, and in your work. (2)

Diedre’s tendency to focus on practicality is evident in her words about paying bills and taking care of herself. Beyond the practical aspects of how marital status affects her life,

she perceives that married women have professional possibilities that are unavailable to her. She also framed her singleness as affecting the kinds of experiences that she has in her life:

But it's a different way of having the experience. And I think, too, you can – if you have a spouse helping you along, I think that you – maybe have –a you can have a different idea of what it is that you want to do with your graduate degree. You don't have to necessarily be as practical. I told you the other day that one of the things that was really attractive about this opportunity in College Town was, I'm simply going to be making more money. That's really great. Wherein somebody who maybe has another person that's a provider in the house can compromise that. (2)

As an unmarried woman, Diedre's experiences have a different flavor from those of Sarah and Maggie. Sarah described herself as the primary breadwinner, suggesting similarities with Diedre's need to support herself financially. On the other hand, Diedre has the possibility of making career decisions independent of another person's location while Sarah's professional setting is impacted by her marriage relationship. Maggie's marriage seems to have an even more substantial potential impact on her career decisions than is apparent in Sarah's descriptions. In Maggie's life, her marriage opens the possibility of choosing a full-time or part-time career. Her commitment to maintaining her husband's career as primary presents potential limitations. Diedre's unmarried status provides the possibility of changing locations without impact on a spouse's career or on the quality of a marriage relationship. Her marital status also limits some of her choices as she is solely responsible for financial obligations. Sarah's husband has influenced her to invest in her life beyond her teaching profession. Her marriage presents conditions of possibility for a balanced quality of life, but also limits some career options as Sarah commits to being the main source of income and to staying geographically near her

husband's work. Marital status and the specific characteristics of the marriages inform these women's identities and how they live their academic lives.

As academicians who have chosen careers that enable them to be primarily teachers, the women in this study describe the most meaningful aspects of their careers in the context of relationships with students, especially when they make a unique connection with a student. Sarah verbalized her view that the teaching profession is her calling:

I can give you some examples where I sit back and think that I sort of have a calling...Like when I have a student who works with me and takes a class with me and I've known them for two years. And then they reach their senior year, and then they present at a national meeting. And they win a prize. And they're given all this praise. When they turn back and just look at you, like – you sort of feel like they would have never had this opportunity if you'd never met them. And it's almost – When I think about it sometimes, I sort of think it's really self-centered of me to feel that way. But you're like “God. I'm so happy that I was in that person's life and that I was able to influence them. I'm glad we 'clicked' because if we didn't 'click,' they would have never worked with me. I would have not been able to introduce them to applying for this award or doing this presentation. And like they look so happy right now.” (3)

Sarah finds satisfaction in recognizing her role in helping students gain recognition for their accomplishments. She also feels pride when an individual student acknowledges Sarah as a contributor to her or his success. She shared one example, noting,

When you find out that they get into the program that they applied [for]...And he [a student] got into that really competitive program which I *never* doubted that he could do it anyway. He's so smart, and he's such a great student. But, then he came back and said, “Thanks to you.” It just made me feel really good. It's like I didn't really do anything. I just told you what you needed to do. “You need to go down there and talk to them.” But it makes you feel good, like “Wow! I might have – Just me meeting that person might have done something good for them.” (3)

The student who was accepted into a competitive graduate school program provides an example of Sarah's connecting to students in ways that make a difference in their lives

and hers. When she knows that she has made a difference in student lives, Sarah reconfirms her sense that teaching is her calling. She described how the calling feels:

Like when I see our students succeed or at least get to a place that I would have liked to have been, because most of my students are way beyond anything I was when I was in college. I was lazy. And then when I see them do this, it's like "That's what I wanted to do when I was lazy, when I was in college." And they did it! It just makes me feel so good. When I think about those specific instances of student success, I think that's where I – I think to myself, "I think I found my calling," because it excites me.

(3)

Sarah finds meaning in contributing to her students' successes and names her experience a "calling." Her description rings with spiritual connotation. Diedre actually labels her connection with students and others as "spiritual," saying,

When I have made some personal connections with some of the students, it's been really profound. And keeps me mindful of the fact that even though I don't fantasize constantly, "Oh, I'm a role model. I'm this. I'm that to them." But just that you really are the adult in the room. They've trusted me and come to me with some very, very intimate things. I'm always kind of blown away by it, you know. Because in order to share things about yourself that are really intimate, you do have to have a lot of trust. And you have to, you have to have a lot of affection so that they would give that to me, even though it can be a little bit weird. It's still – When it happens, it just makes me really glad that I was there for them...So, there's this whole moment that moves away from teaching every now and then, where it's just connections between people. And through your teaching sometimes you can be in a place that allows you a different kind of connection with a student or a parent. That's always affected me a lot. . . . I think the personal connection with the students and parents and other people is probably the thing that moves away from satisfaction and more into something that's spiritual. (4)

When Deidre encounters the moments with students, parents, and others that move away from teaching to interpersonal connections, she finds profound meaning. Maggie described her interpersonal connections that change a student's life:

I guess meaningful is – I guess I find it most meaningful when I feel like I've done something that has potentially changed a student's life in some way – even in some small way. Like, "I didn't think I would ever want to go to graduate school, but now I kind of think I do." That kind of



thing....You can't help everyone, and there are days when you feel like, "I'm spinning my wheels and not accomplishing anything." But then somebody comes back and said, "Wow. That made such a huge difference for me. This has changed in my life." I think that totally makes a lot of the other stuff worthwhile. So I feel that way about students coming sometimes and saying, "You helped me get through that class and that just totally changed my perspective on my other classes." Or "You helped me think about a different career path." Or something like that....To me that's the most meaningful thing and that's what makes a lot of other things worthwhile. (3)

Maggie finds the greatest meaning in her career when she discovers that she has had a positive influence in a student's life. Maggie, Diedre, and Sarah affirm their careers as special, spiritual, and meaningful when they connect with students in ways that impact lives. Their careers provide conditions of possibility for the constellations of relationships that help shape their own identities while they in turn embrace their possibilities to influence the identities of their students.

The themes that emerged from this research reflect both familiar and unexpected dimensions. That the women fell in love with their disciplines might be expected, but the evidence that the love relationship began when they were children is unexpected. These three women are not unusual in their embracing of teaching as their preferred career investment. But their stories reflect strength and personal agency in contrast to themes of career tracking. With their passions for teaching, their accepting positions at an institution with a teaching focus is familiar. The women shared common experiences of working hard and managing student demands, but because they were faculty members in the same School of Arts and Sciences, I did not anticipate such stark differences between Diedre's experiences in a department as compared with those of Sarah and Maggie. The story lines of relationships with family, teachers, mentors, and colleagues that weave into their experiences are familiar, but the spiritual aspect of their connections with students is

unanticipated. As these themes provide insight into the experiences of women, I now turn to a discussion of the significance of the themes.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

As I began this research, my interests focused on several issues related to women in higher education. First, I continue to encounter gender inequities in higher education. Women are underrepresented at research universities. The percentage of female faculty members who obtain the rank of full professor remains unbalanced compared with the total percentage of faculty members who are women (Wilson, 2004). Women represent 39.4% of all full-time faculty members, but only 23.6% of those with full professor rank (*Digest of education statistics tables and figures*, 2005). The salaries of female faculty members continue to be lower than those of their male counterparts (Curtis, 2004; Toutkoushian & Conley, 2005). I hoped that my research would provide increased understanding related to the problem of inequities. Second, my review of the literature indicated that most research is either quantitative or is conducted with women at research universities. The qualitative studies that have been published are based on one interview with each participant and were not designed with a specific focus on women's careers in their academic disciplines. My goal was to enhance the literature by investigating the experiences of women in academia within the specific context of traditional academic disciplines and beyond the problems implied in statistical data. By researching with a series of in-depth interviews, I hoped to elicit and present a more complete picture of the women's lives, their career paths, and their experiences. I expected to participate fully in the interview process, investing myself in personal connections beyond an objective data

collector (Oakley, 2003) and to encounter themes related to the women's experiences in their academic disciplines.

