Waiting to become: A descriptive phenomenology of adjunct faculty experiences at multi-campus community colleges

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Waiting to become: A descriptive phenomenology of adjunct faculty experiences at multi-campus community colleges

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of adjunct faculty who work at multi-campus community colleges, and who aspire to full-time positions in such institutions. Greater numbers of professionals are entering community colleges with aspirations of becoming full-time faculty. A paucity of research on this topic revealed a need to illuminate the experiences of adjunct faculty working at multi-campus community colleges (Wolfe & Strange, 2003). The widely-held notion that adjuncts choose part-time teaching to earn extra money, give back to the community, or are retirees is not a reality (House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2014).

The following research questions guided this study:

1). What are the experiences of adjuncts aspiring to become full-time faculty at multi-campus community colleges?

2). How might adjuncts’ career aspirations have changed as a result of their professional and personal experiences?

Descriptive phenomenology was employed to conduct this study. Seven adjunct faculty members, two men and five women, were selected as research participants, utilizing a purposive sampling technique involving two multi-campus community college research sites in the Midwest. Data gathered from 21 semi-structured interviews were analyzed to identify emerging themes. The meaning of these themes and subthemes are discussed and contextualized within the current scholarly literature. From the data analysis, ten distinct themes emerged: (1) They thought I’d just figure it out, (2) Accidental academics, (3) I am not a professional, (4) No one was there to tell me what to do, (5) Insider yet outsider with full-time faculty, (6) The undercurrent with administration, (7) Place bound by family, (8) Interviewing for full-time
faculty: Trying to get a foot in the door, (9) Reevaluating my career aspirations: Why am I still working as an adjunct?, and (10) Thank you for listening. Two additional distinct subthemes emerged from the data: *I hope I set an example* and *We are the Walmartification of higher education*. The analysis addressed how each theme is situated within Astin’s (1984) socio-psychological model of career choice. Several suggestions for best practice within administrative and community college cultures are provided.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Waiting . . . As a female adjunct working at a community college, I aspired to become a full-time faculty member in the Arts & Sciences. Ever since I was a little girl, I played schoolhouse and grew up dreaming of becoming an educator, inspiring students to fulfill their dreams. Throughout my journey in education, I had the benefit of interacting with professors, who encouraged my career aspiration of becoming a full-time faculty member. My family also was supportive. No one ever imagined one of us was even capable of achieving an education to teach at the collegiate level. When I completed my first master’s degree, I immediately started to look for a teaching position at the collegiate level. I applied for and accepted an adjunct position in the Arts & Sciences Department at a multi-campus community college with high hopes of obtaining full-time employment. I felt as though I was well on my journey to fulfilling my career aspirations.

A few years went by with little opportunity to apply for a full-time faculty position. While working as an adjunct, I continued to wait, checking the employment page for open positions several times per week, hoping to come across a position for which I could apply. Finally frustrated, I met with a full-time, respected colleague for coffee and career advice. She told me if I continued to work hard, teach classes that needed to be filled, and participate in other academic events, I would have a good chance at a full-time faculty position when one became available at one of the campuses. Several years after we had this discussion, including years of completing applications, sweating in job interviews where I was the only woman in the room, receiving the same rejection emails time and time again, struggling to pay rent, and wondering if I could afford food the next month, I became frustrated and tired of waiting. I decided to pursue
other academic avenues, while many of my fellow adjuncts also hoping for full-time, chose to remain behind.

Recently, one of my colleagues graduated with her master’s degree and is now an adjunct instructor teaching English and Speech classes at a multi-campus community college. When I asked her what her goals were now she had graduated, she said, “Well, I think I will just teach as many classes as I can at the community college for awhile and wait to apply for a full-time position.” . . . The waiting has begun.

This research study illuminates the experiences adjuncts have, while they travel perceived paths to becoming full-time at multi-campus community colleges, and how their aspirations may have been altered as a result of these experiences. Chapter 1 presents the following: background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, theoretical perspective, theoretical framework, research strategy, and term definitions. It concludes with a summary and overview of this dissertation.

**Background of the Study**

**Adjuncts in the Community College**

It is no secret adjuncts are an integral part of postsecondary education. In 2011, part-time instructional staff at all institutions exceeded full-time faculty for the first time in academic history. The highest portion of part-time faculty are found in community colleges, where 70% of the instructional staff are adjuncts (Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014; Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015). Community colleges employ adjuncts for a variety of reasons. First, they save institutions money. In an environment of shrinking financial resources, community colleges must find ways to cut costs. In most states, community college adjuncts make one-third less than
their full-time colleagues, do not receive benefits, have limited rights to raises, and are rarely promoted to higher paid positions. Adjuncts cost community colleges close to nothing:

Community colleges have come to depend on low-cost labor to balance the budget. As long as the law or collective bargaining agreements do not stop them, administrators will continue to employ lower paid part-time instructors. Part-time instructors are to the community college as migrant workers are to the farms. (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 85-86)

Second, adjuncts increase institutional flexibility, allowing schools to match enrollment demands at other campuses, if they are a multi-campus institution. Contracts can be terminated or renewed, based on student enrollment. Adjuncts often bring real-world professional experience because they teach in disciplines in which they have experience, and enrich the student experience by providing recent- practitioner examples to the classroom (Banachowski, 1996; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015).

An academic hierarchy illustrates the current status of adjuncts in community colleges within higher education as a whole. In general, community college faculty rank the lowest in prestige and perceived importance. Women and people of color fall below White males, occupational instructors fall below academic educators, and part-time cohorts, regardless of their field or expertise, and are at the very bottom of academic staff (Weisman & Marr, 2002). Whether or not adjuncts receive any support as instructors depends mostly on the dean’s attitude toward the perceived value of his/her staff. Unfortunately, recent studies show deans tend to support and allot more resources to full-time faculty (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015). Due to the complexity of the governance and structure of multi-campus community colleges, there has been
an increase in the intricacy of function, formality in communication, delegation of responsibility, and centralization of ultimate authority designated to each campus (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Unlike the hiring process of full-time faculty, part-time academic staff are chosen by administration less carefully, with the rationale being the institution is making no long-term commitment to them; therefore, there is less perceived need to spend a great deal of time or money in selecting them (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Department chairs usually are given authority to hire adjuncts to fill classes in their designated departments. Since finances are becoming more constrained, much of this authority has been reallocated to the college’s dean. Deans’ attitudes of how much they value and support their adjunct faculty in/ out of the academic classroom will impact them personally and professionally (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015).

Usher (2015), a Black English instructor struggling to share her authority, knowledge, and expertise with students already hostile about her gender and race, discovered how much a dean’s support is needed for someone in her profession. She was reprimanded by her dean for not allowing students to text during class, and was told she should let her students have fun and write what they wish instead of teaching them thesis statements. Usher (2015), thinking about her insurance premiums, rent, and car loan, kept silent during one of the most humiliating and frustrating conversations she ever had with a supervisor. Community college part-time faculty have very little status in the academic hierarchy; yet, they are essential to the success of the institutions they serve.

While there has been much research on adjunct and full-time faculty members who serve single-campus community college institutions, very little research has been conducted on those who serve multi-campus community colleges. Wolfe and Strange (2003) conducted a qualitative study of the faculty culture, both full-time and part-time, of a small, rural, multi-campus
community college. They found faculty members valued each other, and were very knowledgeable and concerned about campus issues. A significant issue raised by most of the faculty was their respective campus being seen as second-class compared to the main campus. Ewers (2000), also studying the culture of multi-community colleges, found multi-campus districts always assume the belief one campus is better than the other. Wolfe and Strange (2003) further found faculty and staff were closer to the community the campus served than the main campus. They also noted the processes for decision-making, overall governance, and even the philosophies of student learning were uniquely set apart from the main campus.

**Adjunct Academicians**

Adjuncts are the new academician majority in education (Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015). Admittedly, adjuncts have been around for a long time, and at one time enjoyed a high social status within the institutions they served; unfortunately, this certainly seems not to be the case in today’s higher education systems (Pearch & Marutz, 2005).

A variety of motives drive an adjunct’s desire to teach. Some adjuncts choose to teach with the hope of moving into full-time teaching positions. Adjuncts who teach with hope of achieving a full-time teaching appointment are involuntary, part-time faculty; others refer to this group of instructors as voluntary, part-time adjuncts. Typically, this definition extends to those who teach for extra income or are retired, or who choose to teach to stay connected professionally (Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015).

Involuntary adjuncts believe if they show commitment to their college by going above and beyond inside and outside of the academic classroom, they will have an advantage over other applicants when a full-time position becomes available. Some even go beyond classroom excellence, volunteering for committees or developing online courses to keep their hopes alive.
Excellent work as an adjunct does not lead automatically to full-time status. Those responsible for hiring may see a dependable adjunct faculty member as too valuable to be hired to a full-time position due to their flexibility (Wilson, 2010).

Anything of value does not come without a price; this is true of the demands of being an adjunct. An adjunct’s life is depicted as “often exhausting, underpaid, undernourished, and rife with logistical challenges” (Pompper, 2001, p. 457; House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2014). Adjuncts typically work in complex, high-pressure environments without clear guidelines. The realities of no job security, no health-care benefits, the need to save for retirement, and fear of being in a permanent underclass are mere glimpses of the struggles adjuncts often find themselves in.

Adjuncts also are excluded from governance and isolated from other faculty members (Pompper, 2011; House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2014). In community college settings, adjuncts greatly outnumber full-time faculty, but usually carry the least prestige of academicians. Studies of adjuncts’ satisfaction at 2- and 4-year institutions find a significant lack of engagement; adjuncts feel undervalued by administrators, invisible, unappreciated, and easily replaceable (Townsend & Twombly, 2007; Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014). Adjuncts are even wary of voicing their opinions, and asking for higher pay and benefits for fear of not having a job the following semester (Wilson, 2010).

Female Adjuncts

Women play a key role in shaping the direction of postsecondary education, particularly at 2-year institutions. Of all postsecondary institutions, community colleges have the largest population of women presidents, students, and instructional staff. Women constitute an estimated 58% of adjunct faculty at community colleges (Townsend & Twombly, 2007;
American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). While community colleges appear to be an equitable place for women to study and work, numbers alone do not tell the whole story. The significant number of women at community colleges may be interpreted as evidence of the marginalization of women faculty in the lower tier of academia, where they still may not achieve rank or salary equity with men (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). More women drop out of academia than men, at all stages of their careers, due to spousal and family obligations (Winkler, 2010). Women are more likely to accept part-time employment to contribute to their spouse’s income, while still being expected to maintain all household and childcare responsibilities (Young & McLeod, 2001).

Female adjunct faculty are more likely than their male counterparts to report feeling marginalized and undervalued. Schneider, Carden, Francisco, and Jones (2011) used survey data to find an apparent gender gap in academia. Female faculty obtained fewer full-time positions than men, were paid less, and pigeon-holed into positions, such as student services or advising (Schneider, Carden, Francisco, & Jones, 2011). Women were also more likely to accept part-time positions in hopes of acquiring full-time employment (Gardner, 2012).

**Statement of the Problem**

Adjuncts are the new academician majority at community colleges. While a plethora of recent literature has examined general adjunct experiences in higher education, few studies examine the experiences of an adjunct working at multi-campus community colleges who desired to become full-time faculty, as well as the personal and professional impact of adjunct career aspirations. Recent studies on adjuncts have found more are accepting part-time teaching opportunities with the hope that doing so it will guarantee them a full-time position (Flaherty, 2015; Hart Research Associates, 2012).
There is a need to explore the experiences of adjuncts to bring to light their professional concerns and struggles working at multi-campus community colleges. The dearth of literature on such experiences is regrettable, as the number of adjuncts at community colleges continues to increase. Understanding the essence of experience for adjuncts in the situations outlined above can contribute towards filling the gap in academic literature pertaining to this growing professional population.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study illuminated (1) the experiences of adjuncts who are working at multi-campus community colleges whose career aspirations are to become full-time faculty and (2) how adjuncts’ career aspirations may have changed as a result of their professional and personal experiences. Participants were encouraged to construct meaning as they described their perceptions and experiences from adolescence to adulthood, and to consider how this meaning has influenced them both personally and professionally. Participants were asked to relate detailed descriptions of their experiences through several one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. These experiences were then reduced to a common essence, or meaning, through a descriptive phenomenological approach.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1). What are the experiences of adjuncts aspiring to become full-time faculty at multi-campus community colleges?

2). How might adjuncts’ career aspirations have changed as a result of their professional and personal experiences?
Significance of the Study

The subject of adjuncts in higher education has been widely researched in recent years, from bleak work conditions, to lack of compensation and benefits, to being the buffers for community college budget cuts. There has been research on full-time faculty at 4-year institutions, which was relevant to this study (Lester, 1999; Maranto & Griffin, 2010; Isgro & Castaneda, 2014). Little research has focused on what influenced adjuncts to pursue faculty appointments at community college institutions. In addition, minimal studies have explored the experiences of those who aspire to become full-time faculty and how these aspirations may have changed as a result of their professional and personal experiences working at multi-campus community colleges.

Despite the large numbers of multi-campus community colleges, very little research has been conducted on the faculty who serve them, part- or full-time (Wolfe & Strange, 2003). This study captured participants’ experiences by learning more about their career aspirations. Their unique experiences help fill the gap in literature pertaining specifically to adjuncts whose career aspirations were to become full-time faculty at multi-campus community colleges. The results from this study may provide additional learning opportunities for administration and full-time faculty concerning adjunct populations and their career aspirations.

Theoretical Perspective

Epistemology is the study of how knowledge is acquired. It answers the question, How do we know?, and encompasses the nature and construction of concepts, the validity of the senses, logical reasoning, and thoughts, ideas, memories, and emotions (Maxwell, 2013). Epistemology is concerned with how our minds relate to reality, and whether these relationships are valid (Maxwell, 2013). Constructivist epistemology was my chosen method to explain
knowledge acquisition and construction. Maxwell (2013) posits our understanding of this world is inevitably our own construction, rather than a purely objective perception of reality. No such element can claim absolute truth. We recognize that what people believe is shaped by their assumptions and prior experiences, as well as by the reality they interact with on a daily basis. Epistemological constructivism focuses exclusively on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind. It reveals one’s unique experiences and suggests ways of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). This worldview is manifested in phenomenological studies where individuals describe their experiences (Creswell, 2013), just as the adjuncts who chose to participate in this study described and constructed meaning from their experiences to this researcher.

**Theoretical Framework**

Astin’s (1984) need-based, socio-psychological model of career choice was utilized to explicate perspectives on career choice and development of adjuncts. The model (Astin, 1984) explores how needs drive the individual, and early socialization shapes the differential interests and capacities of men and women. The model also incorporates elements of social learning theory and other theories to demonstrate how socialization shapes occupational expectations. The model can be useful not only to explain individuals’ career changes, but also to understand generational changes in the behaviors of groups, such as men and women. Astin aimed to explain two important empirical concepts: (1) gender differences in career choice, and (2) recent changes in adjuncts’ career aspirations and occupational behaviors.

This model was an appropriate fit for this study since it provided a framework to consider how general psychological (work motivation and expectations) and cultural-environmental (socialization and the structure of opportunity) factors translate into adjuncts’ expectations about
work, career choice, and work behavior, and most importantly, to understand why they stay in a career that may not meet their needs. Lindholm (2004) suggested that individuals pursue careers that satisfy their basic needs, which “makes sense: given their early experiences, opportunities, and perceptions” (p. 608).

Participants were asked questions about how their life experiences may have influenced their professional career choices and the factors that motivate them to work as an adjunct faculty member in a multi-campus community college. In the analysis phase of this study, emergent themes from their stories and the fit within Astin’s (1984) need-based socio-psychological model of career choice were identified. These themes drawn from the data helped to explain how participants’ experiences may have altered their career aspirations to become full-time faculty.

**Research Strategy**

Phenomenological research focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This reduces individual-lived experiences within a phenomenon to a description of universal essence. The phenomenon for this study to examine was what adjuncts, who aspire to become full-time faculty, experience, while working at a multi-campus community college.

During the data collection process, I practiced *epoche*, placing my usual understandings in abeyance to ensure a fresh perspective on the phenomenon under examination, to make sense of it directly and immediately (Moustakas, 1994; Maxwell, 2013). A descriptive phenomenologist must bracket his/her embedded understandings and let experiences of the phenomenon speak firsthand (Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Maxwell, 2013). As an adjunct academician working at a community college, I came to this study with my own professional biases and assumptions. To bracket my biases and professional experiences, I actively engaged
in several strategies: (1) member-checking, so participants can be sure I am sharing their experiences, not my own, (2) peer debriefing, or having a trusted colleague, familiar with qualitative research, provide feedback to keep me honest, while writing about participants’ experiences, and (3) external audit, or having a professional unfamiliar with my area of research continually review and assess the project. Finally, I kept a reflection journal while collecting data so I could write and later refer to any thoughts or feelings that may surface (Merriam, 2002; Maxwell, 2013). Engaging in the above strategies helped reduce bias and encouraged me to see the world through a new lens. Therefore, I could more accurately share the participants’ stories without adding my own expectations and experiences.

Descriptive phenomenology is a method to chronicle the stories of adjuncts for this study. I utilized the following strategies:

1. Gathered detailed information and concrete descriptions of specific experiences from others.
2. Adopted the attitude of phenomenological reduction to intuit the intelligibility of what is provided in the experience.
3. Sought the most invariant meanings for the context (Todres, 2005).

Thus, a descriptive phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study. I approached this study in a manner as unbiased as possible. The descriptive methodological approach required I dismiss my experiences as an adjunct in a multi-campus community college scenario (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Todres, 2005).
Operational Definition of Terms

Adjunct: Adjuncts are cost-saving, part-time employees classified as either permanent or non-permanent. They are paid per course or a yearly appointment, receive little or no health insurance or retirement benefits, experience few raises or advancement opportunities, have little to no say in institutional governance, and may have earned a doctorate, master’s, or bachelor’s degree (Caruth & Caruth, 2013). The American Association of Community Colleges (2015) defined part-time faculty as those who teach nine or fewer credit hours. Gappa and Leslie (1993) defined part-time faculty as “those individuals who are temporary, nontenure-track faculty employed less than full-time” (p. 3). Based on the above definitions, an adjunct is someone who teaches nine or fewer credit hours on a per-semester contract with no benefits.

Career Aspirations: The concept career aspirations was introduced into experimental psychology by Hoppe, who defined career aspirations as “person's expectations, goals, or claims on his own future achievements in a given task” (Frank, 1935, p. 119). Factors, such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, parents’ occupation and education level, and parental expectations, influence career aspirations. Domenico and Jones (2006) defined a career as “a series of related jobs within an organization or different jobs within various companies” (p. 3).

Career development includes the many jobs at which a person is gainfully employed. It should represent progress, whether through increased recognition, salary, or respect one receives from colleagues. The more a person’s career progresses in this manner, the more he or she will be judged successful. Career aspirations represent an individual’s orientation toward a desired career goal under ideal conditions (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Simply stated, career aspirations “provide information about an individual’s interests and hopes, unfettered by reality” (Domenico & Jones, 2006, p. 1). Hence, this study utilized Hoppe’s definition of career aspirations, “a
person's expectations, goals, or claims on his own future achievements in a given task” (Frank, 1935, p. 119).

*Community College:* Community college is widely viewed as a major educational institution that serves students not traditionally well served in higher education, such as women and people of color. Cohen and Brawer (2003) defined community college as “any institution regionally accredited to award the associates in arts or the associates in science as its highest degree” (p. 5). A community college is also recognized as a junior college, city college, county college, branch campus, vocational institute, technical institute, adult education center, people’s college, democracy’s college, opportunity college, or anti-university college. Nearly one in every two students enrolled in American higher education attends a community college (AACC, 2015). Enrolling an estimated 46% (11.5 million) of all students attending college in the United States, community colleges provide open access to education, prepare students to transfer to 4-year colleges, provide workforce training, and offer a number of noncredit programs (AACC, 2015). The community college sites utilized for this study were defined as multi-campus community colleges located in the Midwest.

*Midwest:* As defined by McIsaac and Edwards (1994), Midwest for this study referred to the following areas: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Eastern portions of the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri.

*Multi-Campus:* The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers defined a multi-campus as a location of a community college geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution, permanent in nature, offering programs leading to a degree or other recognized educational credential (AACRAO, as cited in Krueger, 2009). Cohen and Brawer (2003) and Holland (2001) suggested multi-campus institutions as
more complex, structured, and formalized than single-campus institutions, where each campus requires differentiated operation and organization. Multi-campus community colleges meet enrollment needs by adding off-campus or multi-campuses at other convenient locations instead of opening new colleges, making it more affordable and accessible for the community the campus is designed to serve. The effectiveness of multi-campus structures is found in their flexibility to offer the educational services that respond directly to community needs, making each campus unique (Norby, 2005).

**Summary**

Adjunct faculty teach for a variety of reasons, despite the challenges associated with the job description. Community colleges employ the largest numbers of adjuncts in higher education (Townsend & Twombly, 2007; House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2014; Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014). While many involuntary adjuncts often pledge their loyalties to community colleges with the hope of obtaining full-time status, their collective morale sinks. Teaching for community colleges not only shapes their lives within the institution’s walls, but within the walls of their homes as well.

A semester has now passed since my colleague started working as an adjunct at a multi-campus community college. She is already tired and frustrated from the challenges she is experiencing with her career. She still hopes a full-time employment position will become available soon at one of the campuses so she does not have to travel so much and juggle her teaching load. As she confided in me, I thought of the value this study’s data will contribute to the literature on adjuncts and the changes it may bring to community colleges.
Dissertation Overview

Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a review of research associated with full-time faculty and experiences of adjuncts in higher education. The literature review begins with an exploration of work about men and women’s career aspirations from adolescence to adulthood, as well as women who work as faculty in academia, particularly in community colleges. Next, a review of the undervalue of adjuncts as professionals and the apparent gender gap in higher education. The literature review concludes with an examination of how teaching in higher education shapes faculty’s family and home lives.

Chapter 3 explores the philosophical assumptions, methodological approach, participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis for this research project. A descriptive phenomenological approach is used to interpret the study’s data. Criteria for participant selection and the data collection methods for the semi-structured interviews are explained in this chapter. Chapter 3 also addresses this researcher’s roles and credentials for conducting this study.

Chapter 4 presents the study’s findings. Characterizations of constructed meaning, as well as participant narratives, results, and analysis animate this chapter’s findings. Each participant has a “voice” in the study. Themes and subthemes are extracted from participants’ descriptive narratives and contextualized within the literature. The major themes/subthemes are then fit as appropriate within Astin’s (1984) need-based socio-psychological model of career choice. An overall discussion of the analysis and results concludes the chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the following: study summary, conclusion, implications, recommendations for community college practice, future research, policy implications, reflexivity statement, and final thoughts.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the few scholarly sources available regarding adjunct faculty and their work experiences. Notably, while several studies focus on the roles and experiences of adjuncts in higher education, there is very little scholarly research highlighting the experiences of adjuncts at multi-campus community colleges or aspiring to become full-time faculty. The literature review provides an overview of the development of male and female career aspirations from adolescence through adulthood and community college adjunct demographics. These demographics include Midwestern community colleges, women and adjuncts in the community college, examining how adjuncts are undervalued as professionals, the gender gap between male and female faculty, and the challenges of raising a family while still working as a professional in academia.

Development of Career Aspirations from Adolescence through Adulthood

Career aspirations are shaped at an early age for men and women. Historically, men’s journey on their career paths has been, and continues to be, a smoother transition than for women. Women’s historic fight to earn advanced degrees, enter the workforce, and pursue careers outside of the home have shaped generations of women and the development of their career aspirations.

Career aspirations represent an individual’s orientation toward a desired career goal under ideal conditions. Career aspirations “provide information about an individual’s interests and hopes, unfettered by reality” (Domenico & Jones, 2006, p. 1). Domenico and Jones (2006) stated adolescence is the ideal time to study career development of children, as changes occur during this time that strongly influence the formation of career preferences. Factors that
influence the development of career aspirations from adolescence through adulthood are gender, family, socioeconomic status, education, and ethnicity.

Every culture includes gendered expectations for individuals, which heavily influence career paths. First, social role theory describes the pressures men and women face to fit socially-gendered roles. Thompson and Dahling (2010) posited women and men progressively narrow their career choices, based upon society’s expectations of what is considered appropriate. Second, social cognitive theory explains career development using personal and environmental factors, which the individual interprets (Shapiro, Grossman, Carter, Martin, Deyton, & Hammer, 2015). For example, in a qualitative study on faculty career aspirations, faculty reported having been attracted to a professor position due to their fit within the academic environment (Shapiro et al., 2015). Individuals also develop gendered roles through personal and social experiences from childhood to adulthood.

Image theory, the third pertinent theory on how career decisions are made, has gained scholarly attention for its focus on an individual’s decision-making process. This theory suggests people set goals consistent with the way they see themselves and the values they hold. They pursue these goals by only using strategies that do not threaten their values or self-views (Thompson & Dahling, 2010). Thompson and Dahling (2010) applied image theory to test different components of 224 undergraduate students’ perceived social status and gender roles, and whether these roles influenced their career aspirations. They found students who perceive themselves in a higher status valued higher-status careers and work. Conformity to gender roles was also confirmed, since women tended to select more feminized positions than men.

The topic of gender roles as an influencing factor in career aspirations appears in most literature pertaining to career development. Researchers agreed one of the top barriers most
often articulated with young women around career aspirations is ‘gender influences’ (Domenico & Jones, 2006). “Gender is clearly one of the most powerful of all influences on vocational behavior” (Domenico & Jones, 2006, p. 3), as gendered expectations shape children as soon as they are born. Shapiro et al. (2015) examined factors that may have influenced the career aspirations of 1200 middle school girls and boys. Surprisingly, they found a large majority of middle school children were already seriously contemplating their futures and gendered messages definitely influenced their career choices. These researchers found middle-school girls expressed a higher interest in female-dominated industries, while boys selected more male-dominated jobs because they were socially acceptable and familiar. Astin and Myint (1971) theorized students aspiring to a career not considered within the norm of society are those most likely to change their career choice. For example, more masculine occupations, such as engineering, lose more women than men over time, and vice versa for males who try to enter a feminized occupation—many do not last.

While gender is one of the greatest factors influencing children’s career aspirations, the roles parents, family, and educators play in shaping children’s career aspirations can be just as crucial (Shapiro et al., 2015). Studies have found parental influence, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and educational level likely affect the career aspirations of young children into adulthood (Astin & Myint, 1971; Domenico & Jones, 2006; Watts, Frame, Moffett, Hein, & Hein, 2015). Many young girls tend to be influenced by their parents’ occupations, especially their mothers’ (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Lindholm (2004) interviewed several faculty who said it was their parents who influenced them to pursue an academic career, since their parents were also professors or employed in academia. Children raised in wealthier homes are more apt to choose professional careers than children who have lower socioeconomic backgrounds, in
part, because of their parents’ educational and professional preparation. Children with lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have lower self-esteem and fewer role models to help guide their future professional aspirations (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Astin and Myint (1971) reported career changes occur as a result of healthier personal development at home and positive educational experiences enable students to define career aspirations more realistically as they continue into adulthood.

Marlino and Wilson (2003), also looking at what influences young male and female attitudes toward future career expectations, found school environments and educators play a large role in influencing career development. Marlino and Wilson (2003) posited having positive teacher role models and school counselors can greatly benefit students at all grade levels. This is especially true if a child’s parental and economic situations are lacking in those crucial areas of a child’s career development. Astin and Kent (1983), interested in how college influenced female freshmen’s professional career aspirations, used longitudinal data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and found colleges do not reduce many of the stereotypical gender differences in course work. Furthermore, many college courses of study, such as those within the liberal arts, preserve rather than reduce stereotypical differences in behavior, personality, and achievement. Faculty behavior can significantly influence students of both genders’ career aspirations. Astin and Kent (1983) stated having a relationship with faculty members and participating in extracurricular activities tended to shaped students’ career aspirations.

While women have made strides in overcoming professional barriers, many struggle with the stereotypical expectations of a successful woman. Studies have found females in high school tend to have higher career aspirations than males. Once they reach college, women’s career
aspirations have a greater tendency to spiral downward, while the aspirations of their male counterparts remain stable (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Before women can begin to work professionally, they face an additional barrier—their own beliefs about the barriers that lie before them, which largely impact career choice. Women are more likely to report expecting to face sex discrimination, lack of confidence, multiple-role conflict, conflict between career and family demands, inadequate preparation, decision-making difficulties, and dissatisfaction with their careers (Domenico & Jones, 2006; Watts, Frame, Moffet, Hein, & Hein, 2015). Watts et al. (2015) were interested in why females’ career aspirations declined once they exited high school. They surveyed women attending universities about perceived career barriers in their future occupation. Survey data confirmed women perceived more career barriers than men with regard to sex discrimination and conflict between children and career demands. Despite these perceived barriers, according to the findings of a recent career success survey reported from the Pew Research Center, women are surpassing men in the importance they place on having career success (Patten & Parker, 2012). For example, 66% of females, ages 10 to 34, rated obtaining a successful career as a high priority. Additionally, there has been a recent spike in the number of middle-aged women who listed the importance of having a successful career high on their priority list (Patten & Parker, 2012). Women constitute almost half of the workforce and have made substantial strides in education, since they are earning more advanced degrees than men. Despite their educational advantage and numbers in the workforce, women still lag behind men in terms of money, power, and leadership positions (Patten & Parker, 2012).

For decades, obtaining full-time employment at the community college level has been a challenge for men and women. In the 1980s, Tuckman and Tuckman (1981) conducted a study highlighting adjuncts concerns about obtaining full-time employment. Data were drawn from
1280 responses from part-time faculty employed at 79 public and private institutions to uncover possible disparities female adjuncts face compared to their male counterparts. Tuckman and Tuckman (1981) identified four categories that describe part-time faculty employment objectives: (1) hopeful full-timers, who wish to become full-time but are unable to find a full-time position; (2) full-mooners, or part-timers, who hold another job of 35 or more hours a week; (3) home-workers, or individuals, who work part-time while caring for others; and (4) part-mooners, who work part-time in one institution with another job of more than one, but less than 35, hours weekly. Compared to their male counterparts, a higher percentage of women self-identified as hopeful full-timers, but had not achieved a full-time position. More women were working toward their Ph.D.s to compete with their male counterparts. Even with a Ph.D., women may still find themselves battling for equality in the higher education workplace due to gender inequalities (Tuckman & Tuckman, 1981).

When higher education institutions were beginning to get established in the United States, women were often allowed to teach at the adjunct level. Spouses of professors often picked up extra work this way (Steiger, 2013). As Eileen E. Schell, author of *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers: Gender, Contingent Labor, and Writing Instruction*, stated, the reputation for adjunct teaching as a women’s profession was so strong that adjuncts were dubbed “the housewives of higher education” (as cited in Steiger, 2013, para. 11). For Maria Maisto, president of the New Faculty Majority, which advocates and litigates on behalf of adjuncts, this “feminization of the profession” is a problem (Steiger, 2013, para. 11). It is not surprising the conditions in the profession are the way they are given they have been so closely aligned with women’s work.
Achieving a professional status in any occupation, especially male-dominated professions, may be more difficult for women because of gender and social norms. There are a myriad of barriers that women already perceive or will experience as they navigate the career development process.

**Community College Adjuncts’ Demographics**

Community colleges are a crucial part of the post-secondary education delivery system. They serve nearly half of the undergraduate students in the United States, providing open access to post-secondary education, preparing students for transfer to 4-year institutions, workforce development and skills training, and offering noncredit programs ranging from English as a second language to skills retraining to community enrichment programs or cultural activities (AACC, 2016). At community colleges, there is relative uniformity in the percentage of male and female adjuncts—as women constitute at least 55% compared with public and private 4-year institutions where males predominate. In addition, at community colleges, there are greater percentages of Black and Hispanic faculty than at public or private 4-year institutions. Eighty to 85% of the faculty are White at all three types of institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008).

**Midwestern Community College Demographics**

Schulz (2009) and Boord (2010) created an electronic assessment to examine faculty demographics at the community college level. Schulz (2009) conducted a statewide study and Boord (2010) led a study at a large, urban, Midwestern community college where she was employed. Both of the studies were conducted within the same Midwestern state. The electronic survey instrument was designed to research adjunct background characteristics, academic and professional backgrounds, instructional responsibilities, workload, current employment,
professional development, job satisfaction, and opinions at the community college level.

A sample population of 930 participants was drawn from 15 community colleges within the same Midwestern state. The demographic categories for an adjunct indicated: (1) 58.85% were female; (2) mean age equaled 47.7 years; 3) 95% were White, not Hispanic; (4) 98.7% spoke English as the primary language; (5) 77.2% were married or living with a partner; (6) 99.3% were citizens of the United States; (7) 60.7% obtained a master’s degree as highest degree completed, while 11.6% had earned a doctorate or terminal degree; and (8) 53.1% taught in the field of arts and sciences versus 46.9% in the career and technical domains.

Utilizing a modified survey instrument developed by Schulz (2009) and Boord (2010), Tomanek (2010) redesigned the survey questions to better understand the adjunct culture at a different Midwestern community college. The following were determined concerning adjunct demographics: (1) 55.4% were female; (2) mean age equaled 48.8 years; (3) 87.1% were White, not Hispanic; (4) 94.7% spoke English as primary language; (5) 74.5% were married or living with a partner; (6) 97.1% were citizens of the United States; (7) 63.2% obtained a master’s degree as highest degree completed, while 7.7% had earned a doctorate or terminal degree; and (8) 57.4% taught in the field of arts and sciences versus 42.5% in the career and technical domains (Tomanek, 2010).

**Women in the Community College**

Community colleges have the highest numbers of adjunct faculty and have always been viewed as institutions that provide opportunities for students not traditionally served in higher education. They have long served as the initial step towards baccalaureate attainment for many women and minority students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). In the fall of 2002, 55% of full-time and 59% of part-time community college students were women. Since the fall of 2015, 60% of
community college students were women (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). The community college’s inclusivity also extends to women in professional positions, since the institutions have a higher percentage of female faculty and presidents than any other institutional type. Currently, faculty at 2-year institutions include 58% full-time female faculty and 52% female adjuncts. Women comprise only 38% of all full-time faculty in academia, including 2-year colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015).

While women, as both workers and students, are well represented in the community college, it may not be because of egalitarian treatment. While the relatively high percentage of women faculty and presidents can be regarded as emblematic of institutions having equitable hiring practices, it has also been interpreted as evidence of the marginalization of women workers, or at least female faculty, both full- and part-time (Townsend & Twombly, 2009). Female faculty at 2-year institutions are consigned to teach and lead in the lowest-tier institution in higher education, where they still may not achieve equity with men in terms of rank, salary, and tenure. There are statistically significant differences by gender in terms of perceptions about salary and rank, and perceived administrative attitudes toward female and male faculty. Townsend and LaPaglia (2000) mentioned that female faculty are more likely than male faculty to perceive inequities in salary and rank, and are less likely than men to agree their institutions’ administrators hold both women and men in the same regard (as cited in Townsend, 2009).

Studies of 4-year institutions have found female full-time faculty experience “chilly climates” with regard to tenure and promotion, which is also apparent at 2-year institutions (Townsend, 2009). Utilizing a national data set to assess if a “chilly climate” exists at community colleges for women faculty, Townsend (2009) found women and minorities are less likely than males and White faculty to agree that claims of discriminatory practices are greatly
exaggerated. In addition, women and minority faculty view the community college’s organizational atmosphere less positively than male faculty with regard to the receptivity of women and minority faculty (Townsend, 2009). Although women at community colleges are moving into the faculty majority, they experience a variety of challenges as compared to their male counterparts.

**Adjuncts in the Community College**

In general, community college adjuncts are the faculty majority. In most states, adjuncts make one-third less than their full-time colleagues, do not receive benefits, have limited rights to raises, and are rarely promoted to higher paid positions. Adjuncts typically teach 6 to 9 credits a semester; on average, making 25-35% less than their full-time counterparts (Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014). Unlike the hiring process of full-time faculty, adjuncts are chosen by administration less carefully, with the rationale being that because the institution is making no long-term commitment to them, there is less need to spend a great deal of time or money in selecting them (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Department chairs usually are given authority to hire adjuncts to teach classes in his/her designated department. Since finances continue to be more constrained, much of this authority has been reallocated to the college’s dean. Deans’ attitudes of how much they value and support their adjuncts in/ out of the academic classroom will impact the adjuncts personally and professionally (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015). Banachowski (1996) posited the practice of hiring adjunct instructors raises the concerns of academic integrity within the community college framework, since the majority of participants in the teaching field are on campus only part of the time. Bensimon, Ward, and Sanders (2000) stated there is a high probability for academic quality and rigor to be affected when adjuncts are in the classroom, due to a lack of office hours for students, academic scholarship, and dedication to their teaching.
Adjuncts are viewed as second-class staff members. If these limitations are not addressed, academic quality and rigor could be affected in the community college classroom. Arguably, the issue is not centered on adjuncts’ academic preparedness; rather, it is focused on an institutional limitation (Charfauros & Tierney, 1999).

Adjunct faculty tend to not have stable incomes. An adjunct’s salary depends on class sections filled by students. Adjunct faculty are often hired to teach at the beginning of each semester and their contracts are reviewed before securing employment for following semesters. If enrollment numbers drop, adjuncts who teach these sections are not hired or rehired. When student enrollment increases, then adjunct instructors could be hired or rehired to meet student needs (Banachowski, 1996). Also, when extra course sections are needed, adjuncts are employed to fill these eleventh-hour demands (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). It is not unusual for adjuncts to be employed during times beyond the traditional normal school hours involving evening and weekend instruction (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Faculty can be described as settling into an upward model at 2-year institutions: continuing antagonism between themselves and administrators; isolation in the classroom; and periodic battles for smaller classes; augmented salaries, and more comprehensive benefits (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014; Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015). The road to a stable profession for an adjunct faculty member at a 2-year institution is a long one.

**Adjuncts Undervalued As Professionals**

Community colleges need adjuncts because they are an integral part of their operations. Without them, community colleges would not be able to keep pace with the demand for courses or to survive financially. More than one million people are now working as adjuncts in higher education (Wallin, 2010). Adjuncts rank the lowest in the community college hierarchy in
prestige and perceived importance. They are considered a cheap, flexible labor source (Wallin, 2010).

Adjunct work is piece work, meaning salaries and resources are pieced together every semester from the various classes an adjunct may/ may not be assigned to teach. The House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democrats (2014) surveyed adjuncts throughout the country about working conditions where they teach. Of the 217 adjuncts surveyed, 48% reported teaching at two institutions, 27% at three institutions, and 13% at four or more institutions, trying to piece together career work, often to no avail. The Academic Workforce estimates the median pay for a standard three-credit class is $2,700; therefore, adjunct income averages about $20,000 a year, often requiring travel to several campuses or different institutions (House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2014). Additionally, 32% of adjuncts teach as their only occupation. They are compensated at a fraction of what full-time professors receive for the same course. They are not paid for class preparation, grading, or office hours (Eagan, Jaegar, & Grantham, 2015). Medicaid and food stamps are no strangers to adjuncts. Many adjuncts with families cannot afford food or medical bills, and often turn to public assistance (House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2014).

Adjuncts perceive themselves as academia’s second-class citizens and outsiders to their colleagues. They share stories of being exhausted from working with students with poor academic skills, grading papers into the dead of the night, and teaching for pennies on the dollar (Pompper, 2001). One adjunct who values helping her students stated, “The lack of office space for meeting with students is perceived by students that we are not important enough to have offices . . . we are definitely on the bottom of the food chain” (Pompper, 2001, p. 462). Another adjunct shared, “It’s practically for volunteer” . . . while another stated, “my salary goes to pay
for my gas” (Pompper, 2001, p. 462). Female adjuncts particularly noted the struggle of teaching courses, while tending to their families. One said the problem is negotiating time slots. She can only teach night courses because of caring for her children. It is a constant stressor to get sufficient courses to teach; she does it because it is her calling (Pompper, 2001).

Why do adjunct faculty stay in education if they feel unappreciated and marginalized? Adjuncts teach at community colleges because they love it. A study was conducted to examine job satisfaction and commitment of community college adjuncts. Results found little is known about adjuncts at community colleges; literature is sparse (Valadez & Anthony, 2001). Scholars have posited part-time faculty teach because teaching is their passion and they are generally satisfied with their roles relative to their students and subject matter. But they are also extremely concerned with salary, benefits, and long-term security—as they should be (Valadez & Anthony, 2001; House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2014). Many adjuncts feel exploited and shut out of opportunities for permanent positions even though they may be qualified. In a study conducted at Georgia’s technical colleges, 45% of the 773 involuntary adjunct respondents stated they would like to be teaching full-time at least within the next five years, but have not advanced despite the empty promises set forth by their administration. They reported still finding value in waiting (Pompper, 2001). Flaherty (2015) stated the notion that adjuncts have full-time jobs, and teach for extra cash or as a hobby on the side, has been debunked. A recent study in the Journal of Higher Education found that of 4,000 part-time faculty, over 73% of adjuncts are pining for a full-time position at their current institution (Flaherty, 2015). Hart Research Associates (2010) conducted a national phone survey of over 500 adjuncts working at 2- and 4-year institutions, inquiring about job satisfaction. Over 46% of the adjuncts working at community colleges reported accepting their teaching assignment
with the hope it would lead to full-time employment. Involuntary adjuncts pining for full-time positions, while dissatisfied with their level of compensation and working conditions, reported more discontent with how they feel mistreated by administration and full-time faculty (Hart Research Associates, 2010).