From the first interview with each participant, I did, in fact, experience a personal connection that opened the conversations to progress in directions I had not expected. Although I began the research with an interest in women in the academic disciplines, the themes that emerged from the interviews provide limited insight into the women's experiences in the academic disciplines. Rather, the themes reflect the flexible, fluid characteristics of qualitative research. I focused on understanding the participants' experiences separate from my personal interests (Seidman, 1998). As I listened to the women's stories, I discovered unanticipated questions related to their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The interviews unfolded in directions consistent with the women's testimonies, their reflections, and their perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998). I found satisfaction in being actively situated in the research, empowered to adjust the research process in ways that maintained each participant at the center of her narrative (Merriam, 1998). One of my overarching goals in interviewing and in reporting the themes has been to maintain the "coherence" of the participants' lives (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746). Although my initial personal interest was their experiences in their disciplines, the women's lives are stories of falling in love with a discipline and then following academic paths into teaching. Thus, the themes that emerged are indicative of the women's lives rather than of my initial research interests.

The experiences of these three women reflect commonalities exclusive of their particular disciplines. As in the Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) study, the interviews uncovered "clusters of similarities" (p. 86). The first similarity was their early attraction

to areas that became their professional disciplines. In the context of literature that emphasizes the positioning of women in gendered disciplines, researchers have suggested various contributing factors. Hartman (1991) concluded that women were directed into lower paying academic fields during the 1970s and 1980s. Clark (1998) identified systemic male dominance in all sectors of higher education. After examining a long-term study of gifted students, Eccles (1985) determined that gifted women are socialized in gender-specific fields. For these junior faculty members at Thaxton State College, early influences were shaping their professional lives before two of them were even involved with institutions. These women were not initially guided by school systems or college professors, but by their families. The social realities in which they were reared made certain choices available to them and opened conditions of possibility. Family members, in Sarah's and Diedre's cases, and the family situation in Maggie's case planted seeds of attraction that were nourished through the years. Research has tended to focus on decisions at the undergraduate or graduate level, but these women's experiences represent a major finding: their path toward their disciplines began in childhood. Like the participants in this study, other women may begin falling in love with their disciplines long before they attend college. Future research which questions women's positioning in disciplines needs to go back further in time than most current literature tends to do.

The next similarity that emerged from interviews with these participants was also surprising to me. While developing as professionals within their disciplines, these women shifted their career investments into becoming teachers. Each woman had another career option available to her. My perspective, as well as those of the participants rely on liberal feminist assumptions about choice, in contrast to other, radical, feminist perspectives that

would rely more on arguments about structural and cultural obstacles creating the appearance of choice. Consistent with the women in studies reviewed by Hulbert and Schuster (1993), each of these participants evaluated her abilities, interests, and values in the process of determining the context in which she finds meaningful work. I encountered strength and agency in these women's stories of forging their career paths in the directions that are consistent with their understanding of themselves. They did not "settle" for teaching careers, but rather actively sought and cultivated professional lives in which teaching is central. In the context of a gendered educational system, they responded to "the voice of the *teacher within*, the voice that invites me to honor the nature of my true self" (Palmer, 1998, p. 29). Their stories balance the statistical picture of academic women and "represent more accurately the complexity, heterogeneity, diversity of human personality" (Stewart, 1994, p. 1). Lather (1991) proposes that feminist research should "correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience" (p. 71). These women's stories correct the distortion of teaching as a less-than-desirable second choice available only after other options are eliminated. In these participants' joyful descriptions of discovering their places and personal satisfaction, I heard a valuing of teaching and of themselves as teachers.

That raises the question of why teaching is devalued in higher education. Fairweather (2005) reviewed National Surveys of Postsecondary Faculty for 1988 and 1993 and found that teaching was negatively correlated with salaries. Faculty members who taught more classes or hours were paid less while faculty who published more were paid more. Higher education embodies contradictions between the discourse of what is valued and the realities of what is rewarded. While the verbiage is a desire for improved

student outcomes, faculty members are not rewarded for the teaching that is likely to enhance student learning outcomes (Milem, Berger, & Dey, 2000). In tenure review processes, research can outweigh weaknesses in teaching and service but not vice versa. Higher education's devaluing of teaching is reflected in salary levels as well as in promotion and tenure assessments.

Park (1996) found a proclivity for men to devote a larger portion of their time to research activities while women invest more time in teaching and service. These differences reflect the cultural tradition of the public sphere as male and the private sphere as female. Research leads to publication and application accessible in the public arena, activities historically conducted away from home. Teaching, however, began as a function in the private realm of home and family (Martin, 2000). When women assume more responsibility for the private sphere, they have less time and energy to invest in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the participants in this study have not experienced teaching careers as containment, which Martin describes as a process of allowing women into the academy while restricting their functions and opportunities there. As individuals, they have chosen from multiple conditions of possibility. They have chosen a professional focus that is associated with women and is less valued in higher education than a research focus. The problem is not that women choose teaching, but that academia continues systemic inequities by not valuing teaching.

The systemic inequities are also reflected in the valuing of types of institutions with research universities named "top tier" and teaching-centered community colleges as the lowest tier. Recent data reflect differences between teaching at research and doctoral universities compared with teaching at comprehensive universities and private liberal arts

colleges. In doctoral institutions, between 49 and 52 percent of the faculty members consider teaching their primary activity compared with 79 to 85 percent in other institutions (Cataldi, Bradburn, & Fahimi, 2005). In research institutions, faculty members report investing about 43 percent of their time on teaching while those in comprehensive universities and liberal arts colleges indicate they spend between 64 and 67 percent of their time in teaching (*Digest of education statistics tables and figures*, 2005). In a recent survey of faculty opinions and attitudes, faculty members were questioned regarding their institutions' priorities. At public and private universities, more than 70 percent of faculty members indicated that national image, national prestige, and external funding are high priorities at their institutions. Between 45 and 63 percent of faculty members at public and private four-year colleges include these as institutional priorities. With 65 percent to 76.8 percent of four-year college faculty members reporting congruency between their values and the institution's values, the data suggest that those who prefer teaching do, in fact, find employment at teaching institutions rather than at research universities (*Opinions and attitudes of full-time faculty members, 2004-5*, 2006). This indication is consistent with Finnegan's (1993) research in the early 1990s. She found that during economic periods when teaching positions were more readily available, faculty members who preferred teaching-focused careers sought and obtained positions in compatible institutions.

Thaxton State College is a baccalaureate institution that has traditionally been a teaching institution. Although the ranking system places less value on this type of institution, the participants in this study were not concerned about rankings and chose TSC as a place compatible with their career goals in teaching, as well as a place, for two



of them, which complemented their marriages. Each woman had narrowed her choices based on location and type of institution (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Sarah and Maggie considered their husband's career locations as part of their decisions, consistent with the Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) marriage plot in which women function in traditional roles. Although Sarah named herself the "breadwinner" of the family, she nevertheless included her husband's location in her career choice. Maggie candidly verbalized that her husband's career is more important than hers is. Diedre reflected her acceptance of the marriage plot as she described married women as having "room for self-indulgence because they don't have to be the breadwinner[s]." (2) I am surprised to recognize that these women share the marriage plot mentality with women whom Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) interviewed more than twenty years ago. Luke (1999) suggests that younger women tend to interpret women's issues differently from those of us who matured in the 1960s and 1970s. While the participants in this study made their employment decisions from fields of possible choices and in the context of their personal realities (Eccles, 1985), their stories reflect society's ongoing emphasis on a man's career being more significant than a woman's.

In spite of their somewhat traditional views of gender roles related to marriage, the participants in this study verbalize a sense of agency in choosing where to live out their careers. I experience a dichotomy in my personal response. On the one hand, I recognize that being blind to the inequities reflected in the marriage plot helps to perpetuate the imbalances in higher education. On the other hand, these women seem to have, as Hulbert and Schuster (1993) suggest of women, a liberal feminist awareness of the trade-offs in their life paths. Sarah traded the chance at a lucrative research career for

a position in teaching. Diedre acknowledges that she cancelled any prospects of attending an elite graduate school when she made poor grades as an undergraduate. Maggie chose to forego pursuing licensure as she invests in teaching and parenting. Olesen (1994) encourages qualitative researchers to invest in understanding worlds of women rather than making the worlds study of objects. In striving to understand the ever-changing worlds of Sarah, Diedre, and Maggie, I recognize that their careers are framed in the contexts of everyday life and of relationships. Choosing to work at Thaxton State College was, for these participants, an informed decision appropriate for the lives they seek to live. If they have made sacrifices or adjustments, they have done so with awareness of the compromises they are making.

Having accepted the teaching positions they were offered at TSC, the women in this study share commonalities in the challenges they encountered while trying to keep their lives the way they want them. Consistent with the women in the Tierney and Bensimon (1996) study, Sarah, Deidre, and Maggie face the challenges of working long hours. They respect their students but struggle with student demands for time and immediate attention. As they create and maintain appropriate boundaries in their relationships with students, they reflect the intertwining of daily activities with their various roles and responsibilities. Consistent with the Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) participants, they strive for balance between their professional lives and the other aspects of their lives. One of Diedre's reasons for leaving TSC has been an imbalance as frustrations in her professional life have infiltrated her personal life.

A critical factor in these women's satisfaction with their lives resides in their positioning in their departments. In Gouldner's (1957; 1958) classic studies of

cosmopolitans and locals, he differentiated between faculty members with primary commitments to their disciplines and those with primary commitments to the institution, but the dichotomy had clear positions along the continuum. Sarah, Deidre, and Maggie represent the locals with stronger commitments to their institution than to their disciplines. Although Deidre was not committed to TSC, she is committed to State University where she has accepted a new position. In fact, her new position is in a field other than her discipline of English. Forest (2002) applied Gouldner's theory to his examination of faculty preferences. He found that teaching-oriented faculty members are more likely than research-oriented faculty members to rank the institution or department as higher in importance than the discipline. As teaching-oriented faculty members, the participants in this study place major significance on the culture of their departments. Connections between discipline and department are fluid and likely vary by institutional type. At TSC, a teaching institution, Sarah and Maggie both appreciate the student-centered philosophies of their departments. They both value relationships within the department as well as the overall atmospheres of collegiality. Deidre resented what she perceived as a department that was not student-centered and felt bitter about departmental favors that were given to others in the department. Sarah, Maggie, and Diedre are representative of junior faculty across the nation who rank collegiality as a key factor in career satisfaction (*COACHE survey highlights*, 2006). For these teaching-centered faculty members, appropriate relationships with students and comfortable relationships with colleagues in their departments influence the conditions of possibility to maintain balanced lives and rewarding careers.

Beyond relationships with students and colleagues, women create their lives in ever-changing constellations of relationships (Franz et al., 1994). In *Women Creating Lives: Identities, Resilience, And Resistance*, Franz, Cole, Crosby, and Stewart (1994) suggest that “at every moment, what makes the individual unlike any other individual - to herself and to others - is that she has a unique constellation of relationships to other people” (p. 326). The women in this study told their stories in the contexts of their relationships to other people. The uniqueness of their family relationships permeates Sarah’s narrative of her older sisters and Diedre’s descriptions of her mother and grandmother. Maggie’s unique identity was shaped by family relationships involved with her parents’ divorce. Throughout their undergraduate and graduate school experiences, the women name relationships that mattered in their individual developments. Sarah encountered a professor who “totally changed [her] mind” in college, and then participated in graduate level research with two different professors at two ends of the continuum of support. One professor was at one point demanding and later distant. The second professor was supportive. Her relationships helped shape her career path first into science and then toward teaching. Diedre progressed through undergraduate school with poor grades, but many friends. Her graduate school professors nurtured and encouraged her in what she described as a “love bath.” She gained the confidence she needed to complete a doctorate in English. Maggie learned teaching strategies under the tutelage of peer education supervisors who provided guidance, and she adopted her graduate school professor’s philosophy of teaching and therapy as growth experiences. Thus, her approach to therapy and to teaching echo what was shared in her unique constellation of

relationships. The role of relationships represents a cluster of similarity between Maggie, Sarah, and Diedre.

The women's identities have also been fashioned through the commonality of mentoring relationships. Each woman described her professors as playing mentoring roles. Clark and Corcoran (1986) found that women who had sponsors to provide "advice and advocacy" (p. 401) advanced more smoothly through graduate school and into their first career positions. As beginning junior faculty members, Sarah and Maggie had both formal and informal sponsors or mentors who provided support to assist the development of their professional identities. In contrast, Diedre mentioned no mentoring relationships at TSC. As she leaves TSC, she returns to an institution where she will again be near her graduate school mentors. While the women all began teaching careers at the same institution, their unique relationships are factors in their individual positioning with Sarah having obtained tenure, Maggie seeking tenure, and Diedre happily moving to a non-tenure track position at another institution.

Identities, however, are not stagnant. "We must always be aware that the stories (even though they are in print) are not stagnant and final—they are tentative and fluid, subject to change and re-group as life is lived and interpreted" (Steinberg, 1999, p. ix). These women regroup their lives as they live and interpret their experiences. Sarah recently applied for other positions, but decided to stay at TSC, largely because she received tenure. Diedre evaluated her experiences and her quality of life and has chosen to regroup her life at a familiar institution but in a different field of study. Maggie examined her new role as a parent and decided to interrupt her progress toward licensure.

She is re-interpreting her life in the context of the new category of relationship that is parenting.

As experiences and relationships inform the identities these women develop and the lives they create, in return they are influencing their students' lives and identities.

When I asked each woman about the meaning she finds in her academic career, each one described connecting with students. Sarah experiences a sense of calling. "When I think about those specific instances of student success, I think that's where I – I think to myself, 'I think I found my calling.'" (3) Deidre describes how she encounters a spiritual dimension:

When I have made some personal connections with some of the students, it's been really profound....Personal connection with the students and parents and other people is probably the thing that moves away from satisfaction and more into something that's spiritual. (4)

Maggie finds the most meaning when she has influenced a student's life. "I find it most meaningful when I feel like I've done something that has potentially changed a student's life in some way – even in some small way." (3) The meaning that these women find and create in their careers is centered in their relationships with students. They embody the caring, concern, and connection that Martin (2000) suggests is desperately lacking and vitally needed in education. In their teaching careers, these three women experience conditions of possibility for connecting with students in meaningful relationships. They describe these connections with conviction in their voices and with words replete with religious connotations. Sarah calls teaching her "calling." Diedre says the connections are "profound" and "spiritual." Maggie values her influence in changing a student's life. They reflect Weber's (1958) view that the art of teaching is a personal gift, requiring an "inner devotion" (p. 137). They possess the passion to which Weber refers when writing,

“without this, you have no calling for science and you should do something else” (p. 135). Although Weber writes about science, he describes these women who are pursuing careers in teaching with passionate devotion.

Sarah, Diedre, and Maggie share experiences consistent with twenty years of research related to women. Gilligan (1982) found that women’s moral development is based on notions of relationship and caring. The women in this study embody such notions in their career choices and in the meaningful aspects of their careers. In *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) presented evidence that women’s cognitive development is linked to their personal experiences and feelings. The participants give testimony to development of their career paths connected with their experiences and feelings. Martin (2000) admonishes academia for rebuffing the characteristics of caring, concern, and connection. Sarah, Diedre, and Maggie are women in academia who embrace and embody those characteristics. In their worlds, they experience conditions of possibility for connecting with students, influencing their lives, and contributing to student success. In those student-centered arenas they also experience conditions of possibility for individualized professional “victory narratives” (Christian-Smith & Kellor, 1999, p. xv).

This research adds to existing literature, illuminating both consistencies and variations with key qualitative studies. Clark & Corcoran (1986) identified a three-stage socialization process through which their twelve participants progressed. The participants in this study also experienced anticipatory socialization in graduate school, occupational entry and induction in the transition to junior faculty employment, and role continuance. Sarah and Maggie experienced job satisfaction and commitment at Thaxton State College

while Diedre, without those experiences has accepted a new faculty position at another institution. These three women also exemplify the value of having mentors, or sponsorship, through the socialization process and the challenges encountered without that kind of support.

The Clark and Corcoran (1986) participants described self-doubts in their early years of graduate school. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) also noted that women often use such words as “naïve and innocent” to describe themselves during the early stages of their careers. Each of the participants in this research also described herself in similar uncertain terms. Another similarity with the Aisenberg and Harrington study involves the marriage plot. Sarah and Maggie involve their husbands in professional decisions, and Deidre assumes that married women have some privileges related to career decisions that she does not share. These three women did, however, venture into the quest plot toward academic achievement. They gained voices to express their preferences for teaching and to acknowledge their successes as teachers. Their transformations from students to academic professionals and the role that supportive individuals played in the transitions parallel the experiences described by Aisenberg and Harrington.