Adjuncts are not just passionate about teaching, but are also loyal to the community college institutions they serve. Research shows 91% of adjuncts are satisfied with their teaching positions, but are not satisfied with the low pay, sparse benefits, and treated as though they are lesser professionals than full-time faculty (Hoyt, 2012). While there have been a number of studies on job satisfaction with full-time faculty, very little has been written about part-time faculty satisfaction, in particular, women’s satisfaction (Hoyt, 2012). Since community colleges will continue to employ adjunct faculty, focusing on the needs of part-time instructors and promoting job satisfaction will be beneficial. Focusing on adjunct satisfaction will increase loyalty and retention so institutions can benefit from the economic value employees bring, such as education, experience, and abilities over the longer term (Antony & Hayden, 2011; Hoyt, 2012; Kramer, Gloeckner, & Jacoby, 2013).

How do adjunct faculty understand their professional identities and status at 2-year institutions? Adjuncts are more apt to follow institutional rules so they are not stripped of their courses and are ensured renewed employment. They view themselves as professionals lacking the same status as full-time faculty. They receive satisfaction from teaching and having the freedom to exhibit their expertise in the classroom. Outside the classroom, their professional value diminishes (Levin & Hernandez, 2014). Laura, a part-time faculty member who teaches several classes at three institutions, who is married with children, said,
I mean, the time factor is what weighs down on me. I guess having to work multiple places, getting paid much less for the job that you do, I feel taken advantage of in some respect. I have the same credentials as many people who sit on the other side, yet colleges . . . in the interest of saving money . . . will hire an adjunct, and it’s cheap labor. And I feel taken advantage of in that respect. (Levin & Hernandez, 2014, p. 548)

Other voices of frustration included feeling like substitute teachers and being stared at by full-time faculty when they join departmental meetings. The nature of part-time faculty work and employment status suggests the construction of a professional identity among the members of this marginalized group often occurs in a conflicted context; that both allocates and denies value to the functions they perform. They often view themselves as both undervalued and abused by their working conditions—low salaries, extended periods of work, excessive workloads, no physical space allocated to them on campus, and limited or nonexistent participation in department and institutional matters (Levin & Hernandez, 2014).

Besides feeling undervalued and working in a less than welcoming environment, adjunct faculty can face hardships when applying for jobs. Working as an adjunct is not always viewed as the best form of employment. Part-time faculty work listed on resumes is now considered a red flag to many businesses and corporations. Evidence suggests that in most institutions, part-time faculty are marginalized, especially female and minority instructors. They have little to no voice in curriculum development, textbook selection, the work of their respective divisions, and especially in institutional governance (Wyles, 1998; House Committee on Education and the Democratic Workforce, 2014). The real problem is not the number of growing adjuncts utilized at community colleges; rather, institutional neglect is to blame. Adjunct faculty are prohibited
from academic decision-making, the collegial process, and are disconnected from the community of learners. They are and will continue to be “faculty of convenience” (Wyles, 1998, p. 72).

To better understand “faculty of convenience,” Thirolf (2013) conducted a qualitative study using positioning theory and discourse analysis to examine faculty identities of three community college adjunct instructors: two women and one man who taught in the humanities. Adjunct faculty were hired on a course-to-course basis and lacked full-time benefits. Thirolf (2013) found the love of teaching and interacting with students was significantly high at the beginning of their teaching. As time went on, the adjuncts’ feelings of pride, and commitment to their students and institution lessened due to feeling disconnected, overlooked, and undervalued.

The ideas of feeling undervalued were evident from participants in Thirolf’s (2013) study. For example, Tiffany, one of the adjuncts, stated she loved teaching and writing, but “this life [as an adjunct] is going to kill me . . . I think if I was teaching in more reasonable circumstances, I could still really like teaching, but being an adjunct, it takes it out of you . . . it makes you start to hate doing it” (Thirolf, 2013, p. 180). As an adjunct faculty member, Tiffany could not claim the academic identity she longed to have. Claire, when asked how connected she felt with the full-time faculty in her department, commented they think of themselves as “the faculty and the rest are, you know, different . . . they don’t stop to talk to me, like our relationship is temporary” (Thirolf, 2013, p. 181). Claire views her academic identity as temporary. She described an adjunct’s life as a “weird . . . gypsy lifestyle” (Thirolf, 2013, p. 181). Female adjuncts felt the most marginalized. The identities of adjuncts interviewed in Thirolf’s study became increasingly wrought by feelings of frustration and isolation over time, and their teaching effectiveness changed, which should be concerning for administrators. Claire stated, “Academia for someone like me, it’s a ghetto” (Thirolf, 2013, p. 183). Identifying new,
novel ways to create full-time career pathways for qualified, dedicated, adjunct faculty should be the goal of every community college.

**Gender Gap Between Female and Male Faculty**

One of the larger issues identified among faculty in higher education is the “invisible,” but large gender gap and the chilly climate that results. Female full-time faculty face challenges in terms of advancement in a highly-gendered occupation dominated by men. Gender segregation occurs across academic departments, since the majority are male-dominated. It may be assumed that chilly climate affects the work environment and job satisfaction for women (Maranto & Griffin, 2010).

Maranto and Griffin (2010) drew on relational demography, interpersonal network theory, gender, diversity climate, and organizational justice literature to investigate the antecedents of a chilly climate for women faculty. Survey data were collected from tenured faculty, 108 women and 258 men, at a private Midwestern university. The women’s response rate was 79% and their male counterparts’ was 70%. Data showed female faculty felt more excluded from informal department networks, and reinforcing informal exclusion perpetuated the hierarchal stratification of male and female faculty (Maranto & Griffin, 2010).

Workplace exclusion is a form of workplace bullying, which plays a role in the “chilly climate” women experience in academia. Women perceive 4-year institutions as chillier than 2-year colleges, but nonetheless do not perceive their environment as friendly or receptive due to workplace dynamics, including workplace bullying (Lester, 1999). Women and minorities are more likely to experience workplace bullying. For example, through a case study of six faculty women at a community college, Lester (1999) defined bullying among faculty by the use of formal and informal power relative position of faculty who serve an important role in
institutional governance, have job protection by tenure, and have high levels of autonomy. The following anecdote exemplifies formal power wielded over one of the participants in Lester's study:

More than six years ago, we had a few deans who did not support what I was doing. One of them was really a racist. He said in a meeting, ‘How bad can you get, you are a woman and a Mexican,’ right in front of everyone. He said actually three things, ‘how bad can you get: young, a woman, and a Mexican.’ And another time, he told me, ‘It’s amazing what affirmative action can do for people.’ (Lester, 1999, p. 452)

The female instructor remained silent, as she was afraid the dean would change her schedule. Weak workplace dynamics and poor leadership styles impact faculty treatment and escalate workplace conflict (Flaherty, 2015). For women, at the core of workplace bullying is power, racism, sexism, and gender bias.

Clearly the academic world is not immune to gender disparities. Based on prior research and statistics, Maranto and Griffin (2010) posited that a gender gap existed in academia, and, unfortunately, it mirrored gender issues in other workplaces. Positions in academia are still predominantly White male. In most disciplines, women in higher education are generally discriminated against in two areas of academia: (1) social stereotypes and (2) policies and procedures used to hire and promote women. Women are socially stereotyped as mothers, weak, and emotional; while professors are usually regarded as older, White, and male (Schneider, Carden, Francisco, & Jones, 2011). Women are trapped in this classical notion of what a professor should look like, so many women are passed for promotions or full-time positions. Gender also plays a role in the evaluation process and notions of what it means to be an accomplished man versus an accomplished woman in academia (Schneider, Carden, Francisco,
& Jones, 2011). Perceptions and attitudes, in addition to inflexible policies and procedures, affect women’s success in higher education environments.

Two personal stories from involuntary female adjuncts, illustrated their efforts against the system they believe is keeping them from succeeding. Fruscione (2014) interviewed two female adjuncts from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to understand their experiences as female part-time faculty members at a community college. Both participants taught a full-time course load; one participant has a Ph.D. and the other an MFA—both were seeking full-time work. The women addressed barriers they faced, such as oppressive feelings of not being able to adequately provide for their families. One of the participants talked about how her age, (mid 40s), affected her competitiveness in job searches. Participants also addressed the harsh realities of not having classes to teach, which resulted in a stressful financial situation for them and their families. Both participants valued the intrinsic rewards in teaching and care deeply for their students’ successes. When asked what they think about the possibilities for change, they responded adjuncts must not wait around anymore for things to get better, because they will not; sympathy from colleagues is great, but worthless (Fruscione, 2014).

**Family Life In Academia**

Family formation can be a struggle adjunct faculty face in higher academia for women and men. Women, who are married or have children, experience higher levels of discrimination than their male colleagues (Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2009). Female adjuncts represent “an academic analog of the feminization of poverty” (Wolfinger et al., 2009, p. 1595). Women in academia are far less likely to become parents than other professional women or their male counterparts. In addition, women are more likely to remain single for the sole purpose of achieving career success without having to face the pressures of motherhood (Isgro & Castaneda,
Studies expose employer discrimination against mothers in numerous ways (Isgro & Castaneda, 2014). Despite the literature addressing the judgments placed on mothers, it is difficult to find in academia and even harder to prove. According to Isgro and Castaneda (2015), “A more common image of part-time faculty is that of a house wife with school aged children . . . a woman with continuing family obligations but also the availability and the opportunity to teach part-time” (p. 17). Lack of support from administration and full-time faculty may have some connection with how women are disproportionately represented and treated in higher education.

Women are more likely than men to become adjuncts after graduate school. Having a family keeps women off the tenure track, even when they choose to return to academia. If women want families and professorships, adjunct faculty positions may be the new normative order, not an optimal solution to the difficulties women face in combining families and academic careers (Wolfinger et al., 2009).

In “Beyond Numerical Equity? Community Colleges and Gender Norms,” Lester (2009) described how women in higher education were expected to perform what is commonly called, ‘women’s work’. Women’s work may involve maintaining a caring, compassionate, helpful demeanor; performing departments’ service work and teaching in a ‘maternal’ way, among other behaviors (Wolfinger et al., 2009, p. 1594). For example, female faculty believe students expect them to perform ‘maternal’ roles, listening to students and assisting them with personal problems. Also, female faculty in departments with a male majority feel pressured to perform administrative duties traditionally assigned to women, such as taking notes during meetings. Women are segregated into traditionally ‘feminized’ disciplines, or academic areas historically populated by women, such as English, education, health professions, and library science. Male
faculty dominate areas such as physical sciences, security, engineering, mathematics, and protective services (Lester, 2009).

Female faculty and students often become tokens in male-dominated departments, where they serve as representatives of a group, not as individuals. The expectation that women perform ‘women’s work’ has implications for female students’ success and female faculty satisfaction (Lester, 2009). The assumption that household duties are ‘women’s work’ creates conflict for academic women with families expected to fulfill caretaking responsibilities at home in addition to pursuing careers. A Ph.D. professional in higher education and a mother stated:

Academic life is predominantly a man’s world. Women remain on the periphery, and children are all but absent. American universities consistently publish glowing reports stating their commitment to diversity, often showing statistics of female hires as proof of success, but the facts remain: university women make up disproportionately large numbers of temporary (adjunct and non-tenure track) faculty, while the majority of permanent, tenure-track positions are granted to men… The disproportion between male and female university faculty, as in other work forces, is most striking among those who choose to be both professors and parents. (Lester, 2009, para. 10)

Although higher education institutions are reputed relatively family friendly, many females and a growing portion of male faculty find their institutions do not have adequate policies and practices to support them when a major life event occurs, such as childbirth or caring for an elderly parent. Motherhood alone seems to be a major reason why women are funneled into the adjunct world and kept there (Wolfinger et al., 2009). Other barriers—including sexual harassment, salary inequities, and workplace bullying—also seem linked to expectations that women perform feminine roles (Lester, 2009). Women cannot pursue their
career aspirations in academia if they cannot wade through the thick blanket of barriers in front of them.

**Summary**

Scholarly literature reinforces how adjuncts and full-time faculty experience disparities in higher education, especially at the community college level. While the overall literature on adjuncts is disheartening, what surfaces most readily in the discussion of adjunct faculty in community colleges is the need for additional, more recent literature on their work experiences, especially for those who aspire to become full-time. Some of the studies in this literature review are more than ten years old. This indicates a paucity in scholarship on the topic. The literature reviewed not only visibly shared the story of adjuncts’ struggles in higher education, but also at home. Clearly, when compared with more recent literature, few changes have occurred.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY & METHODS

This qualitative study examined the experiences of involuntary adjuncts who aspired to become full-time faculty, how their professional experiences have shaped them personally and professionally, and, as a result, how their career aspirations may have changed. Participants were encouraged to construct meaning from their experiences and consider how this meaning has shaped their lives—personally and professionally. The study asked participants to relate detailed descriptions of these professional experiences through three semi-structured interviews.

In this chapter I describe the study’s philosophical assumptions—constructivist epistemology and the theoretical framework—Astin’s (1984) need-based socio-psychological model of career choice. In addition, the methodological approach, data collection procedures, data analysis process, trustworthiness in the research process will be discussed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the role of the researcher, researcher’s positionality and reflexivity statement, and ethical issues and limitations.

Philosophical Approach

Constructivist Epistemology

Crotty (1998) defined constructivist epistemology as meaning obtained through construction rather than discovery. Constructivist epistemology describes how participants understand reality and make meaning in the world where they live and work. In constructivism, the observer creates reality by providing meaning to what is observed (Creswell, 2014). The person experiencing it can create meaningful reality. What participants perceive and believe are shaped by their assumptions and prior experiences, as well as the conflict in which they interact (Maxwell, 2013). The participants in this study constructed meaning through interview questions inquiring about their experiences working at a multi-campus community college with a
professional aspiration of becoming a full-time faculty member, and how these experiences may have altered their pursuit of full-time faculty status. Broad, open-ended, semi-structured interview questions encouraged participants to share personal experiences from adolescence to adulthood, discuss how professional aspirations were shaped, and how they came to be where they are currently. In terms of governance, structure, and the community each community college serves, their personal experiences working in multi-campus institutions with different locations differ. Thus, each participant’s answers were of unique value to this study.

Theoretical Approach

Astin’s (1984) need-based social-psychological model of career choice served as the study’s theoretical framework. Astin’s (1984) model explains the professional developmental paths of the study’s participants. What attracted them to faculty work? When did they decide to pursue academic careers? What people and experiences were most influential in their decisions to pursue this profession? Does faculty work meet their needs? Why do they choose to remain working at multi-campus community colleges? What are their future career goals? Astin’s (1984) model aims to uncover changes in individual career choice and work behaviors over a period of time, using four constructs: (1) motivation, (2) expectations, (3) sex-role socialization, and (4) structure of opportunity. Astin’s model defines the psychological and cultural environmental factors that interact to produce a career choice, which, in turn, becomes a work behavior. Astin’s (1984) model is grounded in four major components:

1. Work behavior is motivated activity intended to satisfy three basic needs: survival, pleasure, and contribution.

Adjuncts teach because they love it (Powell, 2015). Although they may not have office space and travel from campus-to-campus to teach courses, adjuncts make the best they can from
their situations. To support their students, many adjunct faculty choose to hold office hours at coffee shops and may tutor from their homes. For many adjuncts, a passion for teaching is the most important attribute for success in the face of low pay. Beyond this, adjuncts are willing to invest large amounts dedicated to their students—time for which they are rarely compensated (Powell, 2015). Adjuncts teach because they are devoted to the profession (Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Powell, 2015).

2. Career choices are based on expectations concerning the accessibility of alternative forms of work and their relative capacity to satisfy the three basic needs (Astin, 1984).

While adjunct faculty teach for many reasons, most want full-time positions within the first five years of hire (Wallin, 2010). Involuntary adjuncts believe if they work hard for and assist where they can in the institutions they serve, full-time positions may be made available to them, or they may at least have a greater chance of being selected for open, full-time positions. An adjunct’s excellent work is a double-edged sword. Administrators may present open, full-time opportunities to keep professional hopes for a full-time position afloat; yet, be unwilling to let go of such a valuable, flexible resource as a successful part-time adjunct (Wallin, 2010).

3. Expectations are shaped by early socialization through family, childhood play, school experiences, early work experiences, and, in part, by the perceived structure of opportunity (Astin, 1984).

Choice of discipline tends to occur earlier in a young adult’s life, typically during the latter stages of an undergraduate career. Across disciplines, faculty members’ descriptions of the beginnings of their academic careers tend to vary considerably. Lindholm (2004) identified two main components that shape vocational behaviors in prospective academics—career-specific sources of influence and early developmental experiences. From a developmental standpoint,
most professors are likely to be first born or only children and come from families that stress academic achievement. These children are more individualistic and had rewarding experiences in school. The role of professors greatly shaped students’ aspirations to pursue a career in academia (Lindholm, 2004).

4. Expectations developed through socialization and through early perceptions of the structure of opportunity can be modified by changes in the structure of opportunity, and this modification in expectations can lead to changes in career choice and work behavior (Lindholm, 2004, p. 119).

Antony and Hayden (2011) examined factors related to job satisfaction among part-time and full-time faculty at 4-year institutions and community colleges. Adjunct faculty originally accept their teaching positions with enthusiasm and determination. Although adjuncts feel qualified, and are devoted and hardworking, many institutions see them, as one provost said, like “fine wine at bargain prices that could be poured down the drain in the event of a problem” (Caruth & Caruth, 2013, p. 3). At the end of the day, adjuncts feel deprived due to the division between the “haves” and “have nots.” While more women rise in academia, many set aside the idea of having families just to be in higher education since “women are more likely to remain single for the purpose of achieving career success” (Isgro & Castaneda, 2015, p. 2). More women than ever are also leaving academia, due to the chilly climate of a male-dominated environment.

Individuals pursue a career that satisfies basic needs and “fits them,” given early experiences and perceptions (Lindholm, 2004). In the analysis phase of this study, emergent themes from the participant interviews were identified utilizing Astin’s theoretical framework as a guide to explore the meanings the participants ascribed to their experiences.
Methodological Approach

This study utilized qualitative methods to interview involuntary adjunct faculty, inquiring about how their childhood experiences, career aspirations, and work experiences at multi-campus community colleges have affected them personally and professionally. The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue and information about the human side of an issue, usually the contradictory behaviors, opinions, emotions, beliefs, and relationships of individuals (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods are also effective to identify elusive factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative researchers strive to understand the meaning people construct from their experiences in a world within multiple, constantly-changing interpretations of reality (Creswell, 2013). Merriam (2013) stated that qualitative research “is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there” (as cited in Patton, 1985, p. 1). Because the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, one must be both responsive to participants’ needs and mindful of one’s own subjectivity. The process is inductive, rather than deductive. Qualitative inquiry produces rich, descriptive data from interviews, observations, and other data collection methods (Merriam, 2002).

Descriptive Phenomenology

For phenomenological research to achieve the same rigor as natural scientific research, the research process must be methodologically articulated so data collection and analysis are seen as part of a single, unified process with the underlying theory of science (Englander, 2012). For this study, participants shared their conscious experiences as they answered interview questions, while I bracketed my own personal experiences and biases to collect clean, untainted
Descriptive phenomenology was the most appropriate methodology to achieve this goal. Descriptive phenomenology draws heavily upon the writings of German mathematician, Edmund Husserl, the founding father of phenomenology (Englander, 2012). Husserl believed: … phenomenology suspended all suppositions, was related to consciousness, and was based on the meaning of the individual’s experience. The experience of perception, thought, memory, imagination, and emotion, involve what Husserl called intentionality, which is one’s directed awareness or consciousness of an object or event. Thus, the critical question for Husserl was: What do we know as persons? (as cited in Reiners, 2012, para. 6)

Since this study followed Husserl’s thought, both the data collection and analysis needed to follow descriptive phenomenology in order to illuminate participants’ described experiences and to retrieve rich, descriptive data (Englander, 2012). Detmer (2013) described one of the principle goals of descriptive phenomenology as descriptive fidelity. The aim is to accurately describe what is given in experience, precisely as given, and within the limits of how it is given.

Phenomenology aims to explain how phenomena present themselves to human consciousness. The process is a descriptive task. Description is the use of language to articulate the intentional objects of experience (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Husserl’s philosophy is experience as perceived by human consciousness has value, and subjective information should be important to researchers seeking to understand human motivation because human actions are influenced by what people perceive to be real. Husserl believed because human beings generally go about the business of daily living without critical reflection on their experiences, a scientific approach is
needed to bring out the essential components of the lived experiences specific to a group of people (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Giorgi, 2012).

For Giorgi (2012), it takes an act of reflection to detect the meaning of conferring or an interpretative act. Once the act of reflection has been detected, it can be described. In descriptive phenomenology, there is an acknowledgement a “given” that needs to be described as it appears with nothing added or subtracted (Giorgi, 2012, p. 6). In this study, participants were asked to describe how their experiences of career development from adolescence to adulthood shaped their career aspirations. They were also asked to describe how their experiences working at a multi-campus community college have affected them both personally and professionally. This researcher reflected on the meanings shared in the confidential descriptions, worked to perceive and preserve their unity, and developed an understanding of their world.