The women in this study experience the long hours and hard work that Tierney and Bensimon (1996) encountered with junior faculty members in their study. They also share common experiences related to reasons for taking their first faculty positions. Sarah and Maggie accepted positions at least partially because of the proximity to their spouse’s location. Deidre also liked the location, but was particularly attracted to the type of institution. Sarah also chose the type of institution she saw in TSC because she could center her career in teaching. Maggie was offered only one position because she applied



to only one. Having obtained the teaching positions they sought, they seek to create and manage integrated lives that balance the personal and the professional as did the women in the Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) study.

The three previous studies based on interviews with women included voices of containment. The Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) interviewees were concerned about managing family responsibilities along with careers. Sarah, Deidre, and Maggie did not verbalize questions about combining career and family. This variation from the earlier study apparently reflects cultural transitions during the last twenty years. This study also varies from the Tierney and Bensimon (1996) findings that women were expected to do the smile work and the mom work. Participants in this research talked about student expectations and hard work, but did not frame work expectations in the categories encountered by the women who were interviewed for the 1996 study. The variations between the two samples of women highlight the multiplicity of experiences for females in academia. The variations also suggest future research related to women in higher education.

Future research can build on the current study by continuing to conduct in-depth interviews with women in various types of institutions and with various levels of experience. In-depth interviewing provides understanding beyond statistical data. Qualitative research with senior female faculty members can provide insights into the experiences of women at various points on the chronological professional continuum. Additional research might also focus on class and race issues not addressed in this research with participants who have lived their lives as white, middle-class children and adults. This research began with questions about women's experiences in the traditional

academic disciplines, but yielded little information. Interviewing women at research universities might provide insights into experiences in the context of disciplines because the women are more likely to have a research-focused career rather than one that is teaching focused. In-depth interviewing with women who are senior faculty members can tap into the varieties of experiences inherent in longevity. I especially recommend a qualitative, longitudinal study of women beginning as they enter junior faculty positions and following their career paths over time. The sensitive study of women's lives using varieties of research can highlight the family resemblances of women in academe while giving voice to the diversity of female experiences lived in the academic setting.

The study described here is much more than the collection and interpretation of research data. It is a glimpse into three women's lives. In telling their stories and weaving together the themes in their experiences, my goal has been to maintain, as Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest, the coherence in their lives. I want this text to represent as accurately as possible these women's experiences and my experiences in relationship with them. My research interests, my age, and my personal biases influence what I hear in their narratives. Yet, as I have reassembled the segments of their stories, I have been committed to communicating the meaningful whole of each life. The interviews with Sarah, Deidre, and Maggie represent moments of observation (Hoff, 1993). Although small portions of their lives are in print here, their lives are not stagnant (Steinberg, 1999). Their lives continue and their professional experiences change. The personal aspects of their lives intertwine with their professions. Sarah balances marriage with the demands of her job. Deidre returns to her former graduate school for working and to a familiar place for living. Maggie adjusts to being a parent while pursuing tenure. These

women live fluid lives in which they create experiences and experiences shape them. In their experiences they find and embrace conditions of possibility in connections with students and in expectations for their futures. These are the experiences of three women who fell in love with their disciplines, but found their callings and their conditions of possibility in careers as teachers.

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## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX A

Second Interview with Sarah (All proper names are pseudonyms.)

A: Is it okay with you if I audiotape our interview today?

S: Sure.

A: Okay. Thank you. I mentioned to you that the first interview gave me so much to build on for the subsequent interviews with you and with the other participants. It was really helpful. And today's interview is going to be a follow-up, a little bit to our first interview, but also sort of pulling from some things I've heard from other participants to ask you about.

S: Okay.

A: And eventually today, we'll probably get to talking more about the present whereas the last time we talked about your journey in the past. Today we may move further into the present. You mentioned several times in our first interview – How many siblings do you have and where do you fall in the mix?

S: I'm the youngest.

A: Okay.

S: I have two sisters, two older sisters. The oldest sibling is a sister; second oldest sibling is also a sister. And then there's my brother who's the next nearest in age to me.

A: That you helped with his college class.

S: But I'm the youngest. So, I'm right spoiled. I had two moms – or three “moms.”

A: Well, that's what I would think. I would think that happens in big families. And obviously proud "moms." You had mentioned the transition from Private Catholic College (PCC) to City University. And you gave some of the reasons, like the tuition and some things like that. And then – but you said that City University didn't really prepare you for graduate school.

S: Yeah.

A: And so...

S: Well, okay. Yeah. I guess – I guess I should go back and address that because City University prepared me for graduate school in terms of research because I had the opportunity to do research.

A: That was my question. What about the research?

S: Yes. But in terms of – I think what I was trying to get at was – This is the case and not just with City University, but with big, large institutions where – in science mostly, most of your tests in science are multiple choice. And you're asked to basically memorize some material to regurgitate on a test. And that's unfortunate. But I understand why it's that way because the class sizes are so large that no one in their right mind could grade essay tests. And it's difficult for – You know, professors at large institutions have graders. It's difficult for them, you know, to give the graders even essay tests to grade because it's an insane job to do. The class sizes have to be smaller in order to handle something like that. And so, I think what I meant by that was, when I got to graduate school, the approach to learning and testing and everything else was so completely different that I was completely lost. Number one on the approach. Number two, I felt

like, “Well, I’ve forgotten everything.” [pause] I don’t think I learned a lot of the material deeply enough to survive in graduate school.

A: You learned it more to take a Scantron test.

S: Correct. But I didn’t learn it to apply it later. And so that’s unfortunate. And I don’t think that’s just City University. I think that’s a problem with all large, research-based institutions where the majority – where professors at those institutions are more rewarded for doing their research and not rewarded for good pedagogy and spending the time to make their students think critically and what not. It’s part of it. And then the other part of it is the fact that their class sizes are so huge it’s really hard to do that. And it takes a very dedicated professor who can spread themselves in both areas. You know? And you rarely find that.

A: It’s just not set up that way. The environment doesn’t lend itself to that.

S: Right. I have to tell you I took one course at City University that was dual listed as a 6000 and a 3000 level course – 4000 level course. I took it at a 4000 level in my senior year. But there were a lot of graduate students in there. And that was a completely different experience. I took a lot away from that, and I still remember a lot of material that I learned in that course. It was a graduate level course. And the professor catered to the graduate students, and I felt like I learned a lot. It was more challenging, but I enjoyed it as well.

A: And I guess a smaller class size?

S: Oh yeah. I think there were maybe – there were less than 20 in that class. Not a lot of undergraduates opted to take a course like that. It was so specific.

A: So what about the research you did at City University? What was that and how was that?

S: I worked with Sam Byrd who I still keep in touch with now. I run into him at these microbiology conferences. He's pretty cool. I had him for micro at City University. And he peaked my interest in microbiology, of course. And I think a lot of it had to do with his personality and his interest in micro. Like I said, he was one of those who was so into their research that he barely scratched the surface. He did a lot for me. But that was one of those areas where I was kind of lost when I went to graduate school in microbiology. I had to really go back and re-teach myself and kind of force myself to re-learn a lot of things because of the approach he took in the classroom. It was all lecture and then regurgitate on an exam. And I did fine on his exams, but I lost a lot of the material. But I did research with him later because I was really interested in microbiology after taking his course. I thought it was pretty neat. His research – how much detail do you want me to go into?

A: Whatever you want to.

S: Okay. I'll be general. Basically he studied sick building syndrome – It's that phenomenon, I guess for the record, the phenomenon where if you have a lot of chemical agents and biological agents floating around in the atmosphere within a building – which it tends to be more concentrated within a building than outside – that those things can cause allergic reactions and malaise in people within the building. And actually cut down on productivity levels because of that. People don't want to work as hard or can't concentrate as much. And a lot of times, the chemicals and what not can be sensed and visible. People can actually smell mustiness and what not. But in some cases, people

don't always recognize that and know what it's doing to them. And they sometimes think they're sick. They have an illness of some other sort. They don't always know it's the building that's making them ill. So, it's not always known.

So, anyways, he was interested in that, but more so the biological aspects of that. There are other people who are interested in the chemical aspects, obviously. And he studied mainly fungi – fungal colonization of building materials. And the project that I was involved in was germination of fungal spores on these building materials under different environmental conditions. The main environmental condition that we studied was relative humidity. So what happened to fungal spores to cause them to germinate in terms of how did humidity affect the germination of these spores? And so basically I did, as a lot of undergraduates do when they *are* given the opportunity to do research, I did a lot of “grunt work” where I counted spores that had germinated in various media at various relative humidities. And then basically reported my results back to the graduate student that I worked for and back to Dr. Byrd. I didn't get a chance to present anywhere. I wasn't invited to go to a meeting to present. And I was not invited to present to the university. That's not how it worked at City University. But I did write a paper and turned that in for a grade. It's a little different from how we doing it here at Thaxton State. We – I don't know if this is appropriate for this interview?

A: Yeah.

S: But at Thaxton, because of the experience I had and not – I didn't have the opportunity to present orally or – That was another way I wasn't really prepared as well as I wished I had. When I had to do my first oral presentation of my research, I was absolutely terrified. Had never done it before. And luckily at State University we had a

class that helped us along before we actually had to defend our dissertation. But it was a terrifying experience – my first poster presentation. And so those of us at Thaxton, when we did all of our curriculum – us “new guys” – we made it a point to make it a requirement to our students that they have to present in two ways: one, they have to present in a written manner and another, at least one oral presentation. So they all have to give a PowerPoint presentation to disseminate their results to the institution. And a lot of faculty opt to take their students to meetings if they have the resources to do so. If the students’ results are such that they can be presented at a meeting, then we actually have asked – All of us work with the Science Association. And every year we ask for funds from Student Life to be able to take students to these meetings so that the students can get money to do these presentations. And then students, of course, also compete for monies within larger organizations when they get to the meetings.

A: That sounds like one of those advantages of hiring somebody fresh out of graduate school who loves to teach – that has that together.

S: And it’s not just me. Let me tell you. [List of faculty members] We’re all of the same mindset in biology that our students have to do this. We’re all in complete agreement about this method. Everyone thinks it’s very important, and so we strive for that.

A: That really does sound like an advantage.

S: And so I’m kind of talking us up here. [laugh] I think a lot of us, since we had that experience in graduate school, we think it’s important to start undergraduates because we either may have missed out on that experience as an undergraduate – in my case. Not in all my colleagues’ cases. Or felt like it was one of the most important things we did as an

undergraduate for those of us who had the opportunity. And I hear back from a lot of my undergraduate students who I've had. They come back and they say that that's one of the more memorable experiences that they did have – that experiential learning. So I'm a big – I can't say it's the same for those who go off campus. They don't always come back and they don't always tell me about those experiences because they didn't really have it with me, I guess. So, I don't really – I can't say that I've done a complete study on this issue and that it's only if they do it within the institution. I can only speak for the students that I've done research with and even those that I have taught who had the experience of doing research.

For instance, Student A. He opted to do his research with another professor at another institution. And I'm sure he's getting the same benefits as the students who work with me. But it's probably a little bit different because he's working more so, more closely with graduate students who may not really be interested in necessarily teaching as much as a faculty member would.

A: Right. Teaching in the midst of doing the research.

S: Correct.

A: As the student researches with you, you and the other faculty members are teaching them rather just sending them to a certain corner of the lab to do something.

S: We had another student, Student B., who'd always come back to get – She would come back to myself and to my colleague for assistance because a lot of times she sort of didn't quite understand what she was supposed to be doing when she was over at Engineering University doing her research. And we would help her with some of the, you know, explanations to her so that she would feel more comfortable doing her research.

That kind of stuff. So that's where the experience is different. When they do get to do research at a larger institution, a lot times – not all the time – but often times, I think, they don't get the same experience as they do at a place where it is an undergraduate institution. And faculty doing research. Faculty at an undergraduate institution doing research.

A: With that teaching focus.

S: Yeah.

A: So, in retrospect, was going to City University the right decision?

[pause]

A: “The best decision?” might be a better question.

S: I don't – Yes and no.

A: That's fair.

S: Yes, from the standpoint that I was exposed to a larger and more diverse institution. I mean, that's where I sort of started to learn about diversity, obviously at City University because I went to very non-diverse institutions. In high school, went to Saint High School – not very diverse there. And I went to another small Catholic school for my first two years of college. So, yes, from that standpoint most definitely. I was exposed to diversity and differing opinions from other students in courses, you know, where that kind of came up. Those kinds of things. It benefited there tremendously.

In terms of a strong background in education, I appreciate what I got at PCC more so than I did at City University because I think the different approaches to teaching sort of – more so prepared me at PCC than it did at City University. Because I got to write papers at PCC, and my teachers actually were the ones who spent the time to give me



comments about my writing and what not. And I don't think I got that at the larger institution. And the testing style was essay and short answer interspersed with some multiple choice at PCC. Where it wasn't like that at City University. And it's nothing like that in graduate school. It's completely different. So, I'd have to yes and no.

I think the best experience for a student – If I were to go back, I would spend my first two years probably at a smaller school. And I keep coming back to Thaxton because I think it has the best of both worlds. We have diversity here. I think we also – I think things are changing, I have to admit - here at Thaxton. Things are moving in a direction that I'm not certain about because we're getting larger. But I would say, if I were going to think about my own kids, I would send them some place where I think they would – I would encourage them to attend a school, to attend an institution where they would have, at least for their first two years, a strong emphasis on actual teaching. And then I would sort of encourage them to move on to a larger institution maybe as they felt more comfortable with what they got at the smaller institution – if that were possible. Or I would like to have them get the best of both worlds at one school if that's possible, which I'm not certain if it is or not.

A: Okay. But that statement about what you would wish for your own children probably tells as much about your overall feeling of your collegiate experience as anything.

S: Right.

A: That you had a little bit of that one and a little bit of that one.

S: I think there are schools out there that have the best of both worlds, you know where they can do...where students get the best of both worlds – the diversity, the – I

don't know how to put it into words – The experiences you get at a large research-based institution versus the experiences you get at a smaller undergraduate institution. I think perhaps there are schools out there that target both, but I think they are very few. And it's hard to find them.

It's so funny, because I have to – for myself, to keep myself happy when I attend conferences, I have to attend those that sort of stimulate my interest in teaching as well as those that stimulate my interest in research. And I don't think there's very much mixing the two, to tell you the truth.

For instance, the big conference I go to called the American Society for Microbiology, they have a separate, a *completely* separate undergraduate conference from the research conference. And they cater towards pedagogy at the undergraduate – Pardon me. They call it the “Microbiology Conference for Undergraduate Educators.” And then there is the American Society for Microbiology conference that just basically deals with research and dissemination of research.

A: Why is that?

S: I think, sometimes when I talk to my colleagues who do research, they don't have any clue what it's like really teaching undergraduates. I mean, I just don't think they do. The ones who come in and do the lectures, yeah? You know? I just don't think they really understand what it takes, you know? I think it's the graduate students who understand what it takes to really properly disseminate, not only knowledge, but critical thinking skills to undergraduate. I mean that's the feeling I get from a lot of them. I'm not saying all, but the majority of my colleagues in science – I can't say this is true for other disciplines. I sometimes feel like I'm talking to someone who just has no idea what it's

like to teach at a school that I teach at. Sometimes. And they laugh, they say, “Yeah, I have no idea.” They understand that they don’t know. And I’ll have to explain to them what it’s like, what challenges I have versus the challenges they have. They forget very easily.

A: And I sensed that when you were in graduate school and you were loving teaching and your friends were saying, “You shouldn’t be doing that.” There was some sense of devaluing? Does that continue in the profession, like with these two meetings?

S: I don’t know because I think it depends on the person. I have some colleagues that I run into who admire me for what I do. But they say, “I could never do it.” And they admire me for the fact that I can do it. And then have those who I don’t think respect me very much for what I do still. I don’t like to hang out with those individuals because I don’t really know how to talk to them. If anything, the only thing I talk to them about is strictly research. And I don’t really have a friendly – I don’t have a friendship type of relationship with those individuals.

A: It’s strictly professional.

S: It’s strictly professional, and strictly research. Because I just don’t understand that lifestyle – you know what I mean?

A: Yes.

S: I think people tend to stick - friendship wise, I think people tend to stick with those people who kind of understand what they’re going through. And so, it’s understandable.

A: So, if you're at a party or something, some social event, and you've gotten past the "Hi. My name is –" A lot of times the next question is "What do you do?" How do you answer that?

S: It depends on the kind of party I'm at, I guess.

[chuckle]

A: Okay. So, if it's a mixture of – occupations?

S: If it's a mixture, I say, "I teach." And then they, "Oh, well where do you teach?"