Another assumption underlying Husserl’s approach to the study of human consciousness is universal essence—features of any lived experiences common to all persons who have the experience. To consider the description of the lived experience, commonalities in participants’ experiences must be identified so a generalized description can be obtained (Reiners, 2012). Essences extracted from participants are considered representation of the true nature of the phenomenon studied. Therefore, the researcher can conclude one correct interpretation of participant experiences (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The central features of a descriptive phenomenological research approach are:

- The researcher gathers detailed, concrete descriptions of a specific experience.
- The researcher adopts the attitude of phenomenological reduction to intuit the intelligibility of what is given in the experience.
- The researcher seeks the most invariant meanings for a context (Todres, 2005, p. 107).
Each person’s experience is a unique result of one’s own lived experiences. Thus, the experiences shared by each participant during the interview process were filled with rich data later interpreted during the coding process.

**Bracketing**

Bracketing is an important part of the Husserlian approach to descriptive phenomenology (Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004). Before I can begin to understand the meaning of participant experiences, I must explore his/her own prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions, or *epoche*. “In *epoche*, the everyday understandings, judgments and knowledge are set aside and the phenomena are revisited” (Merriam, 2013, p. 33). These prejudices are then set aside temporarily so the researcher can examine the consciousness itself without outside influences that may tarnish the data. Questions a novice phenomenological researcher should ask include:

- At what point in the research investigation should bracketing commence?
- When does it stop?
- Ask oneself, “What am I taking for granted?”
- How can I open my own perspective to break through my tunnel of vision routine? (Merriam, 2013, p. 33)

Due to my experience as an adjunct faculty member at a multi-campus community college, I must openly acknowledge my biases and view the data through a fresh lens. This will help me create an open, honest story from what the participants share (Creswell, 2013). To achieve this, I used the following strategies: member-checking, so participants can ensure I am telling their stories accurately, not my own; peer debriefing, or having a trusted graduate student, familiar with qualitative research, read and provide feedback on what I wrote about participants’ experiences; and recruiting an external auditor, a professional unfamiliar with my area of research, to review and provide an objective assessment of the project. Finally, I kept a
reflection journal while collecting data so I could record and later refer to thoughts or feelings that arose during and after the interview sessions (Merriam, 2002; Maxwell, 2013; Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004). As a researcher, I wanted to share the stories of my participants as though I knew nothing about the intricacies of teaching at a multi-campus community college.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Data were collected through three, semi-structured, individual interviews from seven participants. In descriptive phenomenological research, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to sample expressions of life experiences relevant to the phenomena of interest. Merriam (2013) defined an interview as “a process in which the researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to the research study” (p. 55). Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful in this study, since they “provide greater depth of information [and] the opportunity to discover the respondent’s experiences and interpretations of reality” (Patton, 2002, p. 92; Merriam, 2013). The interview questions in this study helped participants to share rich descriptions of their professional experiences. The interview questions were designed, based upon Astin’s (1984) need-based socio-psychological model of career choice and content discussed in the literature review and elsewhere.

**IRB Review and Approval**

The plans for this study were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University for review and approval, prior to conducting human subjects research. Notification was received January 21, 2016, the study was approved (see Appendix A). Before research began, this researcher met with her program of study committee to discuss including male adjuncts, instead of focusing only on the working experiences and career aspirations of female adjunct faculty. The modified IRB form, changing the working title and omitting any
wording pertaining only to female adjunct faculty, was resubmitted. Approval for these modification changes was received from IRB on February 12, 2016 (see Appendix A-1).

Next, I contacted two multi-campus community college presidents via email regarding their willingness to have their institutions participate in this study. After their approval, an email with the appropriate documentation was sent to the Academic Deans of the Arts & Sciences departments, seeking their permission to recruit staff and faculty. Participants were chosen, based upon the following criteria:

- serve as adjuncts at a multi-campus community college,
- administrators and full-time faculty who serve as an adjunct within the last five years,
- teach at least two classes a semester in the Arts & Sciences,
- aspired to become full-time faculty,
- educational attainment no higher than a master’s degree, and
- taught for at least four semesters.

One of the research sites immediately provided approval and sent my recruitment email that clearly described the research project, to all their staff and faculty. The second institution required approval via its IRB process, which took several weeks before approval was granted. Before research could begin, a letter to the Arts & Sciences deans, clearly outlining the intent of the study was deemed necessary for permission to be granted (see Appendix B).

**Interviews**

A phenomenological approach to interviewing focuses on the meaning participants make of their experiences (Seidman, 2013). Three semi-structured interviews were the main data collection method for this study. They provided the best structural method to capture the essence of participant meanings. Semi-structured interviews are characterized by the following:
a mix of more- and less-structured interviews,

flexible questions,

specific data usually required from all participants,

guidance from a list of questions or issues to be explored,

and no predetermined wording or order (Merriam, 2013).

A researcher using semi-structured interviews must have highly developed listening skills to ascertain whether the interviewee has addressed the research topic, and when and how it is appropriate to follow up on the accounts given (Kvale, 1996). These interviews took place during March and April 2016. To ensure validity and reliability of the data, unedited draft transcripts of interviews, as well as final copies of individual narratives, were provided to participants for member checking.

**Seidman’s Three-Tier Interview Model**

A customized model of Seidman’s (2013) three-step, in-depth interviewing series was utilized. This approach is comprised of three separate interviews that address specific tiers of inquiry. The first interview (face-to-face) established the context of the participant’s experience and allowed this researcher to learn as much as possible about the participant in light of the topic. The second interview (face-to-face) allowed participants to reconstruct and contextualize the details of their experiences, while the third interview (a telephone call) encouraged them to reflect on personal meanings of their experiences (Seidman, 2013).

Narrative biographical and phenomenological methods informed the interview guide (see Appendix E). Using a narrative biographical approach helped obtain the essence of who the participants were as well as their cultural, historical, and personal experiences (Creswell, 2013). Examples of narrative biographical interview questions used in this study include:
- What was it like growing up in your family?
- How might your childhood experiences have shaped your career aspirations?

Using narrative biographical interview questions allowed me to help participants uncover meaning from their personal experiences and link them to their career choices.

Phenomenological interview questions are broad in nature (Moustakas, 1994; Kvale, 1996). They should dynamically promote positive interactions and continue conversation to motivate subjects to talk about feelings and experiences. After posing each question to the participant, I followed with prompts seeking further details about what was said. Each interview is uniquely different according to what individual interviewees offer, and how each researcher follows up with questions to elicit further description (Kvale, 1996).

**Interview Process**

For Seidman’s (2013) three-step interview process, this study utilized the following:

1) Interview one: The focus of the first, in-person interview was on the life history of the participant. This researcher asked broad, open questions about family background, personal interests, aspirations, goals, and how the participant became interested in pursuing collegiate-level teaching. Questions included, “What was it like growing up in your family?” “How did your childhood experiences shape or not shape your career aspirations?” and “Describe your experiences in college.”

After the interview, I emailed a summary and copy of the original transcript to the participant. The participant was provided the choice to reply with changes or to discuss it during the next interview. Most participants chose to share their changes during the next interview. Informants were asked to check data, correct any inaccuracies, and offer any additional information they believed necessary to further validate their stories.
2) Interview two: The second, in-person interview focused on encouraging participants to share details of their experiences working at community colleges. Questions included, “Tell me about working with full-time faculty” and “Tell me about your experiences as an adjunct instructor at a multi-campus community college.”

After this interview, again a summary was emailed to each participant along with a copy of the original transcript for member checking.

3) Interview three: The third and final interview was a telephone call, which focused on asking participants to reflect on the meaning of their interview experiences and potentially connecting all the factors in their lives that brought them to their current situation. A combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now and describing the concrete details of their present experiences established conditions for participants to reflect upon what they are now achieving in their lives (Seidman, 2013). Questions included, “What have you learned throughout the interview process?” What aspects of the interview process inspired reflection for you?” and “What do you see yourself doing in the future?”

The first two, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, and the follow-up telephone call lasted 15 to 20 minutes. Since adjuncts do not usually have an office, the gatekeeper, an administrative employee who has control over the population a researcher seeks, was requested to arrange for private space at each site to conduct the interviews (Seidman, 2013). Some of the interviews were conducted on campus in private conference rooms to ensure confidentiality (Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006; Seidman, 2013). To ensure participants would be comfortable with their interviews, several participants met with this researcher off-campus in a secure conference room at the local library.
Before beginning the interview process, each participant signed the participant consent form and was given an overview of the purpose of the study from the researcher. Each consent form was uploaded into a folder in CyBox (an encrypted file storage service at Iowa State University) and the original paper copies were shredded to maintain confidentiality. All interviews were audio recorded with permission of the participant, uploaded, and sent to a professional transcription agency. Each participant was compensated for the time committed for each interview and data review. A $15.00 gift card was given after the first two interviews and a $20.00 gift card was mailed the day after the telephone interview. Each participant signed an Iowa State University Research Participant Receipt form after each interview confirming he/she received the gift card (Appendix F). The receipt forms were scanned and uploaded into CyBox and the original paper copies shredded to ensure confidentiality.

Once the audio digital recordings of the interviews were uploaded to CyBox, the original copy that was downloaded onto the researcher’s laptop was deleted. The computer’s trashcan was emptied and the audio recording was deleted from the recorder to ensure confidentiality. This process was repeated after each completed interview. The transcription service deleted their recordings after sending the researcher the transcripts via email. The transcripts were uploaded to CyBox and then fully deleted from the researcher’s computer. Regarding transcription copies, participants were identified by pseudonyms and had their identities kept in a file on CyBox. Any research memos/notes were kept in a locked drawer in this researcher’s office.

**Participant Selection and Research Sites**

A small sample of participants were selected using the purposive sampling approach. A small sample size is typical in a qualitative research design, since this allows the researcher to gather a deeper plethora of information for each participant. According to Maxwell (2013), it is
essential participants represent the sample population in a way that adequately captures the heterogeneity of the population, they are critical adversaries to the theories the researcher wishes to develop, and they are willing to establish productive relationships with the researcher. According to Creswell (2013), Englander (2013), Merriam (2013), and Todres (2005), sample size is not as important as the quality of the sample. For example, to gather rich, descriptive data, having two good descriptions is better than ten poor ones with very little. Due to the focus and methodology of this study, the goal was to recruit and learn about the experiences of six to eight participants. Nine participants were recruited and seven successfully met the outlined participant criteria. The next section outlines participant selection and recruitment criteria.

**Participant Selection**

Participants were recruited by contacting the gatekeepers, i.e., the academic deans, of the Arts & Sciences department at both community college sites. An email message clearly stated the details of the study so there would be no confusion (see Appendix C). A participant consent form was attached to the email. This information was then emailed to all faculty and administrative staff. If someone met the criteria and wished to participate, he/ she then replied to this researcher with a signed consent form (see Appendix D). Several potential participants emailed this researcher to express their interest, but did not meet the qualifications outlined in the email. The first week after the message was sent, only one interested participant responded. Therefore, an additional email was sent to the deans asking if they would resend the email to help secure participant responses. One of the deans suggested a revision for the definition of an “adjunct”:

This Monday faculty return and I will not only email again, but we have a department meeting and I will talk about it there as well. I wonder if one "disconnect" is the
terminology? We classify faculty as adjunct only if they teach 8 or less credits... Faculty with 9-12 credits as part-time regular... And 15 or more as full time. I know of only one faculty that has moved from either status to full time at the school since we just haven't hired in several years. Couple that with me cutting about 25% of offerings in the last year and it may have a dramatic impact in those eligible based on your criteria.

Taking the dean’s advice, I revised the definition to state the following:

… I am seeking adjunct faculty, part-time regular faculty, administrators and full-time faculty who were adjunct faculty in the past five years in the Arts & Sciences Division, willing to participate in my study.

With these changes in place, the email was resent to all faculty and staff at both research sites. This time, several replies resulted with signed informed consent forms.

My rationale for recruiting participants from the Arts & Sciences was to help keep the study focused on one area, due to the unique organization of multi-campus community colleges. Also, a large population of adjunct faculty teach in the Arts & Sciences. The criteria were as general as possible to recruit a variety of adjuncts differing in age and teaching experience to increase the uniqueness and value of the experiences each participant shared.

Participant Recruitment

Two sites were selected to help ensure sufficient adjuncts would volunteer, due to the large percentage of adjuncts employed at each institution; to ensure a reasonable traveling distance for the face-to-face interviews with participants; and to reflect the definition of a multi-campus community college outlined for this study. Given this researcher’s professional experience, the topic for this study may be intimidating and uncomfortable to share with a complete stranger, so including more than one college campus from which to recruit was
necessary. Consequently, it did take several weeks to recruit the seven participants who successfully completed this study.

Two sites met the above criteria. They included Plains Valley Community College and Urbanville Community College. To keep these sites confidential, pseudonyms were used in place of each community college’s official name.

**Urbanville Community College.**

Urbanville Community College is a comprehensive, full-service, public, multi-campus community college located in the Midwest. Its purpose is to provide high-quality educational programs and services, primarily in career preparation and general education, to people of all ages and educational backgrounds. The college has three campus locations and several centers. The student population is diverse, as are the faculty. The average student enrollment is over 18,000. An estimated 248 full-time faculty and 900 adjuncts work for the institution. Of the adjunct faculty, 47% are female and 53% are male. Participants were recruited from campuses and student centers to increase the chances of obtaining a diverse array of participants. Three participants were recruited from this community college.

**Plains Valley Community College.**

Plains Valley Community College is a multi-campus college located in the Midwest. The district registers over 5,000 students annually in its Business and Industry, Continuing Education, and Adult Education classes. Short-term classes are designed to help individuals improve a job skill, upgrade general education skills, or pursue a topic of interest. The college has numerous centers located in several Midwest communities, which allow more students to continue their education. An estimated 130 full-time and 220 adjuncts work for this community college. Of the adjunct faculty, 63% are women and 47% are male. Participants were recruited
from all campuses and centers to increase chances of a diverse array of recruitment. Four participants were recruited from this community college.

**Data Analysis Process**

To analyze the data, I began by reflecting and journaling about preconceived notions of adjuncts’ experiences working at a multi-campus community college to become more aware of my own biases from experiences working as an adjunct. After I completed each interview, I listened to the recordings several times and had the files transcribed by a professional transcriptionist service. On the transcripts, horizontalization, the process of highlighting statements and stories (Merriam, 2009) that described participants’ experiences working at a multi-campus community college and how it may have altered their career aspirations, was completed. Each research question was written on a large poster with one of the interview questions. The interview transcripts were cut according to question and then grouped together under the respective interview question, so each poster had all interviewees’ responses for the question. During the horizontalization phase, all data were given the same value. Once the horizontalization process was completed and major themes/ subthemes were extracted from the data, a textual narrative was written for each adjunct (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Creswell (2013) defined memos as written notes, phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occur to the researcher to assist in constructing an understanding with regard to the data. A record was maintained of memos concerning the research process throughout this work. Two types of memos were written: procedural and analytical. Both memo types contextualized this researcher’s thoughts and ideas throughout the emerging analysis and encouraged continuous reflection throughout the duration of this research project.
Procedural

Procedural memos were drafted throughout the duration of the coding and category process. These memos provided summaries of what the researcher accomplished, the reasoning behind the coding process, and the decisions made. These memos were useful in reflecting how this researcher analyzed the data and provided a roadmap for writing the analysis section of the study.

Analytical

While engaging in the horizontalization process and assembling themes and categories from the interview data, writing these memos kept this researcher focused on the most important aspects of the data. These included identifying relationships between categories, making decisions about whether themes/subthemes and categories would need recoding, and what could be set aside for future projects.

Goodness and Trustworthiness in the Research Process

The quality of this study’s research design is based on goodness and trustworthiness. Merriam (2002) defined trustworthiness as a manner of completing research to persuade the reader the study’s findings are noteworthy. The concept of trustworthiness covers several aspects of qualitative research. It allows the researcher to anticipate criticisms of her/his works and make necessary changes. Strategies to establish goodness and trustworthiness are similar to the strategies a researcher must achieve to bracket his/her biases. In qualitative research, member checking, saturation of coded data, and an audit trail composed of research memos, transcribed interviews, a research journal, and extensive field notes exemplify evidence of exhibiting goodness and trustworthiness (Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).
For this study, several strategies were incorporated to ensure goodness and trustworthiness. These strategies included member checking, recruiting a peer-reviewer, writing a reflexivity statement, allowing adequate time for data collection, creating an audit trail of memos and field notes, and, finally, disclosing data through a descriptive, informational writing approach.

Merriam (2002) stated member checking—asking participants to comment on the interpretation on the data—is a common strategy to ensure validity in qualitative research. Member checking is the single most important method to identify biases and misunderstandings, and to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting participants’ statements and perspectives (Maxwell, 2013). Participants received raw transcripts after each interview. The transcripts were emailed in case additional amendments or corrections were needed before continuing to analyze and code their interviews. Two of the seven participants amended information they shared. Also, narratives were written about each participant to preview the analysis and findings. A draft was emailed to each participant to verify the accuracy of what was written.

A colleague pursuing her doctoral degree outside the College of Education was the peer reviewer. Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2002) described a peer reviewer as the “devil’s advocate” during the research process, an individual who keeps the researcher honest, asks hard questions, and encourages the researcher to explore additional feelings, hardships, and other issues that may arise during data collection. In this case, the peer reviewer was someone trusted to provide honest feedback and understands qualitative methodology. So, her comments and critical eye were beneficial to this study.

Due to the researcher’s personal connections with this study’s topic, it was important to include a reflexive component. Merriam (2012) defined reflexivity as a strategy whereby the
investigator provides a self-reflection concerning the research process, which subsequently enables others to better understand how the researcher interpreted the data collected. This enables the researcher to provide a critical self-reflection regarding the presence of bias, assumptions, or other aspects that may affect investigative findings identified and addressed.

Spending adequate time in the field collecting data is another strategy to ensure goodness and trustworthiness. Adequate time in the field collecting data was ensured through 21 interviews conducted at several different locations. As a result, I participated in the collection of interview data to the point of saturation. Visiting and revisiting interview transcripts, and digital audio-recordings required a significant time investment, incurring data saturation (Merriam, 2002).

An audit trail or detailed account of the study’s methods and procedures throughout the writing of the dissertation research was provided. Throughout the data collection process, thoughts, ideas, emotions, and observations were recorded by writing memos and field notes. Memos were written while coding to keep personal biases and feelings in check and to help ensure the most accurate codes were selected to describe participants’ stories. These notes, along with interview transcripts, were coded using language for all to understand later, as Maxwell (2013) suggested: “When you write, you don’t want to put a tuxedo on your brain” (as cited in Metzger, 1993, p. 21).

Finally, providing rich, thick descriptions through a descriptive, informational writing process served to ensure goodness and trustworthiness. These descriptions of participants’ stories are located in the findings and results section. All of the employed strategies for goodness and trustworthiness triangulated the data for this study in powerful ways.
Role of the Researcher

Throughout data collection and the analysis process, I developed relationships with and earned the trust of the participants so they would share their stories. To help cultivate these relationships, I shared information about myself at the beginning of the first interview to establish participants’ trust, which, in turn, encouraged them to share their feelings and unfiltered thoughts throughout the series of interviews. I remained courteous and professional throughout all meetings, and was completely engaged throughout the interview process, guarding nonverbal communications regarding the content of the participants’ stories. Gratitude and appreciation were expressed for the time each participant spent with me, since their time was very valuable.

Positionality

I am a constructivist who socially constructs knowledge with others within the world in which I choose to live and work. I believe that people construct, not discover, their meaning and that meaning emerges inductively (Crotty, 1998). Currently, I serve as an involuntary adjunct instructor in the Arts & Sciences department in a multi-campus community college in the Midwest. I am a 30-year-old Caucasian female, who has taught as an adjunct for six years. Three of these years were as an academic probation advisor, one year as a career coach, and the past two years as a full-time doctoral student in the School of Education at Iowa State University and research graduate assistant for the Organizational Development Unit within Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

Reflexivity Statement

As a researcher, I am attracted to topics of personal interest or those I have experienced in some way. Reflexivity is a “self-awareness practice achieved by directing an analytical gaze into the self in an attempt to understand the dynamics between the researcher and the researched;
it involves researchers seeking to make sense of their influences either intentionally or unintentionally throughout the research process” (Edgley & Ibrahim, 2015, p. 1671). As a researcher, I understand the importance of being transparent in my work. It is also important to identify a connection to the work I conduct. I bring over five years of teaching experience as an adjunct at a multi-campus community college to this study. I fit this study’s description of what it means to be an involuntary adjunct aspiring to become a full-time faculty member. As an involuntary adjunct, I have experienced the anxiety of not having sufficient teaching courses to pay bills, the impact of low pay, no health benefits, and feeling unappreciated for all the hard work and dedication I poured into the classroom and institution. Teaching evening courses and constant travel between campuses also affected my personal relationships.