Or yeah. "Where do you teach?" And then when I say – cause I'm not going to lie – Thaxton State, everyone always – not everyone, but most people react the same. "Oh! So you teach the college level?" "Yes." "Okay. So what *do* you teach?" "I teach microbiology." "Oh! You teach *science*." And it's like I honestly think that people are very surprised. I don't know why, but I think people are surprised. Because I think they see me, and then when I say, "I teach," "Oh yeah. That makes sense. You seem like someone who would teach."

A: High school. Middle school. Something.

S: Yeah. And then when it goes on to "Well, where do you teach?" And I say, "Thaxton State." And they're like, "Thaxton State *College* on the south side?" "Yeah." "Oh! So you teach college?" "Yeah. So I just think they just – not that they think that I could never do something like that, but I think sometimes it's a surprise. Number one. And number two I think – [pause] And I don't know where that comes from. I don't know if it's the fact that I, you know, the personality they think I have seems weird to them. Or because I'm a woman. I have no idea because I don't really go there with them. But it's just interesting to me. And sometimes I wish I could just say, "Yeah." With

certain people I wish I could say, “Yeah. I just teach.” And leave it at that. And then with other people, I want to tell them all about what I teach because they do seem interested.

A: Now is there a reason that you would not say, “I’m a biology professor”?

S: U.m.m – I don’t know. I’ve just gotten used to saying – because I think of myself more as – I think lately – To tell you the truth, lately I’ve been saying that more because it’s easier. It just cuts to the chase. Yeah. But when I first started, I said, “No I teach” because I don’t really think of myself as a research professor. So where do you fall?

A: That answer that you have been giving emphasizes the side of the job that matters the most to you – the teaching part.

S: Yeah. I think so. I think so. A little bit lately, I have been responding more, and it’s been surprising to myself. I think to myself, “Yeah. I’m a biology professor. An assistant professor of biology.” And people seem surprised usually with that as well.

A: Ever which way you communicate it, they’re still surprised.

S: But if it’s at a party that has mainly scientists at it because they’re old friends from graduate school, then I answer that way. But I usually fill in, fill them in the fact that I teach, and I don’t do research. Well, I do research, but my main component is teaching. The main aspect of my career is teaching. Teaching in research and teaching in academia.

A: Oh, that’s a good point, too.

S: ‘Cause it’s two different things.

A: Because the research that you’re doing is along side undergraduates, and you’re teaching as you research.

S: Right. I'm mentoring in research very closely, like I did in graduate school with undergraduates.

A: Yeah. You've used the word – I'm trying to think – I think you were telling me about Dr. Butler. And you said that you truly fell in love with science?

S: Yeah.

A: And the interesting thing is my other people I've interviewed talked about being in love or falling in love or their passion. What do you love about biology or science or microbiology? And I don't know which way to frame it for you. Whether you think of it as science or biology or microbiology. But anyway, whichever one of those that you fell in love with, what is it that you love?

S: [pause] I don't know. It's hard to put my finger on what exactly I love about my discipline. I guess, it's always an adventure, is one. In the laboratory it is anyway. I love it. I mean, you start off with a question, and you set out to answer the question. And guess what. You get many more questions than you ever imagined that come out of that one question. And I love that. I guess that's the main thing that I love. You start off asking a single question, then you end up with more questions than you even imagined – than you started with. Do you answer the question you started out to ask? Not always. Not always. You usually end up somewhere else. That can be frustrating sometimes. But I like it because I think I'm the kind of person who gets bored very easily. And so, if new questions didn't arise from that, I would be completely and utterly bored. So that's what I like about it. That's the main thing in the scientific aspect of my discipline, that's what I like. And most scientists will probably – Well, I can't say that. I can't say it's the same for most people.

A: So, when you say “your discipline,” are you thinking biology? Or are you thinking more specifically microbiology?

S: I’m thinking biology as a whole. [pause] Yeah. I’d have to say biology as a whole. In microbiology, what do I like the most?

A: No, that’s okay. Or yeah. Go ahead. What do you like most in microbiology?

S: In microbiology [pause] I think it’s because it’s more a happy mixture of chemistry and biology. And I like the two. You know it’s funny I’ve – Tom Brown and I play around a lot. He’s like, “Biologists drool and chemists rule.” And I go back and forth with him on that. “No. Biology rules – But wait a minute. Chemists don’t drool. I like chemistry so I don’t really know what to say about you.” [laugh] So then we play around. I ask him if I can be an honorary chemist. And “Yes, of course.” He’s like, “But only you. You understand us chemists.”

A: If you’re in love with biology, you have an affection for chemistry.

S: Yeah. And I think microbiology exists in that zone of biology and chemistry. There is – As a matter of fact, often times biochemistry – the discipline of biochemistry – is taught by a microbiologist. Or the biochemistry books are written from a microbiology standpoint. And the two cross a lot of times. And it’s funny to meet a chemist who teaches biochemistry. And it’s funny because I was on a search this summer, a chemistry search. We interviewed two biochemists, and they’re from the discipline of chemistry and not – One of them had a solid background in chemistry, and then he decided he liked biochemistry. And I thought that was unusual. The other one came from a solid background in biology and then was interested in chemistry.

And I find myself, to tell the truth, more drawn to chemistry and chemists than I do to biology as a whole. Just mainstream biology. Now there's this area called molecular biology – cellular and molecular. And that's me. That's my area. And it's completely different than the typical biology that most people think of, when you think about animals and trees and plants and stuff. That is almost foreign to me in a sense. I consider myself a microbiologist. I like biochemistry. And a molecular biologist, which falls into the area of biochemistry and microbiology. And so, that's the area that I love. And to tell you the truth, the other part of biology is not foreign to me, but not very interesting to me. When you get into larger organisms and beyond the biochemical, it's not as interesting to me.

A: Are there differences in the – sort of the cultures of the – not lab cultures, but social cultures in say biology and the social culture in chemistry.

S: Oh yes. I think there are. Social culture? No. No, no, no. I think we all get along really well.

A: No. Maybe that's not – just the organizational culture, the mindset of people within those fields.

S: Oh yeah!

A: How does that unfold?

S: Okay.

A: And obviously these are generalizations; they're not hard fast. There are always exceptions.

S: I can give you sort of an illustration. When I took an ecology class in graduate school, we went on a field trip. And the ecology class was soil ecology, which consisted of a very diverse group of individuals. There was me, a microbiologist. There was a



gentleman who was from forestry, the School of Forestry. There was a soil chemist.

There was – and it was funny ‘cause we all didn’t know what to do with each other. We were all very careful around each other not to, you know – because we had preconceived notions of what their discipline was like. We had these – and we were very careful not to joke, you know say what our colleagues would joke with us about in their discipline.

Does that make sense?

A: Yes, it does.

S: So it was a very interesting class because we went on these field trips together, and we had to be very careful and guarded in what we said around each other in terms of discipline. And so we usually just talked about social things outside of school.

[laugh]

A: That is strange.

S: Kind of funny. And there was this one point – we were riding back, and this one group of people who were sort of very similar – there was an ecologist and the forestry guy – They said, “Look. Look at that molecular biologist. They’re running to their laboratory. Look! Look! Look!” You know they were making fun of him. I started laughing. I just busted out laughing. And they looked at me, “Oh yeah. We forgot you were here.” [laugh] I said, “I can take it.” In good humor it’s funny. They think of them as just stick in the – “they have no idea what it’s like outside of the lab or laboratory,” because I consider myself more of a laboratory scientist. I have a hard – I don’t know. I hate to say that because I really like to go out in the field, and I do some field work. But I am more of a laboratory scientist. And they were laughing at this laboratory scientist

rushing back to their lab because they're out in the sun too long. "Oh my gosh. They're exposed to the elements."

A: So, if there's that stereotype of the microbiologist running into the lab, what would be the stereotype of a chemist?

S: Gosh. I don't know. It's hard to say. I guess – [pause]

A: Or maybe not the microbiologist because you said that kind of merges chemistry and biology. But like the stereotype of a biology department and the stereotype of a chemistry department? Maybe that would be a way to ask that.

S: It's harder for me. I can answer that, but it's funny when I think cause I've been so – I've only been here five years. But I've been so surrounded by my chemistry colleagues who I don't even – We're teachers. I have to say. I mean, we teach. And we mesh in different ways. You know, we talk very rarely about our own disciplines in that regard. It's kind of funny.

A: I think that's significant, too.

S: We're plucked out, we're put in a group to do a different type of job. And sometimes I consult – I can consult more with my chemists on research issues than I can consult with biologists. Believe it or not. I ask them more questions when I need help. But that's another issue.

How would you characterize chemists? Very serious, I guess. I'm trying to think back, not to the chemists that we have now, because I don't know our chemists necessarily – I see that side of them all the time because we're – when we get together we're teaching. It's a teaching thing. They're very serious and – what's the word I'm looking for? They go from A to B to – I can't think of the word I'm looking for. Logical?

A: Linear?

S: Linear. Yeah. More so than a biologist. And physicists are like that too. Physicists are *really* like that and then chemists are kind of – and then biologists, forget about it.

A: Do the different fields approach things –

S: Yes.

A: Each group might have a question and each group goes for answers using similar methods and similar approaches.

S: There are some similarities, but I think there's a lot of differences.

A: Tell me what those approaches might be for biology then. That'll be –

S: Can I take a break?

A: Oh, absolutely.

[break]

A: I think what I – I probably wasn't asking the questions real clearly. So, let me back up and ask the question again. I'm interested in what are the issues, the problems that biology typically seeks to address and what approaches do they use to go after solving those problems or confronting those issues or whatever?

S: H.m.m. Okay, so – the problem with biology – we all – there's a similarity in all sciences. We ask questions. And we seek...we'll state a hypothesis concerning that question. And we'll seek to support that hypothesis or to disprove that hypothesis or not support that hypothesis. The problem with biology is there are so many factors that come into a system, that it's really hard to target one hypothesis without there being something else and something else that comes into play.

A: So is that why there end up being more and more questions? Is that part of what happens there?

S: I guess more so than in chemistry or in physics. I guess that one's of the aspects to it. And so a biologist has to be aware of that when they go to tackle a problem. And they have to attack the problem from a multi-disciplinary approach. They can't, in my eyes, you can't just look at the biology. You have to think about the chemistry aspect. And you have to think about the physics and what not. And you have to think about what's going to happen if you do this and that within the system because in biology it's not as clear-cut. So, for instance, a chemist can test a hypothesis, and it's pretty clear-cut in the experiment that's completed. I can't even speak for a physicist. I feel weird speaking for a physicist, but I think Jack Fairburn would agree with me that physics is pretty clear-cut. You ask a question, and there's an answer to it. In biology, you ask a question, and there's fifty answers to it. And so you have to find which direction you want to go to answer that question. There's many different directions you can go. And you have to choose one first. Does that make sense?

A: Yes it does. It does make sense.

S: So we all sort of as scientists seek to do the same thing, but as biologists, in a lot of cases it's more complicated to test hypotheses when compared to other disciplines in science.

A: Sounds like you have to be more flexible.

S: Yeah. I suppose you do. And – I think it's so very important to be multi-disciplinary in terms of science. And that's why, if you look at a biology curriculum, it's got physics, chemistry, most of that's what you do in your freshman and sophomore

years. And then you do the biology in the end. But you have to learn those basics first before you can get into the biology. Because you can't understand the biology until you understand those areas.

A: Okay.

S: And on top of that, you have to understand your system even if it involves – To give you an example maybe? To work from an example. If I wanted to study how a cell metabolizes a food item. Okay? Then I have to understand, first of all, the multi-disciplinary deal. I have to understand the chemistry and physics behind that metabolism. And on top of that, I have to understand that when that cell metabolizes this chemical, this complex chemical, that it's going to produce a number of different waste products that could affect the cell. And so studying that metabolism can be very tricky. To isolate that one thing can be very tricky from everything else that's going on in that cell. 'Cause keep in mind the cell's also doing a number of other – metabolizing a number of other different things in order to stay alive. Does that make sense?

A: Yes. It does.

S: There's so much that's going it's hard to just target the one thing and control it. So running a control in biology is really difficult in some cases.

A: Whereas in chemistry you might take one molecule or whatever and just work with it.

S: Right. And I don't mean to – I don't want to over-simplify chemistry and physics at all. But I think, I mean even some chemists and physicists would agree, too, that biology is a lot more complex than their disciplines. Inorganic chemistry and physics. Now when you get into organic chemistry and then biochemistry –

[tape change]

S: So getting back to what I love about biology, I love the fact that there all of those things because, as I said before, otherwise I could get bored easily. That's sort of in my personality. I have to be always doing – You know what I mean? I really appreciate diversity in a lot of different aspects and not just in terms of human beings. You know?

A: That makes sense. Well, I'm going to skip back to more of your life story. And I'm interested in knowing about your experiences in applying for jobs after graduate – or as you were finishing graduate school and applying and interviewing and getting hired. Sort of that process.

S: Okay. Well, it was sort of a surprise that my advisor wanted me to defend as quickly as he did. I thought I had probably another year, perhaps, to go. And he mentioned the spring before – or a half a year before I actually started looking, “No. I think you're ready to defend very shortly or you will be in August. So you might want to start thinking about looking for positions.” So that got the fire under me. And I thought I was starting a little late because of that. And it's a great thing that Thaxton was hiring starting a little late, too. But it's funny because it was a lot earlier than what it is now. Still, I thought it was a little late. I guess back then they were saying, “No. That was on time.”

So, I put my feelers out, and I started sending out resumes, or CVs, I guess –But it was such a short CV. It's funny. Started to sending out CVs to places that were advertising in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. And I was even sending out CVs to places that were just looking for a general biologist, not necessarily specific to my discipline even though that made me a little nervous. But I thought I could do it.

A: Different locations? Out of state?

S: Well, no because at the time I had my husband. At the time he was my boyfriend, my fiancé. And his area of expertise is southeastern archeology. And so when we discussed finding jobs – It wasn't decided like, you know, completely, but we discussed that we would look in the southeast first. And start in Metropolitan and within in the southeast. I applied to places in the southeast essentially and places that – At the time he had a position at a company out of a suburb that has satellite offices in Florida, Raleigh-Durham, and one in Tennessee, I think. And Jimmy was working there at the time. So I was looking sort of in those target areas as well. And luckily they were all around big cities so there were lots of schools and stuff. So this issue – because I kept thinking about it. I had a lot of friends – there's a lot of people who work in areas away from their spouses. And we talked about that issue. We hoped that it would never happen. But it was there. And I was kind of nervous. So I applied and I was offered an interview at Thaxton, and I was offered an interview at Small Private University (SPU). And SPU was looking for somebody – they were actually looking for someone to, I guess, to be more of an administrator slash teacher for their satellite program. You know how they have those satellite campuses around Metropolitan? And they wanted someone to do the general ed science stuff. And they wanted someone who actually would be a department – All of the duties that they described to me, they didn't list it as department head position. It sounded like a department head. But they still just listed the position as an assistant professor of biology. And so I thought that was kind of strange. And I wasn't ready for that.

I was offered both jobs, and I took Thaxton. So it was actually really easy. I mean, I got two interviews, offered the jobs, and it was an easy decision for me which one was

more suited to me. But at the time, I was thinking that this would be a stepping stone. To tell you the truth, I thought that I would probably work here for a year or two and then apply at other places. But, you know, I really liked it. I did apply this year to try to move on, but things worked out where I stayed. What I was looking at wasn't really better or put me in a better place than I would be here. If that makes any sense. Because I got tenure this year, too.

A: Good! Are you Coordinator of the Biology Program? Is that the title?

S: Yes.

A: So, it's not a separate department. It's part of the Natural Sciences Department.

S: Correct. It's Natural Sciences, but since we have a program, the department head – the department would be so huge, that the Department Head would have a real hard – There's a lot of duties that someone else could do to help out. So we have a – actually Chemistry, because they have several faculty too, has a Point of Contact, which is similar to a coordinator but because they don't have a program, there's fewer things to do. That's Pam Timbark. And then Jack made me the Coordinator for Biology.

A: Is there an overriding philosophy for y'all's department?

S: In terms of?

A: Teaching or relationships – approaching students or anything like that. I hate to use the word “mission statement.” I'm tired of that, but maybe something –

S: Well, I kind of touched on before one philosophy is to really – well, the main overall philosophy, I guess, for the whole college would be to prepare students for, not just graduate school, but for work. And so, you see one of the things that comes out of that is we're really big on forcing the students to do some sort of experiential learning



whether it's research or doing an internship. And then if they're doing research – We couldn't figure how to assess the internship other than the way we assess it now. So that's why we did the pass/fail thing. Because we had a really hard time thinking how would this work. How would we be qualified to assess some of these jobs that students do? So that's kind of a problem, I guess. Now I'm just – I'm probably talking more than I need to be about all that.