The “waiting part” of the adjunct’s life is the biggest weight I have felt. I applied for positions that came available, even if they did not involve teaching. I hoped I would get hired so I could at least work full-time for the institution to which I was so dedicated. The hiring committee was always the same group of individuals, mostly men, and time and time again I answered the same questions, leaving with the promise I would receive a call or email if I moved on in the hiring process. I never did. So, after several years of hoping to get a full-time position, I decided to move on from community college life to pursue a doctorate in higher education. I know of many involuntary adjunct faculty who wish to become full-time instructors for the community colleges they serve, and I still feel their frustrations.

My own experiences as an insider in this research study, or someone who shares an identity, language, and experiential base with the participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), added strength to this study because I can emotionally relate to and empathize with participants about what it is like to be an involuntary adjunct. Participants are more apt to be willing to share their
experiences with someone they identify as an insider because “there is an assumption of understanding and shared distinctiveness; it is as if they feel, ‘You are one of us and it is us versus them’” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 58). I must also bracket these experiences so they do not overshadow the experiences participants describe and influence my interactions of data. It is important to develop a trusting bond with participants so they will be candid during the interview process (Seidman, 2013).

**Ethical Issues**

The only possible ethical issue is the potential for letting personal biases and past experiences cloud my judgment when interpreting the stories participants shared throughout the data collection process; hence the selection of descriptive phenomenology as the study’s methodology as it required the researcher to bracket his/her biases concerning the phenomenon to be studied. Because I want participants’ voices to be heard and to be as transparent as possible, I do not foresee any ethical concerns.

**Limitations**

A limitation of this research was the small sample of multi-campus community college adjunct faculty included in the study. I did not address adjunct faculty at 4-year institutions (public or private), single campus community colleges, or for-profit institutions. Second, I only recruited involuntary adjunct faculty from the Arts & Sciences. Third, participants came from only two multi-campus community colleges in the Midwest. Participants’ availability also limited the research.

Throughout the interview and data analysis process, and following the framework of descriptive phenomenology, I made every effort to bracket my views and background as an
involuntary adjunct faculty member. I also worked to represent participants’ recollections as individual narratives, tied as closely as possible to interview transcripts and field notes.

While two of the seven participants have full-time positions and teach classes on the side, four currently consider adjunct work their primary sources of employment. The urgency to become full-time faculty, or the need to find a full-time position, may have had a heavier influence on their interview responses. Both time and geographical considerations limited my ability to travel for interviews during the data collection process. Additionally, at times participants were unable to recall past events.
CHAPTER 4. NARRATIVES, THEMES, AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of involuntary adjunct faculty members working at multi-campus community colleges with career aspirations of becoming full-time faculty. Of particular importance was how their career ambitions may have changed as a result of their professional and personal experiences. To achieve this, participants were encouraged to construct meaning by describing their experiences from adolescence to adulthood, and consider how these incidents influenced them both personally and professionally.

The following research questions guided this study:

1) What are the experiences of adjunct faculty aspiring to become full-time faculty at multi-campus community colleges?

2) How might adjuncts’ career aspirations have changed as a result of their professional and personal experiences?

To answer these questions, data were collected through 21 individual interviews—3 interviews per participant—as well as consistent member-checking via email throughout the interview process. Chapter 4 is organized into six sections: (1) individual participant narratives, (2) themes, (3) subthemes, (4) Astin’s (1984) need-based socio-psychological model of career choice, (5) unique phenomenon analysis, and (6) discussion.

Individual Participant Narratives

Using the purposive sampling method, five women and two men formed this study. They came from a variety of family backgrounds with varying college and work experiences that led them to teach at a multi-campus community college. The study began with nine participants. During the interview process, two revealed they were teaching one class the semester the interviews were conducted. Parameters for the study were teaching two courses or at least six
participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and to maintain confidentiality. Aliases were assigned to the two multi-campus community colleges where the participants taught. The descriptive narratives that follow emerged from three, semi-structured interviews per participant. The first interview inquired about participants’ childhood and educational experiences, the second interview asked about their experiences as adjunct faculty members working at a multi-campus community college, and the third interview asked participants to reflect on their interview experiences, as well as what they learned throughout their interview process. The following participant narratives provided context for this study’s findings.

**Amelia**

In her 40s, Amelia was an adjunct at Plains Valley Community College, where she taught psychology classes and worked part-time as a business consultant. She lived in a small Midwestern town and was a single mother.

Amelia was raised in a traditional, small Midwestern town, in a strong Catholic household with three sisters and parents. Her mother was a homemaker most of the time, but worked a series of part-time jobs during Amelia’s childhood. Her father, a first-generation college student, was a high school English teacher. Amelia did not remember much of her father growing up because he rarely was involved in family activities. The family attended church every Sunday, participated in various church-related activities like choir and youth group, and assisted with spaghetti suppers. While religion was a big part of Amelia’s life, she questioned and ultimately rejected her traditional upbringing and the gendered norms. Amelia said:
I hated the religion. It always pissed me off that there were no women priests, it was so male dominated, and that pissed me off even in high school. I would try to talk to my parents about it, and they just didn’t want to hear it, so you couldn’t even have a discussion about it. It’s just you just believe. This what we were taught; it was a little bit authoritarian. And I think, growing up as female, there’s that influence already, where you’re supposed to just kind of not speak up too much, not question things.

Amelia went to a high school that fostered academic learning with teachers who inspired. She believed she did not receive much career guidance from her high school or her parents, but was expected to attend college.

I didn’t feel guided by my school, and I also didn’t feel guided by my parents. I love them to death, but they did not guide me at all. I don’t know if they just thought that I was capable of figuring it out myself. I mean, I was bright, I got straight As, and I was like number 3 in my high school class of 150. I had a 4.0 and I was so involved with everything, my parents probably thought I’d just figure it out. But it took me a really long time to figure it out.

College was still kind of new in our family and we didn’t talk about it. We didn’t talk about jobs or careers or college or what college is like or what you do. It’s sort of like, oh, you just go. And then you figure it out, or someone else helps you. I remember maybe one conversation with my dad after like my first semester at (college), and coming home, and he’s like, “Well the counselors at the college will help you figure it out,” or something. So I went to college knowing what I was interested in but having no idea what I wanted to do.
Amelia attended a private Lutheran college, because of her love of music. She began as an English major, but switched to anthropology, since it challenged her creativity and her desire to understand other cultures. In college, Amelia met her husband. They settled in a small Midwestern town. For the first five years of their marriage, Amelia attended her husband, who was diagnosed with cancer, as well as attempted to provide an income for her family. Using her Anthropology degree, she worked with refugees for three years and started an art center that lacked city council support. After the art center closed, Amelia thought about continuing to graduate school and obtaining her master’s degree in journalism. She decided against the idea because her family was content in their small Midwestern town. During this time, her family came first.

With a family and as a full-time mother, Amelia’s creative wheels were constantly spinning. As a volunteer, she wrote her first business plan and, with approval from the city council, successfully started a pre-school. With her children now in pre-school, she supported her family with a variety of human services careers for several years, but through a lack of funding, the positions were cut—a disheartening and frustrating time:

I worked for an agency that provided home visits to young families to help with their child development stuff. I really liked that job. It was really cool, because I got to work with families who had just new or young kids. It’s sort of counseling, and you’re helping. It’s educational. I mean I got certified in all that stuff. I was certified breastfeeding instructor, certified car seat technician. I got all this training. It was really great. And then, it was a non-profit organization, they ran out of money, and I was the most recent person, so they had to lay me off. So, laid off, well, let’s look for the next thing.
I got hired at our regional planning commission doing workforce counseling. Then I became a workforce counselor, employment and training counselor. But I actually really liked that job too. I mean, I found, again, I really liked working with people one on one, where I can help them better understand something or get a skill, because I would help people with resumes, cover letters, and interviewing skills. However, I got laid off as the money funding my position ended up at Plains Valley Community College.

After her second layoff, Amelia began to reflect on her life, mainly her reasons for staying in the town, and providing for her family. She had spent time helping other people reach their potentials and she realized she had not found hers. After carefully researching graduate institutions, Amelia found a university that would meet her needs as a mother and student, and began her quest for a master’s degree in Transpersonal Psychology. Along the way, Amelia experienced a variety of hurdles:

I chose a low residency program, and . . . I started. It was crazy, and my husband was really unhappy with me. And we are divorced now. He was pissed off that I did that. I think it scared him, and a whole bunch of things. It shook up our world, but I did that. I was a little scared. I was like, “How am I going to be away from my family for 2 weeks every semester? How am I going to pay for it? How am I going to travel?” All that stuff was a little overwhelming to me when I started.

Despite all the odds stacked against her, Amelia concluded her degree program. Upon completion of her master’s degree, Amelia’s program director inquired if she would be interested in teaching her online course for two semesters. This teaching opportunity and the support of her program director opened the door to the world of education for Amelia. Amelia said:
I was a little afraid I couldn’t do it. It just seemed like maybe I couldn’t do that, and I remember talking to one of my classmates, and it was really scary to me to say the words, “I’m thinking about maybe being a teacher.” Right away he was like, “Oh my God, you are so teacher! You have teacher written all over you! Why are you questioning yourself?” And it was like for the first time I had ever heard or gotten feedback on that. And so I did and it was fun. It was super challenging! It made me realize that I liked the challenge of it and that it fit with me with my enjoyment of thinking, thinking outside the box and the enjoyment of getting other people to think or like seeing how they think and then helping them navigate their thinking and steer them to ideas or relate things to ideas. I really like that and how much that I was able to connect with students in a way that they felt heard and understood and then they could respond.

Amelia completed her master’s degree in 2013 as a single parent. Her husband showed some support at the beginning of her program, but grew resentful of her dedication to education and they divorced. Due to her family’s situation, she could not move. Amelia applied for an adjunct position teaching English as a Second Language at Plains Valley Community College. Later, she saw an ad for a psychology adjunct and decided to take a chance, hoping it would get her foot in the door for a full-time faculty position. She described the experience:

I was like, I wonder if there is any way they would even consider me, since I really don’t have an education background, I really don’t have that much experience. My professor gave me a really good reference, and they needed someone, so that was good. Then, I think, the types of classes that they wanted me to teach just fit with someone who has a work background in like services, working with people, counseling . . . I had an interview, and they said, “Yeah.” So I started, and I taught Psychology of Human
Relations and I could teach cultural diversity because of the Anthropology undergrad. Loved all three of them. Loved it, just loved it, so I kept doing it.

Amelia taught because she enjoys the challenges students bring to the classroom. This allowed her to use her creative outlet as she illustrated:

I love working with the students. I had one class that was an early ending class. It just ended yesterday. I just feel like, “Fly my babies. Fly, fly away.” I like teaching. I like the students. I love working with them. I feel like the community college is the right place for me. It’s a good fit for me. I like the diversity of the students in ages and backgrounds, and I feel like I can help them on some things that you might not think people are going to school for, like confidence or writing skills, even though they’re taking a psychology class. I feel like I can understand and relate to what their needs are in a larger sense then just their school needs, their academic needs.

Amelia quickly ascertained living the life of an adjunct was not without its challenges. Teaching met her professional needs as an instructor to accomplish what she loved—teach and help students discover their inner selves. For all the education, hard work, and sacrifice she endured to better herself and her family, Amelia believed she wasn’t being fairly valued or compensated. This issue negatively affected her entire world, as evident from her comments:

You don’t feel valued. There are two kinds of value at your workplace. One is just the personal, how you feel personally with the culture, the environment and the people. I feel very valued that way. But you need to feel valued in the way you are compensated, and I don’t feel that way at all. I think it affects your self-esteem to a certain extent, even though you keep telling yourself, “It’s not me. It’s not me.”
Adjunct work has shaped Amelia’s life and her family’s in a variety of ways. When asked how this occurred, Amelia’s voice became a little louder with a hint of anger. She said:

It has made my personal life fairly chaotic because I have prioritized continuing to teach for as long as I could. In order to get that experience, I’ve had to keep trying to add other part-time jobs to sustain myself and my family. Also, semesters are never guaranteed. You never know how many classes you may get, what the schedule will be. It’s the always changing thing. For example, when I start, I can’t budget. When I started, the dean said, “We’ll try to give you four classes. That’s what we will aim for.” Then they always say there is no guarantee. Right? Four classes sounded great. At the end, he had to take one away and give it to someone else. Three is not enough to pay the bills. If I knew I would have four every semester, I could probably survive and keep on teaching, but when it’s three one semester and two the other, you can’t plan financially. Also, every semester your schedule changes. I have kids at home still and I have had to leave my house before my kids left for school. It affected . . . it did affect their life a bit. My personal life has not felt stable.

Usually, Amelia teaches at two campuses, sometimes three. On average, she drives between 70 to 80 miles twice a week to these different campuses. As an adjunct, she provides a plethora of donated mileage and time not reimbursed. Because Amelia teaches classes on campus during the day, she interacts with many types of staff and full-time faculty. Amelia said:

I feel I actually have a lot of support from faculty. They’ll give me a space to work. I don’t have my own designated space, but you can have shared spaces. I’ll bump into people and talk to people and ask questions. Everyone is always willing to help. The dean is always supportive and willing to help and the secretary too. I’ve felt very much a
part of their community. I really have. I’ve been invited to everything . . . the culture of
it has been very positive and supportive, but it’s just the lack of stability and pay.
Sometimes you fall through the cracks. They do forget to tell you things sometimes, or
maybe I missed it?
Administration is helpful, but Amelia believed they were helpful only if one plays the
“adjunct game.” If an adjunct stepped out of the game, then the administration was not as
flexible or accommodating. Amelia described this reality:

They’re very supportive, but there’s sort of an undercurrent; they just have to do what
they have to do. No matter how much they like you and no matter how supportive
they’re going to be, there’s just always a bottom line for them too. I found it kind of
funny because it was all going fine in the beginning, because I was to be really flexible
and I was willing to be flexible, it was all roses and wonderful. But when the tables turn,
because I have to work all these other part-time jobs, then they’re not as happy about it
and as peachy.

Amelia accepted the adjunct position at Plains Valley Community College hoping it
would increase her chances of obtaining full-time work. She has applied for the only full-time
teaching position to become available, since she started as an adjunct. To her surprise, she
received an interview and was called for a second interview. She said,

I got a second interview, which surprised me too. I had people tell me I interviewed
really well. I had one person later tell me it was the best interview they ever saw. I
would have been surprised if I had got it, because I didn’t have the experience, but . . . I
don’t know if I should say this. Who knows, they could have been saying this, too. The
dean told me that he would have liked to hire me, even though I had very little experience. It gave me a little boost in a way. It was very disappointing, of course. The dean told me that they’re planning on not replacing a lot of full-time people if they retire or leave, and are just filling everything with adjuncts. They’re going to keep increasing adjuncts, and I just really . . . I guess it affects me personally because I feel that an abuse of the system. I don’t think that’s the point of adjuncts.

Amelia just completed her evaluation with the dean. Although she received an outstanding review, nothing changed. She knew if she wanted to lift her family from poverty, Amelia had to pursue a full-time job outside of teaching as she described:

I just had my observation and my evaluation with the dean. I got excellent on everything. It sort of made me depressed because I’m sort of like, “Well you say I do a good job but you’re not rewarding me in any way.” That was frustrating. I kind of talked open minded with him about my situation as far as how I can’t make it financially what I’m doing right now. It shocked me that he’s still encouraging me to just tough it out, keep living in poverty because there might be something down the road for me. He encouraged me to take classes in another area so that if a full-time teaching position opens up in that subject area I would be able to teach. I’m living off $1,500 a month right now. How would I take those classes?

I have a job interview for a completely different full-time job here in a couple of weeks. If they offer it to me, I’ll take it because I don’t have a choice. It would be irresponsible of me not to, because it would be more than doubling my current income and it would get me out of poverty, because right now, I’m a community college teacher who is living in poverty. Even with another part-time job, I’m on food stamps. My kids and I are on
Medicaid. I’ll have to take another job. If they don’t offer me that one, I’ll keep applying to other jobs, even though I’d rather be teaching. When my kids are all graduated, I may consider searching for a full-time teaching position anywhere because I could move at that time.

Daniel

In his 50s, Daniel was an adjunct at Plains Valley Community College where he taught environmental science and a variety of biology courses. He also worked quarter-time as an outdoor learning lab manager and half-time for a national consortium for the community college. He is a single father with two teenage daughters soon to attend college.

Daniel was raised in a rural setting with his family in the Northeastern part of the U.S. His parents divorced at an early age and his father remarried. His father and mother’s side of the family were self-employed with farming and construction. Although Daniel’s dad was a high school dropout, his stepmother was a physical therapist. There was an unspoken expectation he would complete college.

When Daniel was asked if he was provided any direction of what to study while in high school, he reflected on the odd jobs he had while in high school:

It wasn’t the teachers who gave me direction. They were good teachers. It was because I worked on a farm and eventually on a golf course; just the outdoors and nature and looking for that avenue. I enrolled in Ag vocational high school but dropped out because I realized if I didn’t inherit a farm I wasn’t going to be able to farm. I actually enrolled in a forestry school. Flunked out immediately. I did love plants and working with them, but we go with what we are familiar with. School wasn’t the only thing going on in my
life. I had things going on, in my mind. They were important and I wanted to attend to them. I just couldn’t bring school up to be important.

Daniel had an extraordinary entrepreneurial spirit, starting several businesses during the next several decades. Before he was 19, Daniel and a partner initiated their construction company, which continues to operate today. He also built his first house by the time he was 22. Ready for a new adventure, Daniel moved to another state on the east coast—built his second house, married, had two children, and reunited with his grandparents. Under the positive influence of his uncle who attended a university to become an architect, Daniel decided to pursue his associate’s degree at a neighboring community college, where he discovered he had a talent for education. His experiences at this community college sparked the idea of teaching:

It was fantastic. I went right through with high honors. I was just totally into it. I learned that I could do academic work. I could write a paper about valence shells of atoms and get an A. Then I was invited to tutor chemistry for the other students. I didn’t know I could do that. It was great. It was like disappearing. The people, the best . . . I surrounded myself with Cambodian immigrants. They had the most incredible stories and they were most incredibly driven.

Overall, the faculty were excellent. One or two stall outs. We had an old proper Madame History instructor. She walked in with a Styrofoam coffee cup and lectured from memory. By the end of the lecture, the cup would be lined with her lipstick. That coffee cup was her whole get up—no board, no slides, and no textbooks. On the exam, we had to walk in without notes and write essays from memory. I thought that was great. Our English Composition teacher was very, very good. I try to be that kind of teacher today.
After Daniel earned an associate’s degree in general studies, he moved his family to another small town on the east coast and began a soap-making business to allow him to stay home with his two children. This was very important to him. He was able to be home with his children the first fifteen years of their lives. Once the business operated well, the family moved again, and Daniel gained employment at a hardwood company. He built cabinets and furniture, and enjoyed seeing the art he was creating.

Daniel soon caught the desire for education again, since his wife was a nursing student. He started undergraduate coursework with the intention of becoming a high school biology teacher, but quickly realized teaching at the secondary level was not in his future:

Learning everything I could, I started as intention to be a high school teacher because I thought that was so cool. I actually passed Praxis 1 (part of the certification to teach). Oddly, then I went and part of that is you've got to go mentor in a high school. I said, this is ridiculous. Yeah, I'm not going to be a zookeeper.

Wildlife and conservation were his passion. Daniel wanted to walk into the woods and explain why moss grows on tree bark or identify birds and other forms of wildlife. Daniel and his family moved to the Midwest in 2007, where he worked with the DNR. Later he divorced, which affected the family. Daniel decided to pursue his master’s degree to open more doors to work in natural conservation, but also for his daughters. Daniel said,

Another reason why I went back to undergrad and eventually masters was . . . this might be a cheap excuse that any parent can use but I did think it would be a good thing for my children to see, as a side benefit. Not a reason, but a side benefit, that my girls could at least see. What they ended up seeing was that I pursued education through turmoil. That
I think is worth a lot. I was determined. As I tell my students, there’s one thing that can’t be taken away from you, your education.

Daniel found a graduate school where he could complete a master’s of biology online, which would meet his needs as a working, single father. He pursued his degree not thinking about teaching, but achieving full-time conservation work. As with his other positive experiences as a student, graduate school was no different:

I got a 4.0 in graduate school. It was rigorous. I don’t know where I found the energy. It might have been through the stress of my family life. Some classes were more rigorous then others. We had to come up with our own research project independently in our area, have it approved, and go through the process of publication. I did submit for publication. Although it got rejected we’re still working on that. It was a very good study. It was very blossoming for me. I love it. It was hard to sit inside by the window and study what was going outside. It was a sacrificial time and that is what college is. I don’t mean to lecture but it is a sacrificial time that is supposed to pay off later.