A: No, that's fine.

S: But I guess that underlying theme we really like the students to do research before they move on even if they're going to go to med school because it helps with critical thinking skills. Other than that – to make sure the students get a good experience in the classroom. We're all very concerned about that. If there's ever a problem with one class, Jack Fairburn presents it to us, and we try to solve the problem. We had an issue where a variety of students were complaining that tests were too hard in a certain class. As a group, we reviewed the tests for that particular section of class – everyone's version of the test. We came up with our professional opinion about how they compared to one another. And so, we're all concerned.

A: And that's a very collegial approach to that, too.

S: Yeah. I think we all get along pretty well so far. I mean, we had trouble, I guess, when Chad Harrison was here. Many of us didn't get along or have the same philosophy as he did. His philosophy was much different than I think the main ideas we all had for our department. There was some strife and a lot of disagreement in our meetings, but that's changed, I guess this year. I mean it's sad. But I think he envisioned bigger things

for our department, things that we weren't really ready to even consider. And he was the coordinator before.

A: So that influence was pretty strong or the voice was strong.

S: It was, but even Fairburn didn't agree with that voice either. So, it just made it difficult, I think, when we went to discuss curriculum issues and what not. And so, other than that, we have been – we all are very collegial. We get along really well in my opinion.

A: What is a typical day like for you?

S: Let's see. Three days a week I get up and exercise with my husband. We go to the gym and work out. And then, I'm in here – let's see, this fall I have a 7:30 a.m. class. So that's pretty early. I'm pretty much here either in the morning anywhere from 7:30 to 9. I usually don't come in after 9. Until about – Most nights I get out of here by 6:30, but sometimes later depending on what I'm doing. And things are changing a little bit this fall. I have fewer hours because of the Coordinator position. Now that I'm officially Coordinator, I have one less course to teach.

A: So, what is your teaching load?

S: My teaching load - depending on how many students I do research with because we get release time for that – any where from 9 to 12 hours instead of 14. So, I got a three-hour release for the coordinator, and an hour for every student that I do research with. You can get up to three on that. We do contact instead of credit hours because our labs – a one hour lab lasts three hours. And we teach 14 contact hours normally unless you have release for coordinator or research.

A: So, when you get here, you teach a class. What else happens in your day?

S: I teach. I usually have students who come by my office to get assistance. So, I work with them one on one. I have students who come by for advisement. I've been on a lot of committees lately. So there's a lot of committee work. Committee work usually exists at noon time on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but in some cases – when I was on the Student Life Committee – we'd have them all different times because you have to...Student Life Committee, most of the students are in clubs so they can't make it on Tuesday or Thursday at noon. I'm going to be on Faculty Council so that will also be every other Thursday, I think. Committee work. And then usually work in the afternoons either publications, if it's in the fall or the spring, trying to get things written up or stuff for the coordinator. I frequently take on little tasks for Jack to help him out some. He works so hard. Try to take some of that. And then grading. Grading and grading exams. Is this what you're looking for?

A: Yes.

S: And, like I said, I try to get out of here by 6 or 6:30. It was really bad when I first started teaching here. I'd stay until 8 sometimes. Jimmy and I had some trouble with it. He thought that I was, you know – we had some problems. And so now I've made it a philosophy not to bring anything home. So, if I have to finish it, I'll finish it at home and I'll let him know ahead of time, and I'll call him. I'll try to be home by 6:30 every night. And I won't do things on weekends unless I absolutely have to, which I'm probably gonna have to this weekend.

A: But that becomes the exception rather than the rule. Doing work on the weekend is the exception.

S: 'Cause we're trying to start a family and everything. I think he's just worried that if I were left alone, I'd work myself to death. I'd probably be like Jack. I don't think – I hate to compare myself to him because –

A: But you do come in, even if you're teaching mainly Monday, Wednesday, Friday, you go ahead and come in on Tuesdays and Thursdays?

S: Oh yeah. Every now and then I'll stay home on Friday because I make doctor's appointments on those days. And for instance, if I make a doctor appointment on a Friday, then I'll just plan to work at home. So not to drive in, back and forth, just to come in for a few hours. But I usually come into work even if I'm not teaching.

A: A couple of people have mentioned a challenge of students expecting immediate access, especially through email. Do you deal with that?

S: Yeah. They do. They'll make comments even on your evaluations. If a student comes by and it's not during your office hours and you're not there, sometimes – not with all students – but sometimes it'll end up on your teaching evaluation that you're not available. Because when they showed up – it doesn't matter if you're teaching or anything – they showed up and you weren't there at the moment that they wanted you and they didn't email you ahead of time. It's real frustrating sometimes. So, I just constantly remind them of when I – I tell them when I'm sitting in my office waiting for them to come. I make them think I'm sitting there waiting, doing nothing. [laugh] And then I remind them in every class period. Just tell them to email me because otherwise – And I check email quite a bit. But yeah, I have some students who will email you. They'll email you at midnight the night before. If you haven't gotten back to them by 9:00 the next morning, you get a second email that's like angry now about how – “Are you

ignoring my emails?” I had one today where she emailed me last night at like midnight, and I got it today. And I responded at like 9:30, I think. And she came in and she said, “I emailed you last night. And I thought you weren’t checking email because I didn’t get anything back.” And I said, “Well, last night. Let’s see. I went home about 7, and I just answered your email about an hour ago around 9:30. And I haven’t heard back from you.” I was trying to turn it around on her. And she looked at me and she’s like, “Oh, so you did get it. You did get my email, and you responded?” And I said, “Yes, I did. And I responded.” And I said, “So, we can cover it now that you’re here, too.”

A: So you do have to draw some boundaries and not let that just –

S: You have to remind them because I think they forget – especially around final exam time. Everyone’s freaking out. I told them this week – You know, I was holding office hours all day today. I had several people to stop by. “Are you going to be in on Friday?” And I said, “Well, Friday’s the only day this week I’m not going to be in. But I’m going to be here Monday – all day - all day long Monday. And so you have the whole weekend to get your questions in order. And you can come in Monday and ask questions.” But I still got this “Ah! You’re not going to be here Friday?!” I don’t know how many times. And this is a woman who’s notorious for saying that she’s going to come and see me on a day, and then she’ll never show up. It’s just kind of funny – the expectations they have.

A: And the immediate response, having you on call. I like your approach to saying, rather than when I’m not going to be here, you’re telling them when you are going to be here. That’s a real good customer service thing. [laugh]

S: And I remind them because they tend not to look at the little schedule on the door. You have it on your web site. You'll even email it to them. It'll be on the syllabus. But they tend not to look at that. So, it's good to remind them every day when you're in and when, you know – Even when I don't have office hours, I'll say, "Look, I'm going to be here all day tomorrow – in this room. I don't have office hours. So I might not be there when you show up, but if you email me ahead of time, I'll make sure I'm there for you." And sometimes they do, and sometimes they don't. Or sometimes they'll just show up, and luckily I'll be there.

A: What's the most rewarding part of your day or your week or your semester?

S: Getting letters from students saying how much they appreciate your teaching. 'Cause sometimes I go through – At the end of the semester, you start feeling like, "God. I haven't taught them anything. I'm horrible." And I start beating myself up. "I did this so horribly this semester. I didn't spend enough time on this, that or the other." And then a student will come by and just will start telling you how much you've influenced them. Or they'll come back after they get into another class, like in the nursing program, they come back and say, "If I didn't have your class – There's so many people in there who came from another school, and they didn't have your micro class. They're so lost. And we are – you know our little clique that was in your class? We know all the answers. You prepared us so well." They'll stop me in the hall. It just makes me feel really good. And so that's very rewarding. Just to know that, even the times where you think you're doing horrible, that there's at least someone out there who thinks you're doing a good job. I don't know how many times that has happened where I'm thinking, "Gosh. I'm going to get the worst

student evaluations this semester. I really should have put more time into this.” I’ll beat myself up towards the end. And then – you know –

A: Get that wonderful feedback. I say those are the things that make me get up tomorrow and come back to work again. Some little compliment or expression of appreciation.

S: Or just hearing what Student A. said. Gosh, that was great. So that’s the best, I think. That’s the most rewarding, I think, of this job.

A: Well, I think that gets us caught with the here and now unless there’s something else.

S: I think I’m good.