There was not a lot of opportunity to work in conservation where Daniel lived, so he decided to apply at a local community college. The dean called and asked him to teach an anatomy and physiology course—a subject he knew very minimally. The dean told him he was qualified because he had a master’s degree. Not wanting to miss the opportunity to get his foot in the door and earn money, Daniel accepted. He taught the class for one semester and asked the dean if he could teach biology and environmental science. Currently, Daniel teaches this class and thoroughly enjoys it, since it allows him to use his creative outlets. Daniel said,

The thing about education is that it constantly changes. Currently, there's three things I teach at the college. I teach environmental science, biology in the summers, biology 112,
My classes change according to what I listen to on NPR on the way to class. It’s current and it’s relevant. It’s flowing and it’s very much like self-employment. You close the door on the classroom and my deans have not ever asked what I am doing in there very much. It really is your own kingdom. You have a lot of latitude. It allows me to be my own person in the classroom.

I ramp up (my teaching load) as much as I could. A full-time teacher teaches thirty-one or two credits a year. I am sure I have 150% times of that. I would note to people that teaching is only one third of my job. I was almost always the last person leaving the building. I would go out in the parking lot and look way across and see my car sitting by itself. I’ve two kids at home . . . their mom is almost completely out of the picture.

Daniel enjoyed the community college’s academic culture. The institution’s administration, faculty, and staff were very inclusive. He had a strong relationship with his department, which served as a reminder of what he did not have:

We have the greatest faculty. I really enjoy being part of the faculty and staff and going to the dean’s meeting and contributing. I enjoy the comrade of learning from my peers. Our department is particularly close. I learned a lot from them and it was just a great experience. They responded to me wanting to do really well. It was great to be part of something that seemed very real.

We had faculty who are twenty-eight years old, kind of raising and starting families, buying houses. I’ve already done all that and I am sitting there making a third of what they are making trying to be professional. It reminds me of that thing about farming like how long can I do this? You farm until the money runs out. We also have those who haven’t changed their PowerPoint in ten years and I resent them because they’re in full-
time jobs and they do less than I do. My teaching load is actually more than some of the full-timers and I was probably getting paid a quarter when you add in the benefits. Some of them are not interested in in their discipline in any way and that frustrated me that I can be ten times as excited about the same thing they were teaching and actually teach the same class.

Along with the positives of teaching and working two other positions for the community college, there are also burdens and frustrations for Daniel. He discussed how someone labeled adjunct as demeaning and how he spent time attempting to determine who to blame for the situation many adjuncts find themselves. Daniel commented,

I spend a lot of time trying to figure out who to be angry at or who to blame. I’m slowly leaning that it’s beyond my school. In other words, it’s the way we fund education. It’s the way states fund community colleges. It’s beyond my dean and the president of the school. It’s actually how the funding comes out of the state and they have to run this place like Wal-Mart. In fact, I think Wal-Mart learned from us how to treat employees. What I resent, is that we are being asked to go the extra 10% to 20% for these students to give them opportunities to tell them what college is worth, and I’m sitting here with this college education and I can’t send my own daughter to college on my income, when I can’t go to the doctor, when I can’t buy a house, when I can’t . . . There’s no opportunity. I can adjunct up to 600 hours a year and then a cap is put on that job. It’s very well known that it doesn’t matter what you do in college as an adjunct. We have adjuncts that literally don’t attend class or you can be teacher of the year and the dean is only wanting a warm body in the classroom. All he wants to do is make sure he has a teacher there.
You can put your heart and soul into it and it is not going to make a difference to anybody. I do everything to serve the college; it doesn’t mean anything to them.

Daniel described applying for several full-time positions at the college, hoping to gain employment:

They opened up a full-time Biology position and I was definitely the person they were smiling at for the interview. I went for the interview and it went off fantastically. They said, “We really need a Chemistry teacher,” and they went and hired someone from Canada.

About two months ago, I applied for a job and it went really well. The people at the table are actually telling me, two of them said, "You are going to be great at this job." Like, "Well, you're in." I found out later that it was only a ... There's got to be a name for this posting. They had an internal candidate already who is part time and they were just going to move him into full time. By the rules, they have to post the job. Everybody's trying to manage a system that has its way of humiliating. If I was successful, I would obviously with getting a full-time job have a different attitude, but at the same time, I don't know how much different. I think I was always amazed that we could accept that we could have professionals who can't go to the doctor, who can't send their own child to college. This is not acceptable to me.

Daniel spent a lot of time on the applications, using different references for each. Still, he never received a congratulating phone call. Daniel attempted to create his own full-time position by approaching administration with the idea of a certificate program:

At the meantime, I came up with a great idea for the college to build a sustainability certificate that will be added to any degree program and I outlined the whole thing. I
researched all the other sustainability certificate and degrees in the Midwest…; it's a big, rising field. I came to the college and I said, "Look, we put this degree program together..." I'm basically building my own job and they know that, and that was okay, I said then if it's a program, they'll hire a full-time person for it. That's one of the keys to getting full time is to ask to start a program. I built my own program since there's no program here. I came up with a good one, everybody loved it and they said, "You go, Daniel. You do that. Build it." Then, I stop and I said, "Okay." I'm going to spend the next year building a program, ground up, getting it through curriculum review, and do this for free for the college, deliver to their doorstep, and cross my fingers that when they open up that job, they're not going to hire somebody from Canada. I said, "Okay, great. My fee is $22 an hour. Can I start now?" No. They were not going to pay me to develop the program. Of course, I understand. Their hands are tied perhaps. There it is. You kind of get tired. If I had that idea in the first year or two, I probably would have had the energy to put it together, but I'm so sick of working for free. After all the hard work and dedication Daniel has poured into his institution, the students, and staff, he is at a crossroads. Daniel needs a full-time commitment to support his family, and wants to feel valued and appreciated for this work. He approached his dean, inquiring when there might be another full-time position open in his department. “After three and a half years, I asked my dean when would we actually create a full-time position in the science department. He said, ‘I will only create a full-time position when I absolutely cannot find an adjunct.’” Daniel was disheartened with this answer. He said, “They will always find adjuncts, if not one with a master’s, then someone starving with a Ph.D.”
When Daniel was asked about his future career aspirations, teaching now seemed out of reach. He did not know what his future might bring,

I'm really worried now about losing my mojo with not just academics, but the whole sense side of things. Really, it's my life course and again, I want to ... When I do construction, carpentry, or stone work, I feel like I'm honoring something that's deep and meaningful. I also know I get bored with that really, really quick. I've been ping-ponged in my life between those two things and then, the academics which where you lose your self control ... I mean, not self-control, but control of yourself because the institution is guiding so much of what you do. It's that dichotomy between finding meaning in something either way you're somewhat contained in an institution or where you're doing something that doesn't require your brain as much as you like it to which is like construction work. We've had people come to our house lately and I hear them, like construction workers talk to each other and I'm like, "Oh, my God. I'm so glad I'm not doing that now."

I've applied for five jobs at one place here in town. I got interviewed four times, and they told me I was in the top three every time. One of them required a bachelor's degree and it went to someone with a Ph.D. I know what the competition is out there and it's hard on everybody. It's one of those things where I feel like it's ... I just applied for another one and I'm not so hopeful. Although, it is the perfect job for me. It is the perfect, perfect job for me. It's research and it's outreach. It's hosting class. It's conservation. It's just everything. I feel like it's the last straw, but the thing is I don't have another thing. There's no plan B. There's no other, "Well, if this doesn't work, I'm going to do X, Y, Z." I don't know what I need to do. I'm stuck right now.
Josie
Josie was in her 40s. She was raised in a small Midwestern town with her older sister, mother, and stepfather. Her grandparents lived next door. Josie lived in a small Midwestern town with her cats and was an adjunct instructor for several community colleges, including Plains Valley Community College. She taught an average of 10 to 13 communication courses each semester and travelled about 50-60,000 miles annually from campus-to-campus.

Josie’s grandparents took care of her and her sister when they were young, since her mother traveled a lot for her career. Her mother married and started a family immediately after high school. She did not have the opportunity to seek a college degree until Josie was seven years old:

My mother decided she wanted to go do what she didn't get to do which was go to college. She went to a [multi-camp community college] and got her degree in fashion textile and merchandising. She went and started to work in retail and she got a good job. She ended up being the district manager of a hosiery and dancewear company. Started to travel a lot. Got to make friends and kick up her heels and do the things that she didn't get to do. My mother, for five years, traveled around, clear out to New York, surrounding cities and surrounding states. Once in a while, we'd get a treat. We'd rotate between my grandmother and my sister and myself and we'd go and spend the night in a hotel with our mother while she was working. We got to see the sights and eat in nice restaurants and stay in a hotel, swim in the pool. What could be better, right? Then, she met my step-dad. He decided he wanted to take on these two kids and help her raise them right, the right way, because we didn't have much contact with our father after the divorce.
She got her degree, got her career started and then decided she was missing out because when we got to the junior high, high school level and we were involved a lot in sports and music and band and speech. She didn't get to see those things. Then she did a 180 and said, "I'm just going to find a job where I can be home and get to see my kids." So, she did. She was the biggest fan. She was always there before the team. She was always in the front row of every performance and you could hear her. You knew she was there without looking. It was good. She's the one that really kind of got me motivated to do everything I've done. With the morals and principles of my grandmother.

Josie recalled several warm, childhood memories with her grandparents. They always wanted what was best for their daughter and their two granddaughters:

My sister and I were raised pretty much by our grandparents that just lived 60 yards away. They farmed. Well, my grandmother went to beauty school and she actually was a hair model. There are pictures I have of her from in the newspaper. She was a very classy, beautiful woman. My grandfather saw her in the paper and said, "I've got to marry that woman," and he did. Not really what she planned but he wouldn't give up. She never really did anything with that because when she got married, they moved out to the farm. He was a foreman at a farming equipment company. He also went and wanted to always farm so he got the farming started. He still was the foreman and he was doing both. He did it at such a late age.

When my grandfather passed away, one of his friends, Alice said we were his most prized possessions. It was true. He took us everywhere. He did everything he could for us. He wasn't a loving man and saying, "Here, let me hug you, kiss you and tell you I love you." But he showed it other ways. Then my grandmother was just, there wasn't a
thing she wouldn't have done for us. That's who I remember when I was sick or needed a
bath or needed to go to bed, that's who was there.

My grandmother was 32 when she had my mom. We probably didn't get to appreciate
them as long as we should have because everything was so delayed and our grandparents
were so much older. I was in ninth grade when my grandfather passed away. My
grandmother, being a lot younger than him, lived a lot longer when I could remember.
But she had a few major strokes so it was pretty tough the last five years but ... They
didn't want that second marriage between my mother and step-dad and it was really
rough.

Josie and her sister were very close and loved to use their imaginations when they played
together. It was through their games that Josie developed an interest in speech and theater.

When I was younger with my sister, we always played adventurous things like trying to
reenact Batman and Robin. Or if we were going to play school. When we played school,
I was the teacher. Whenever we were doing like Happy Days, I was Fonzie and she was
Chachi. Or if Batman and Robin, I was Batman, so I was the younger one but I was
always the one that was kind of in charge or the top dog. Whether it was teacher or
Batman or Fonzie, I was the ... I really liked school. I liked the idea of school. I wasn't
always the best student. I mean I liked a lot of things about school. The social aspect, I
liked being involved in a lot of activities and I liked being diversified in friends. That I
didn't think it had to be a, oh, I'm in this clique or this group. I wanted to be nice and
friendly and the class clown to everybody.

But that wasn't really what I wanted to do. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I got into
speech and theater and that because I was always trying to perform in classes and I'd
always get in trouble. Because I was making people laugh or doing things I wasn't supposed to. Then, oh well. I'd go to the principal’s office once in a great while. But then the principal would be like, "Josie, what were you doing?" The one time it was just pure fun in the band. This guy was deciding he was going to empty his spit valve on my leg. I dismissed myself from the class, went out and got a mouthful of water out of the fountain and came and spit it on him. I said, "Well, I am not going to waste my time. I'm going to really do this so I'm going to do it right." I got caught.

When it came time for Josie to look at colleges, she was not quite sure what she wanted as a major. She decided to pursue education for a variety of reasons:

It was something ... In fact, at one point, when I went and got my four-year, I went and started in what I thought I was going to do in education. My mother picked it for me. She chose all my classes for the first semester because I'm like "I don't know. I don't know." I'm just going to college. I'm supposed to go to college, right? She kind of guided me along the way. I went on a vocal music scholarship and I didn't like it. I mean I'll sing anywhere. But I didn't want to follow that program. It was too rigid and stuffy for me. I went to a [small private religious college]. I switched majors. I was actually doing work-study and I was cleaning the theater. I enjoyed that and I was back right where I liked to be. The director asked, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm cleaning." "No, I mean, what are you doing? What's your major? What do you want to do?" I said, "I don't know." He talked to me and said, "Well, what about the theater? What about taking speech classes and theater classes?" I was doing some of that but I wasn't sure. I did some education classes. I did my student teaching in the Bahamas. I got back and I said, "I don't want to be in education anymore." I know it was a completely different
system but I didn't think I wanted to do secondary. I didn't think that's really what I wanted to do with my life. I'd been in school and in the middle of it all, I took a sabbatical and I decided to take a leave.

Josie and her sister decided to join the Navy for 4 ½ years, although her sister joined before her. She returned to college and completed her bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies. Josie worked a variety of jobs she really did not like, such as telemarketing and retail. Then, by coincidence, Josie was hanging flyers at a small Midwestern university for a company where she volunteered. She was approached by a graduate advisor who challenged her to return to school to obtain her master’s degree in theater—which she did. Afterwards, for eight years she sold insurance and said,

I had an insurance agency and then that disheartened me. I decided this isn't what I really wanted to do because there's still sales involved and quotas. You have to push, push, push people to buy something that you really don't think they could afford or need at the time. That's not me. My step-dad, who's an instructor at a community college at this time, says, "Why don't you come out and apply for a job to teach? Use your master's and teach." I said, "They don't have theater at a community college." Not at that time. He said, "Well, you have undergrad in public speaking and speech," and that was different then. You didn't have to have as many hours and ... I said, "Okay."

I went out and interviewed and I got the job. I started teaching. I was scared to death! I couldn't sleep. Leading up to it all summer, I thought, what have I done? What have I done? It wasn't until fall and I'm this worked up all summer. I couldn't enjoy my summer. I'm like, what have I agreed to? I just thought, here comes my theater. I’ve got to act like I know what I'm talking about and like I'm confident in myself and I've got to
sell it to the audience. I did but I was so nervous. Then I got addicted, like a good cup of coffee. I wanted more.

Josie worked full-time in insurance when she started her adjunct career. After encountering some unpleasant situations, she decided she really wanted to teach. When asked what spurred this epiphany for her, Josie reflected:

Well, I got to use my theater. I got to be upfront and always acting. I mean I got to use my comedy. I got to be the class clown because I could make people laugh. You better laugh because it's funny, right? At least laugh now for a semester. I got to make an impact. I think that when I started getting feedback that wasn't required of students that was what really got me. Just like even with insured’s that would come in and say, "Thank you so much. I appreciate what you did for me." But when students would tell you that in a class that's required and they don't want to take anyway, oh, well, that's really neat. Or send me emails. Or write at the bottom of an assignment, thank you so much. I have put this off for three semesters. This is the third time I've taken this class. I never thought I could get through it.

I get to teach and I go out and teach some more from one place to the next and I'm not locked in and stationary in one place where I have to have those office hours, and I have to go to meetings and then I have to have office hours, and then I have to go to a committee. I just get to teach, teach, and teach.

I always joke and say it's my social life. It's me myself and I at home. Then, of course, my pets so, again, I don't have that at home. I suppose, for me, because of how much I teach and how many locations, and because I always say I have the benefit of the subject matter that I teach. It's communication. How can you not find that social? You're
talking constantly about examples and illustrations from, not necessarily my personal life, although I do, but also having other people share examples. That's just sitting down having coffee or beer or whatever you're doing and talking to a friend, and yet keeping it on an educational, professional level. Although some people don't know how to draw the line. You have to learn to reign them in. Still it's neat how you can learn material or explore it and yet still feel like it's not work.

It helps me sometimes. Sometimes I feel like I ’m in a therapy or counseling session because I do joke and say that, "Here we go. We're ready to sit down with Oprah today or Dr. Phil because with the intrapersonal and the interpersonal aspects, that's where it goes. It seems, in certain locations people are ready. They're just like, "Oh good. I finally get to talk about all these things that have happened in my life. Really? This is class?" I like to approach it that way too. Maybe it's cathartic for me in a way because I get to share too and maybe live through other people that, "Gosh. I don't have it so bad, nothing compared to this."

Working with faculty and administration as an adjunct comes with its challenges. Josie worked with a great full-time staff member who paved the way for her teaching communications courses at the community college level. Yet, the faculty were challenging faculty when it was time to select courses. She believed she was treated like she was second class and commented she did not fit in because she was not “part of the good old girl’s club.”

There were other people that were just on the opposite end of that comfort zone where they seemed ... All these awful words come into my head like manipulative, vindictive, jealous, and yet how do I phrase that nicely?
I don't know because I don't think ... Even to the point of sabotage, that if I had a class, they'd want it. Some of them didn't even want technical students. If they had technical students in their class, or a majority of them, they'd try to switch with my section. They said, "I want the nursing students, the premed students, the ones that are going on and further their education. You can have all the truck driving students and the auto mechanics." I'm like, "Fine. I grew up on a farm. It doesn't bother me." People are people. A lot times I would appreciate them as much if not more because they were very common. My step dad was an auto mechanic. I felt probably more at home in that case. The difference in that was some of the faculty just seemed like they were ... In fact, I felt, at one point, and I voiced this to the dean "I'm not part of the good old girls club." I feel like I don't fit in. It was because I was going between different colleges and I wasn't completely devoted to them. I didn't go to the meetings. They felt like maybe I was just there for a paycheck. One of them even said to me in the mix of it when I finally just said, "It's curious to me that I always end up with everyone's leftovers. I'm fine with that because I'll take it on, but I just am curious that it seems a little on the side of discrimination if you ask me." "Oh, no!" One of the ladies that was about to retire too said, "No, no. We would never discriminate. I think you're taking that wrong." I'm sure you do think I am because no one wants to be accused of discrimination. I said, "I just feel like I'm not being considered for other opportunities." Then she backpedaled. Then they were really messing with my schedule.
Believe it or not, I've saved the phone messages in one of those old answering machines. I saved them because I always thought this would come back someday. They just kept messing with my schedule. "Oh, that won't work because so-and-so is going to take this class." Then they call me back the next day, "Well, actually..." and it was just like a game. I said, "Okay, I'll take whatever." I was going somewhere with that. Oh! It seemed like they were almost trying to get rid of me at one point because she said, "We appreciate immensely what you do for the students." What does that mean? You can't get rid of me because of the student evaluations, but you'd like to because I'm not fitting the mold.

Josie loved teaching and thought because of her education and experience, she would eventually obtain full-time work. Teaching for 15 years as an adjunct, she applied for three full-time positions, but has dropped the idea she will become a full-time instructor. Applying for a position was a long process, stressful, and just did not seem worth the time and effort:

When I found out that I wanted to teach, and I was trying to just get my foot in all these doors I just thought somewhere I could find a place where I could get in full time and have that security that I'd have because I didn't have benefits. I didn't know from semester to semester how many classes, if I'd have a class to teach and that was really unnerving.

I like stability so much. So much that I think that's why after I was rejected a couple times in applying for full time, after I'd established myself and thought I'd really made, I guess, a difference to some degree. I proved myself. I thought, I'd gotten my degrees. I had secured where every semester they would ask me if I wanted classes, but you just never knew because your contract was up after that semester, and nothing guaranteed. Of
course, nothing is guaranteed in life even if you're full time. It feels a little more secure that you've got at least a year or nine months versus four months. I tried. It's quite a process to apply for those jobs. You don't just turn in a resume. After you get all your transcripts and you go through all the long ten-page application and do everything you're supposed to, then you don't get an interview. I'd think, "Why?"

The little comments like, "Yes you have two master's," at the time, "but you don't have your master's in communications." "You didn't require that. It doesn't say it in the job description. You say I need twelve hours in communications, and a master's. I have both those." "Well, yeah, but we want to see that you have that communication master's."

"Doesn't say that." Then, when I went back and I started to work on it, I went back for my third master's, I said, "Okay, I'll go get my third master's in communications." I applied again. They said, "Well, it's not in your hand." "Excuse me? I'm working on it. It's about done." "It's not in your hand." "Okay. I give up."

Josie decided she will adjunct until she retires and placed the aspiration of becoming full-time faculty on hold.

After fifteen years of teaching as an adjunct or regular part-time adjunct I've resorted to, that's where I am. I've found a way to surprisingly in some cases make more money than full-time people. I have to do a few more hoops, but sometimes I'm okay with that because I never wanted to necessarily be a hula hooper, but I like the freedom to get out and drive and leave the office or leave the classroom, or one semester I say, "No, I don't want that class." I'm at a point now where I can say, "I don't want that class." I didn't used to be. I'd take anything I could get. Now if they ask me to teach a night class, where I used to teach night class four nights a week, and I say, "You know what? I want
one night a week off. I just don't want to do that." I can. I can feel secure enough and go, "Oh, they're not going to get rid of me. They're not going to ask me to teach anymore if I say no. If they do, okay. I've got these other options now."

I also do consulting now, training consulting. I've got my foot in other shoes so I don't have to rely so much on one employer. At one point I felt like I had to do whatever was necessary. I think most people do in any job if they really like it and want it. I think I'm just probably getting burnt out.

**Ursula**

Ursula was in her 50s. She was an adjunct at Plains Valley Community College, where she taught English classes and worked part-time in the college library. She married, had a daughter in college, and lived in a small town near her employment.

Ursula was raised in a small Midwestern town with her parents and three siblings. Her family was very education-oriented. Her paternal grandparents attended college. After her father completed his bachelor’s degree in animal science from a Midwestern state university, he worked for the county. During World War II, he served in the Air Force. Ursula’s mother was a home economist and the first person in her family to attend college. Both parents valued reading and writing, and read stories, newspapers, and other forms of literature to their children—her father especially:

He read constantly at night to himself, and when President Kennedy was shot, he read us the entire newspaper. I was nine and he sat down and read us the entire newspaper. My mom listened constantly to the radio, so there was always that. There was also old time radio hour. We didn’t have a TV until I was 15, so we read a lot; all of us, all the time. There was a great emphasis on education.
Ursula’s family moved several times to different Midwestern towns, due to her father’s career changes. Regardless where they settled, her family always stressed education, and her father ensured his children would benefit educationally.

Because of her parents’ influence and her introverted personality, Ursula developed a love of literature and writing as a child:

Since I was a little kid, I wanted to be a writer. Our teacher in second grade told us this little story and we were supposed to answer it. It didn’t have an ending so you had to make one up on your own. It was like footprints on the beach and then they stopped and what did it mean? There were two sets of footprints then there was a set of one. Well it was like dad and a kid or a mom and a kid and he or she picked up the kid and carried him or her. I don’t know I just thought I would write because I knew the answer or something.

My fifth grade teacher was really good. She read us great stuff like “Call of the Wild” and “Island of the Blue Dolphins”. She was brilliant—a very good teacher. She was young and she would wear poodle skirts. This was 1965 and poodle skirts were from the 1950s. However, I didn’t have a single person whose ever supported my writing really. I’ve had good friends along the way that were good writers. I had sound English teachers...

With encouragement from her mother, Ursula first attended a girl’s Catholic college for two years and then finished her bachelor’s degree in English at a large research university. While she pursued her bachelor’s degree, she worked at school libraries. Upon graduation, Ursula received her first job at a publishing house, where she edited medical, police, and
psychology textbooks. After several years at the publishing house, Ursula decided to attempt teaching at the high school level. This was a challenge for her:

I taught English and one Psych, which was fun. English—not so fun when it’s all grammar and spelling. It was spelling books I had used in 8th grade and I hated it. Those horrible ones that have 20 words that you are supposed to memorize for the week. It was 1984 and I was using books that I had used in 1968. They were old books and they were awful and they had this horrible old reader . . . what are those boxes of cards you’re supposed to read then answer the questions? I was using that, my poor students. We also read “Mark Twain” and half of Huckleberry Finn, left, when he told someday to go to hell.

Ursula decided she did not want to teach high school. She chose to pursue her master’s degree in Composition and Rhetoric at a large Midwestern university, the same university her father graduated and her sister attended. While pursuing her master’s, she wrote articles for the Office of International Service’s newsletter for a semester as a break from teaching. The next year she was awarded a teaching assistantship, which allowed her to teach English classes for one semester, work at the university’s writing center, and tutor for one year.

From 1986 to 1987, she worked for a conservative agricultural organization, where she wrote their newsletter and annual reports. After she completed her master’s degree in 1987, she married. Her husband also graduated from the university with a Ph.D. in Chemistry. They moved so her husband could complete a post doc position. Ursula obtained a job teaching at a community college and had their first child. In 1991 her family moved to a Midwestern town, where she helped operate a program at a private college with her husband for the next ten years. As time continued, Ursula began to feel uncomfortable in her work environment.
I ran a discussion group, like one or two a semester and they paid us extremely well. I have to teach three classes here to make what I was making there because they paid 5,000 a class. After ten years, they can do nationwide searches to find people better than me. They were snotty and booted me out basically, because I wasn’t at their level. I didn’t go to a good enough college for them. Whatever I did wasn’t good enough. I really didn’t fit into their English scheme of things either. My husband is still there of course. He didn’t dump me when I lost my job there, which is probably fortunate. I’m not the most easy person, I’ve always been . . . we get along basically. He can’t really fight for me because his position is head of his department.

Needing to find a career to meet her professional needs, Ursula applied for an adjunct teaching position at the local community college. Immediately hired, she has been teaching there since 2001:

I’m regular part-time. They give me ten classes a year to teach, two to three a semester. I teach essay writing, basic five paragraph theme and then I teach Comp 1 and Comp II, which is research, heavy-duty research writing that is pretty rigid. That’s what I’ve done over and over, which is fine. I love Foundations of Writing because it’s fun and easy now.

Ursula’s experiences as an adjunct faculty member at a multi-campus community college were bittersweet. She enjoyed teaching, since it provided her with an opportunity to interact with students and do what she loves—reading and writing. There were many aspects of an being an adjunct faculty member she did not like, and she was still not meeting her needs as a professional.
Professionally, I don’t really have a career, because this isn’t full time. I have two part-time jobs because I also work at the library. I’m not paid as a professional. I make professional money per hour, but I am only paid for the hours in the classroom; we don’t get paid for grading papers. As you know, grading papers takes up way more hours than classroom hours.

It makes life very fragmented. I have to part-time jobs because I work at the library also, but that stays there which I really like. It stays there so I don’t have homework. Most of the adjuncts end up spending every night grading papers. I can’t always grade papers when I need to because I have the [library] job to go to. I spend weekends grading papers non-stop.

Because Ursula taught during the day, she interacted with full-time faculty and staff in her department and part-time faculty, in general,

I like the faculty. They’re nice people. They are a whole lot nicer than the [college] I used to work at other than that one Ph.D. [As for adjunct faculty] We talk. Issues [that we talk about] is that full-timers “can steal our classes.” There’s a woman, she’s 60 something and she came up to me downtown and started talking to me about the Ph.D. who had “stolen her class.” We don’t’ really talk about pay. Over 15 years I’ve gone up from $32 an hour to maybe $40 an hour. I like all of them; they are very good, they’re nice. The one that I really didn’t talk to died. She was 42 and I had to step in [for her classes]; it was the worst experience of my life. It was a small high school. She was 16 years younger than me, and she was dying and I was, “How dare I turn up, who was alive, and way older than her and a nerd compared to her.” The kids hated me; it was
dreadful; the whole semester was awful. I think my blood pressure shot way up and I had to start taking medication.

The dean now is okay. The dean is the department chair. He’s a speech person, so he doesn’t approach things as a writing person would do. He came to my class, and what I was having him do was I usually start writing a paper by doing a free associating thing, and he didn’t get it all. It was on causes and effects of the Iraq wars. He told me I wasn’t teaching anything and they [students] weren’t learning anything. I wasn’t too happy with that evaluation.

When Ursula talked about how she felt about the lack of support from administration when she needed help, she said, “One of my classes was acting up big time so I reported them. It’s kind of hard to teach over ICN; they [students] think you’re on TV so they can ignore you completely. They have (administration) had numerous meetings about this class but they’ve haven’t removed anybody who should be removed or done anything really that they should have done.”

Ursula also discussed her experience applying for the only full-time position that became available in her department during the past 15 years. It was a very negative experience that affected how she viewed the institution’s interviewing process. She said, “I’m not good at interviews. I got mangled up by the PowerPoint, which was intimidating. I haven’t used them since. It was not a good experience, let’s put it that way. I didn’t get hired anyway. [Of the people who interviewed me] one was a sociology instructor, and she was great, but one of the deans, who left a long time ago didn’t like me at all.”
When reflecting on what she saw herself achieving in the future, she commented it was not teaching full-time. If a full-time teaching position became available on campus, she probably would not apply.

I wouldn’t get it. They already told us there won’t be any. They wouldn’t hire me because of my age and because of past history. The New Yorker is pretty much what I want to do. I like working in the library, too. It’s not that I don’t like teaching; there are days when I just want to throw it all away. I wouldn’t be teaching high school students that’s for sure. I would like to retire, but I can’t. I’ll just keep adjuncting probably. It’s been nice to talk about this topic of being an adjunct. We don’t really have an outlet otherwise. We talk to each other but the administrators don’t want to hear it. There is nobody really to listen to you except the other adjuncts. My husband is sort of sympathetic, but not really. I think the adjuncts should stand up and do something . . .

Ursula counts herself lucky. She has a husband who teaches full-time and can help support the family financially, even if he does not support her in all the ways she hoped. She plans on working as an adjunct and part-time at the institution’s library until she retires.

**Nancy**

Nancy was in her 60s, married a second time with two children and several grandchildren—her pride and joy. She lived in a large metropolitan area in the Midwest. She was an adjunct instructor at Urbanville Community College alongside her full-time lab coordinator position.

Nancy had two younger brothers. Due to her father’s work as a uranium geologist, the family moved to different parts of the country almost every two years, which was difficult for the family.
Other people have infrastructure. I didn't have any of that. You become really independent really fast, and really strong willed. My mother was a very vocal, say what I think and screw you if that's rude or inappropriate. She didn't care, and you pick that stuff up, and that's not always a good thing. Some of it gets you into trouble. We moved around. We've lived abroad. We've lived mostly in the western part of the US.

Because of her father’s profession, education was highly valued in Nancy’s family. It was expected she would graduate from college and follow in her parents’ footsteps.

My dad had a master's degree in geology. It was really cool. At one point when were cleaning the basement after he passed away, we found all the maps that he'd drawn of some mountain someplace in Oregon, all by hand. My mother didn't really go to college until the year that he died. She'd been kind of going back to school here and there, and she eventually got a bachelor's degree in English. I remember saying to her, "Why do you want a bachelor's degree in English? You're never going to get a job with something like that." She said, "I don't have to get a job. I'm retired." Okay, fine. Go for it.

Education was always very prized at our house. It was always assumed I would graduate from college. My dad was the first person in his family to attend college. They moved away from the farm to achieve this. My mother worked hard so he could attend school, and then later she returned to college.

Nancy spent every summer at her grandparents’ farm. She liked nature and found her high school science classes interesting. She recalled one of her favorite classes involved dissecting frogs with an influential biology instructor. This piqued her interest in pursuing a biology degree. She enrolled at a small, two-year, Midwestern junior college and then
transferred to a larger university to complete the degree. Nancy lived at home her first year of college, but when her parents moved, she lived in the dorm—an entirely new experience.

I did a lot of stuff, but I wasn't ... Today, the kids just do a lot of things that they really shouldn't do. I was always not that kid. I remember hanging out with somebody, and she had a boyfriend back at Woodstock, and the guy was on the phone. He would take the phone during the concert and lay it down, and she could pick the phone up at the dorm and listen to Woodstock. That's what I remember from my first and second year of college. I wasn't a very good student. I don't think I knew how to study. I don't think I really knew how to focus, and how to get there. You need help with that if you don't have that talent.

When I moved to the [university], I spent the first year in the dorm there, and then I got married, and it was just miserable. I had the world's worst roommate, and it was just awful. The whole thing was just awful. The classes were hard and you were away from home. My boyfriend was there, but he had other things to do too. I felt almost lonely. The classes were interesting. I took a lot of interesting things, and learned a lot, and I don't know. I got a work study position with a guy there that had studied mayflies. Mayflies are called mayflies because they basically turn into adults and come up and mate all in one day, and then die. If you've ever been, because we have them usually where there's water, but if you've ever been down by the river, all of a sudden you go up and there's all these dead insects. That's usually mayflies. He would go out and stand in the water, collect and bring home these jars of gook, and my job was to pick through them. He had us over for dinner, and treated me respectfully, and found money when the work-study funds ran out.
Nancy met her husband while working on her undergraduate degree. Even though her advisor had discussed continuing her education, she decided to put her career on hold and support her husband, as he sought a career in dentistry.

I know that he talked to me about going on, but I got married when I was a junior, and his (my husband’s) career was, he was going to be a dentist. He was the first of his family to go to college, and so it was a kind of a big deal he got into a prestigious university, because he was part minority. They had an agreement with Wyoming, which is where he was from, and so they used to take all their dental students. That's why we moved here, and you can't afford for two people to go to school at the same time. Somebody's got to work. It was just my turn to work, and that was okay. I always thought it was, but it didn't work out. Our marriage hit the rocks pretty fast, but yeah. That's how I got to [the Midwest], actually, was because his education was just more important. It never even occurred to me that mine should be more important.

Nancy worked several jobs throughout the years, while her husband focused on school and his professional aspirations. She filed cards at a bank, worked for a cancer institute, worked as a night manager for Burger King, and then worked at McDonalds as a store manager. Nancy and her husband divorced. She remarried, and her current husband was able to support her financially so she could concentrate on graduate school.

My master's is in just plain biology. The first class I took back was, oh, golly, biochemistry at the graduate level, which was ridiculous, because I hadn't had regular chemistry since the '70s. That was fun. I had a friend that just absolutely saved me. We studied together, and if it hadn't been for her, I would have never made it through... I still wasn't the best student, but I became more focused, and I watched some people around
me go and be field biologists, and I watched some people go on, and get PhDs, and do research. I don't think I know anybody that became a teacher, not one.

During graduate school, she received an opportunity to work as a graduate student, which opened doors to teaching. She procured an opportunity to lead discussion groups, labs, and grading. “The lab was always kind of fun, because you didn't necessarily have to set it up, but you were in there to answer questions. It was fun.”

While Nancy was working as a teaching assistant, she had two daughters twenty months apart. She worked full-time and attended her children, while her husband was traveling. This meant she had to place her professional life on hold again. She sold Tupperware for the next 15 years so she could stay at home with her daughters. While selling Tupperware, Nancy began to realize a few things about herself.

We had our first child in 1984, and the second one in 1985. They are 20 months apart, so they're not Irish twins. Mark had a job where he was traveled. He was gone 40 weeks a year, and you can't have a full-time job, and two little kids, and do it by yourself. You just can't. You can, but you can't. That's when I started selling Tupperware, and I discovered that I'm good at the teaching thing. I'm not afraid of public speaking, which is huge. It got to the point where I was the top sales person in our area, and had a pretty good group of people around me, and we were very, very, very successful.

After Nancy completed graduate school, she acquired a customer service position at a large telecommunications firm; she was miserable. Nancy decided to apply for an adjunct position at a multi-campus community college in her area, teaching a variety of science classes. She was hired to replace an instructor who suddenly left her post. Nancy has been teaching as an
adjunct at the college for 12 years as well as working full time as the institution’s lab coordinator.

When asked to describe her experiences as an adjunct, she reflected on when she first started teaching at the institution:

When I started they just kind of gave me a box of paper. "Here you go." The Science 0900 class was really undeveloped, and so they were supposed to teach biology, chemistry, and physics, and a girl bailed a few weeks in. I took her place, and that's where I started. They kind of just gave me this box of all these notebooks and all these things, and it was just like everything that she had ever taught in this class ever. It wasn't structured. There was no format. There were no objectives. There was nothing, and so you just kind of had to figure out what you were going to do. It was just almost impossible. That was 12 years ago.

[Currently] I teach microbiology, which is the one I normally teach. I've done that for a really long time, and I can do that in my sleep. Every other or every third year I teach this full year biology, and they've change the book. They've changed the lab book. They've made everything completely different, so I'm going home Sunday and Tuesday night, and usually a little bit on Saturday, and I'm reading the book, I'm writing a lecture, or reformatting the slides that they give me from the book, and developing the homework, and writing the tests, and so I don't have any personal life anymore. I've taught Microbiology, Intro to Biology, Survey of Anatomy and Physiology, A and P 1, and A and P 2, and then the biology, all 3 series, so I've taught 8 different classes in the 12 years I've been here. Not everybody does that. Sometimes they just give you one class, and that's all you teach day in and day out.
I feel good because I like to teach. I like the students. I like the opportunity to do those things. I love it when somebody says, "Oh, Mrs. N, you're my favorite teacher." Those are just words everybody wants to hear at least once a quarter. Keep coming back, so there must be something positive in there. I don't mean to sound so negative, but I love the students. The students on a community college campus are different. You have students that have done something their whole lives, and go up one morning, and go, "Hey, I think I'll go be a nurse." Then they go back to school. People that have had kids their whole lives, and, "Gee, my kids are in high school. I think I'll go back to school." "I'm going to finish my degree." Somebody that worked for a couple of years, and then decided to go get a better job. I have a student in my class this year that is an Afghani interpreter.

Nancy loves teaching and giving back to her community. She spoke about her experiences throughout the years teaching at her campus, and how these have shaped her personally and professionally.

It doesn't pay very well. Although I will tell you as a person who's adjunct at least four places total in the city, this pays as well and has as much support as any of them, if not more. You get a certain amount of flexibility that you can pick when you want to work, but one of the things that happened as of late is with the Affordable Care Act they cut back how many hours an adjunct can work. Because they add them up as ECHs, which are educational credit hours, you get so many a quarter and so many total for the year if you work summer, and if you don't work summer they change. At any rate, so because of the way the biology department does things, our classes are 7.1 ECHs. They're six credits for the students, but we get 7.1 ECHs. That's how they pay at 7.1 ECHs times
however much an hour. Because of the way they worked this out with the Affordable Care Act, adjuncts now only get to teach one class. You can teach one biology class ...

Now, you can pick up a second lab, or you can pick up a second lecture if they ever split them, but they try not to do that. It used to be that you could do two classes every quarter, and then they went to two classes, one class, two classes, one class, and now it's just one class. It's been really difficult for people that I know that make a living, whether they're retired and adjuncting, or maybe they're people that can't find jobs.

Nancy discussed how working hard and prepping for classes can have drawbacks as an adjunct because there is no guarantee the class will be yours or if you will teach the same course the following semester. This instability was stressful and caused financial strain.

I do all this work for a class, and that it may be that in the next quarter they don't need that class taught anymore. You're an adjunct, so you can just teach anything that they want you to, and you have to work, so now all the sudden you're teaching a different class. All the work you did for this class doesn't necessarily apply for the second one. This class may have two quarters like A and P, and they may decide that, "Well, so-and-so's going to take this class over here, so now we need you to go back and teach this class over here."

Going from campus to campus is really hard. When I work here, I taught one quarter at a second campus of Midwest Community College. I will never do that again. I will go without teaching next time because it's too hard to expect somebody to work all day, then drive to the second campus, and then go home again. I'm tired, I'm cranky, and it's late. It's hard enough to teach and be here until 9:30. In terms of how much time do I have to lay around, or go do, and have any personal time at all between the job, and the
adjuncting, and the prepping, and I watch my grandchildren one day a week, there's no
time for anything.

I think that thing that offsets all the negative things about being an adjunct, all the way to
the full-time faculty treat you like you're invisible, and like you don't matter, and like
you're not important, that is all offset by the sweetness of the students, and how kind they
can be.

Nancy shared how classes were divided among the faculty and what it was like working
with faculty and administration:

We're on a quarter system, and so we have 11 weeks of classes twice a week.
Everybody's restricted to just one class. There's no overload. There's no exceptions. It's
an interesting way they assign the classes. The first thing they do is they make the
schedule for the next quarter, and then the faculty loads in what they're going to teach
because they get priority. Once they get those people loaded into the computer then they
send out an e-mail, and the e-mail says, "Summer schedule's ready. Whatever you'd like
to teach send a copied e-mail to this person and this person." Then it's first come, first
serve. If you're the first person on the list you can pretty much have whatever you want,
or if you know the person who does the scheduling sometimes you can sweet talk your
way into the class that you want. They don't call you up, and they don't say, "Oh, here.
We gave you this class." They don't send you an e-mail. You're expected to go to the
website, and look and see if you got a class. Then if the class doesn't fill, they cancel
you, then you're just screwed. There's $3,500 you don't make this quarter. They just
cancel your class. Sometimes they put you someplace else and sometimes they don't, so
it's maddening.
Nancy tried to support the other adjunct faculty who taught in the science department because she knew the challenges they faced. She wanted to support and show appreciation for their efforts. Nancy admitted it was difficult to work with other full-time faculty:

The full-time faculty just really, and I don't understand, they have no respect at all. They're just bunch of assholes. I'm sorry, but they really are. Not helpful, cooperative, supportive. This department in particular is really hard and difficult. The biology department has never hired an adjunct full-time. They haven't hired a chemistry adjunct full time.

Would I want to be a full-time instructor? My husband's like, "There's going to be a position open? You should definitely apply." I have applied four times. Four. I've been here 12 years. I've applied. The first time I got all the way to the Vice President's office. I was one of two candidates, and they did not hire me. You have to do a teaching demonstration. They gave you two subjects, one in anatomy and physiology, which is not my major field, and then biology was the other one. I did okay. I think I had been teaching a couple years at that point, and I was super, super excited because I just knew they were going to hire me. I was so naïve. When I asked why I didn't get the job they said, "Well, we wanted to find a candidate that was from a different part of the country that brought a different experience to the faculty."

I would rather quit than work with these people at this point because they have been so disrespectful and so difficult to get along with that I just couldn't possibly work with them as colleagues now. It's too late for me. The things that they say about people behind their backs, and the way they talk about people, it's shameful. That's the biology
department. The math department, same dean, not the least bit like that. It's crazy. I
don't understand. It makes no sense to me at all.

Moving forward, Nancy planned to continue working full time as a lab coordinator
because it provided stability for her and her family. She felt lucky to have a wonderful husband
who provided support—not just financially, but also professionally.

**Chris**

Chris was his 60s and lived in a large metropolitan city in the Midwest with his wife.
Recently retired from his full-time position at a boy’s youth home, he taught a variety of
sociology courses at Urbanville Community College.

When asked to describe what it was like growing up with his family, Chris said one
word—chaotic. His father, a World War II veteran, had problems readjusting when he returned
home. Chris’ mother was very religious and worked hard at mostly labor jobs to feed her
children. Chris has two brothers and a younger sister, and was raised in a very fragmented
household:

My dad saw himself as a cowboy. He was a professional bull rider, and worked in the oil
field. It was a crazy life. I don't ever remember living in a house for more than a year, at
one time. Dad was really never around much and when he was everything was chaos.
When he came home he was a full on drunk. My dad served four terms in the
penitentiary. My mother was married numerous times. My older brother is paralyzed
from the chest down from taking too many Harley Davidsons off the road. My younger
brother is a more or less self-induced paranoid schizophrenic from taking so many drugs.
He's been in a nursing home for about 15 years, and both my brothers have served time in
jail.
Because the family moved often, Chris had few opportunities to make friends, so he would go to the library to read adventure and mystery stories. Chris was very close with his mother, since they had many experiences together, due to familial issues. His mother never attended college, although she had a high school diploma. Even though she is retired, they still have a very strong relationship. His grandparents worked in the trades.

Chris described himself as the “black sheep” in the family. As a teenager, he lived with his mother’s sister, a large Catholic family, in another Midwestern state. Even away from his home environment, Chris had problems. He was placed in a boy’s youth home during his high school years. It was there Chris started to take an interest in studying and had some very influential people pushing him to succeed.

I had this guidance counselor that kept telling me that I could do some stuff. I just needed to get focused. That I was starting late but that I could do this, and I could do that. I was starting to get a little interested in school. By my senior year I was starting to catch on to the stuff, and I was getting real interested in world history and social science.

I think a lot of it had to do with the way I was raised. Without previously understanding cause and effect relationships, and why I was born into the family that I was born into. All my father's brothers and sisters did very well. They were chemists, and teachers, and business people, and did very well coming from a good, Christian family.

I didn't have any idea what the hell I wanted to do. I thought maybe I might want to go to school and be a teacher, but I didn't have any idea what I wanted to teach. I ended up at this little community college back in the town that I had come from.

Chris had a hard time concentrating in school, so he went to work full time to pay his student loans. During difficult times, he attempted to enlist to serve in Vietnam, but was
disqualified when he failed the hearing test. So, he worked offshore for a year on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. After a year, Chris decided he did not want this type of work for the remainder of his life. He returned to pursue an undergraduate degree at a college in the Midwest with a new major in mind.

I thought I wanted to be a psychologist. I accidentally took a class on industrial sociology. I didn't do that well in the class, but I did the readings and it was fascinating. Then I took an anthropology class, and suddenly I felt like I was home. That explained a lot of things to me that none of the other social sciences did. Their whole approach to understanding societies, why people interact, believe, and behave the way they do, and everything they do, it all made sense to me. I really got turned on to that.

By the end of my junior year I changed my major to where I was taking nothing but anthropology classes. I got into graduate school. I transferred back to another institution to study in a special program designed for people that wanted to teach at community colleges. I completed that program. I taught for about two years as an adjunct right out of graduate school. I knew a lot of people in the department.

Chris was the first in his family to receive a college degree. During his graduate career, Chris had strong connections and was positively advised by two Anthropology professors. He graduated with his master’s degree in 1976. During this time, Chris married. His wife wanted him to become a farmer. After five years, they divorced. Chris tried to find a full-time teaching position, but most community colleges wanted someone with a master’s degree in sociology who could also teach anthropology courses—unfortunately, he had just the opposite. So, Chris began a new adventure and went to Mexico where he worked in the fields planting potatoes. After this and with no teaching opportunities on the horizon, Chris moved to the southern part of the
United States and worked for seven years managing poverty programs, working mainly with the Pawnee Indians, where he met his second wife. They have been married for 35 years.

While his wife finished graduate school, Chris returned to visit the boy’s youth home he had attended almost 30 years prior. His visit resulted in employment for the next 25 years. For nine of these years he was a youth counselor. Then, he and his wife became family teachers. While his wife left to pursue a teaching career, he worked for another 15 years in the aftercare program, helping kids transition into society. For about the last five years, he was the National Alumni Director. During his time at the boy’s youth home, Chris discovered a passion for writing and wrote four historical novels. Chris retired from the boy’s youth home in 2015. During the last ten years of his career, he obtained a position as an adjunct at Urbanville Community College, where Chris’ wife also worked.

I applied at Urbanville Community College fifteen, twenty years ago because my wife had been teaching there a long time. She said, ‘You ought to put in an application.’ I said, "They're not going to hire me." I work out at the juvenile correction institution full-time and the only time I can teach is at night. She says, "Well they have a lot of classes." Anyway, I never heard back from them. It was like five or six years later I got a call on the phone that they wanted to interview me. They shocked me. I think they were just low on teachers, low on adjuncts at the time. I went down and visited with them. They hired me right there. I think a lot of it was they were just really low on help at the time. The dean probably said, "You all go back and see if we've got some old applications back in there." I strongly suspect that's what happened, and mine was one of them that were. It's worked out great for me. I started out teaching one class a quarter for most of my time at the boy’s youth home. I was on call. When you're on
call working with kids and after care, you get called a lot. It was a little precarious even
taking a night job. You could never tell when the phone was going to ring or an
emergency would come up. I'd try to make arrangements with other people in the
Department that if I was on call during that week that that particular night I had a class or
something so someone else could take it.

Then I got to where I was teaching a couple of classes. I did that for a year or so. Then I
started teaching a couple. They taught me to do online classes and recently starting
about, I don't know, three or four years ago every once in a while I do three a quarter.

Now I'm doing the max. Because I'm an adjunct and you can only teach so much without
benefits and stuff. Now I don't need the benefits because I'm retired and I have health
insurance and the other stuff. I'm teaching three this quarter. I had three last quarter.

They told me I could only teach two this summer. I just do whatever they tell me to do.

As an adjunct, Chris taught a variety of courses, including Introduction to Sociology,
Introduction to Anthropology, Multicultural Issues, North American Indians, and Sociology of
Healthcare. Chris has the opportunity to teach at several campuses and work with different types
of students. He enjoyed using his degrees to help a variety of students understand the world and
the people around them.

I've always really enjoyed teaching. I think I've had a real wide variety of experiences.

I've taught at all the campuses a lot. A lot of the teachers just can't just teach at one
campus. They all operate a little bit differently, all the campuses do. They all have a
little bit different ethnic makeup. This is pretty white out here at this campus. You
typically have better students out here because they go to a little bit better schools. It isn't
just the schools, I think those opportunities are available at a lot of schools.
At the west campus, there's several times I've had more minorities in there than whites, you know Caucasians. It makes for a more eclectic match. I think it's real easy to preach to the choir. It also creates opportunities though because when you're in an environment where you have a real mixed ethnic makeup, they wake up in the morning knowing that their experiences may interact, it doesn't matter whether they're going to the bank or the police or the schools or whatever, their interactions are going to be a little bit different than other people's. You can bring that out in the classroom. You can use that so you have to adapt how, I think, especially in my field, sociology, to find a way to use that as a resource in the classroom—that is very valuable. Sociology, so you're talking about society and the people in it and their different experiences; who has money and who doesn't.

Chris mentioned while he enjoyed working with students, it could be a real challenge that takes its toll. His wife almost quit her position last semester due to a few rude, disrespectful students who went to the dean several times to complain about her. As an adjunct, one plays many different roles and sometimes must deal with the repercussions.

Chris shared his experiences working with full-time faculty and administration have been nothing but polite and supportive, or as much as they can be given his position. Unfortunately, even though he was on campus almost daily, he rarely interacted with other adjunct faculty.

You know you really don't interface with them much. You're on your own. My experience has been you're pretty much on your own. There's really little opportunity or reason to contact other adjunct faculty unless you're substituting doing a class for them or someone's subbing for you or something like that. I walk up and down the halls here.
After a while you figure out who's a full timer and who isn't. But you see other people and you suspect there is a teacher look about them. You think, well that's a new one. You wonder whether or not they're full time; people do come and go, or whether if they're an adjunct. Urbanville Community College has a lot of adjunct faculty, hundreds and hundreds I think of adjunct faculty. I don't know how many there are in my Department. I would imagine there's probably at least twenty or twenty-five.

When asked about his career aspirations, he talked about teaching full-time, whether at Urbanville Community College or elsewhere. Since starting at the college, there have been no open faculty positions for him to apply:

I would like to continue to teach as much as I can here. If they did have another full-time position I might, I told my wife, even though I'm retired now, I might apply for it, just to see if they took me seriously or not. I'm sure I could teach for another ten years. I have good health. I apparently don't have Alzheimer's yet. It doesn't run in my family. I've got an active mind, good health, and to see whether or not they would discriminate against me because of my age.

I strongly suspect they would whether they liked me or not. It would just be part of the entertainment for me I guess. I'm going to continue writing and I might try to maybe teach some different classes. Sometimes you need a change of venue there to make things fresh. Unfortunately for adjuncts what they really need you for a lot of times are the introductory classes. Which a lot of times are what the full timers don't want to teach. They get burned out, and don't want to teach those anymore. You've got to take what's available to you.
Teaching for me has been pretty gratifying. If this is the only gig I could have got and I hadn't had a full-time job at the juvenile correction institution, paying the bills and with benefits and everything like that, I would have had a lot different experience with this.

Tara

Tara was in her 30s, has three young sons, and worked for the past nine years as an adjunct faculty member in the biology department of Urbanville Community College. She also worked full-time as an assistant lab coordinator for the institution. Tara’s husband was self-employed and traveled regularly for his job.

Tara’s family was originally from the upper Midwest. Her family moved often during the first eight years of her childhood, due to her father’s position in the military and then seeking employment after he was discharged. They finally settled in a large metropolitan area in the Midwest, where her father started dabbling in photography and her mother worked as an accountant at a children’s home. When she was young, Tara recalled her father receiving his associate’s degree in business with dreams of opening his own photography studio—a dream later became a reality when her parents purchased the photography/modeling business they operated for the past 20–25 years.

Tara was very active in school and a good student. Her favorite hobbies were participating in flag corps and the International Order of Rainbow for Girls. She explained,

It's a girls' group that you do service projects. You learn how to be ... Basically how to be, I suppose, a successful woman. You have to wear dresses, so you have to know how to look proper and sit properly and have good manners and how to carry yourself. We got to dress up in formals. I used to call it ... I always tell people that it's kind of like Girl Scouts, only you get to be more like princesses. We never sold anything or did anything like that, but we did the service projects and got to dress up and be fancy.
When Tara was young, she told her mom she wanted to be a teacher. When Tara finished high school, she could not wait to leave the Midwest to study marine biology in a small coastal Southern college. She enjoyed science and chose marine biology because it was a science she knew the least. Her parents supported her educational aspirations, although they did not offer much guidance of where she should go to pursue her education or inquire what she wanted to achieve when she finished.

The best years; I went to a college that was about the same size as my high school. It was really easy. I mean, it was really nice, because it's a good enough size where you don't necessarily know everybody but you do know most of the people or at least have seen most of the people. It's kind of a smaller-knit group of students and faculty. The class sizes were pretty small. It was a lot more personal. They were more guiding there, because it was more the smaller class sizes. We actually got to be friends with a lot of our instructors. That was really good and really helpful. You learn a lot more that way if you think of them more as a friend, rather than an instructor.

After Tara graduated, she pursued graduate work because she knew she would have a better chance of obtaining a job with a master’s degree. Tara attended another university on the Southern coast, but her experiences were not like her undergraduate tenure. These experiences kept her from pursuing her Ph.D.

We didn't have an instructor to study under. That kind of got all messed up. That's part of the reason why I never went to go get my Ph.D. and I'm good with my master’s. I thought I was going to be underneath a professor and everything was good and straightened and I'd be starting when I got there. After I got there and we started classes, I found out that I didn't have a place. There wasn't a spot in a lab for us to work on our
master’s degree. I don't know if it's different for other ones. In the sciences, if you're going to get your master’s, you have classes and you have your research project. You have to do an experiment. You have to have lab space in order to do your experiment. There wasn't any lab space, because they had all of their spots filled with students already.

Fortunately, Tara was able to complete her graduate studies under the guidance of expert faculty with whom she developed a relationship. Tara worked on her master’s degree, taught biology labs and completed volunteer work at a Sea Grant institution, where she hoped she could get a full-time position once she graduated. While working on her master’s degree, she met her husband and had their first child. She finished her degree in 2007. When the economy crashed, Tara and her family returned to the Midwest so her husband could find employment. Tara acquired work at a fish and games park, but it was a 45-minute commute that was very tedious during the winter. She found an open position as an adjunct at her local multi-campus community college and took a chance, since she had no real classroom teaching experience besides labs.

They hired me to teach anatomy and physiology, which I had never had before. Not human, at least. Along the way you get it studying animals, which is not that much different. It's not exactly the same either. I think they hired me a week before the quarter started, and I had never had the class before. I had never actually taught a class, because I had only ever taught labs.

Tara received an opportunity to teach at the other campuses. She enjoyed the diversity of students and staff, the uniqueness of the environments, and what the institutions offered their communities.
It's interesting to see the different types of students on every campus, because every campus has its own distinct kind of set for the student base. If you get tired at one campus, you just go teach on a different campus. It's almost like a different class for a little while, because you have a different set of students. That's kind of nice that you get that having the different campuses with the community college. It's a different environment, because there's different instructors on every campus. Having that different environment, if you get bored on one campus, you just go teach on the other campus for a while. It's enough of a change up to keep things fresh--keep things moving so you don't get really bored.

Tara worked as much as she could as an adjunct instructor before she was able to obtain a full-time position as an assistant lab coordinator. She made sufficient money to help her family because she could teach several classes, but this changed.

Before the whole healthcare stuff started, we were allowed to teach more, so every other quarter I had two classes, and then the ones between I had one class. I could make a little bit more money than I am now as an adjunct, because we were allowed to work more. It was really nice because it was enough to support us along with my husband's income, and I got to stay at home with the kids while they were infants and growing up before they started school. It was really, really nice, really helpful so I had that chance to be with my kids. Then they changed the stuff with the healthcare. They changed and evaluated. Some adjuncts were working too much, and they would have to offer them benefits, so they had to cut it back.

Now, as an adjunct, we're only allowed to teach one class. At least in the sciences, we're only allowed to teach one lecture and one lab, because that's the maximum that they can
pay us for without having to provide health benefits for the time, hour-wise. The max size of a class is at twenty-four. As far as biology or A and P one goes, you might start off with twenty-four, but you never end with that much. The work isn't bad. It's not bad at all, depending on how much you have for homework and stuff.

Tara’s friend, the lab coordinator, encouraged her to apply for the position, since she knew Tara needed the benefits because her husband was self-employed. Even with her full-time job, Tara still teaches to make extra income to pay for childcare. She also loves the students, even though teaching has its drawbacks.

I like the interaction with the students and being able to share my knowledge of science. That's really the main reason why I teach as an adjunct is because I like to share my knowledge and help teach others. It's been fun, although since I have taught the class for so long and the type of student is kind of changing, it's getting kind of daunting. The coursework hasn't changed. Our labs have been the same the whole entire time that I've taught. I'm getting kind of bored with it.

The full-time instructor who is in charge of our class doesn't want to do anything with it. He doesn't have time to do anything with it, and apparently, one of the major professors that helped write the lab manual—because ours are all in-house lab manuals—finally retired two years ago, so we could actually change the lab manual without him griping too much about it, but the only changes that got made with the new instructor that took it over was just to take a whole clump and move it. That was pretty much it, and apparently, he's not very tech savvy, so he just sent the changes to the secretary for formatting and things like that. That's pretty much where that ended. It needed to be
updated and changed, because there are so many different things that we could be doing to make it better.

Tara shared working with full-time faculty has its gives and takes. The older instructors did not like change, but the younger instructors were friendly and more apt to be open to exploring new ideas. She shared the same experiences working with administration.

We have a new dean. He got hired on two years ago. He's awesome. He's so nice and really quick to respond if you have any questions. Any kind of problems, you can go talk to him, and he'll respond back to you super quick. Really easy to talk to, really friendly guy. He gets things done, and he takes care of problems. He's way better than the previous one, because the previous one you'd ask him a question, it'd be like a week if he ever got back to you. Our new dean now does the class evaluations, teacher evaluations. He has a full-time faculty come in and evaluate your class. He does that every year now, whereas the past dean, I worked there for five years and never had anybody come into my class and tell me what to work on and what I was doing good, and I was a new instructor, never taught before. He never sent somebody in to evaluate my class.

Over the years, Tara applied for several full-time faculty positions in her department, but was left disappointed and frustrated each time. All the time and work dedicated to completing applications seemed a waste of time to her.

At least two of the times that I applied, I made it through the interviews to do the presentation. The first time, I don't think it went anywhere. The second time, I got to do the mock teaching. That was pretty much a "No thank you" kind of thing. The third time, I did the mock teaching. I think I made it a little farther, but they said they were going to go with someone that was a little bit more qualified. I sent an e-mail to the dean.
This was our old dean. The e-mail that I sent him, I asked him what do I need to work on so that I could be better qualified for the next time that I interview. The response back from him that I got was have somebody come in and evaluate you while you teach. That was his response. I already told you how pretty much bogus those are. "There's not really anything you can do," so it wasn't very helpful in trying to move forward, so that response was kind of disappointing because it was not helpful at all. Then the lab assistant position opened up, and I was like "Well, that sounds way better, because applying for the full-time faculty is not going anywhere. I didn't get any good input to help me move forward with that."

Tara is planning to apply for a lab coordinator position as soon as one becomes available, the same title her friend has who hired her, as well as continue with her adjunct position. She has given up on the idea of teaching full-time, at least for now.

Seven participants successfully completed the interviewing process. They were passionate, intelligent, and vibrant professionals. All seven originally applied for an adjunct position, hoping it would be a foot in the door to obtaining full-time employment as a faculty member at the community college.

**Themes Analysis**

Ten distinct themes emerged from the data analysis: (1) *They thought I’d just figure it out*, (2) *Accidental academics*, (3) *I am not a professional*, (4) *No one was there to tell me what to do*, (5) *Insider yet outsider with full-time faculty*, (6) *Undercurrent with administration*, (7) *Placebound by family*, (8) *Interviewing for full-time faculty: Trying to get a foot in the door*, (9) *Reevaluating my career aspirations: Why am I still working as an adjunct?*, and (10) *Thank you for listening*. The themes are discussed below and contextualized within the current scholarly
literature. The analysis concludes by addressing the findings related to Astin’s (1984) socio-psychological model of career choice.

**They Thought I’d Just Figure It Out**

Adolescence is the ideal period for studying children’s career development, since changes during this time strongly influence the formation of career preferences (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Factors that most influence development of career aspirations from adolescence through adulthood are gender, family, socioeconomic status, education, and ethnicity (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Each participant had one parent who was a first-generation college student with the exception of one individual, Chris, who was a first-generation college student. Lightweis (2014) defined a first-generation college student “as having parents who do not possess a college degree” (para. 3). While their childhood experiences were distinctly unique, being a second-generation child of a parent who was a first-generation college student affected their career development.

Four of the five participants’ parents were first-generation college students from middle-class families; their parents were small business owners, teachers, and so on. Zweig (2004) divides the middle class into three sections: professionals, supervisors, and small business owners. Professors, lawyers, doctors, and accountants belong to the professional middle class. Amelia’s father was a high school English teacher, Nancy’s father was a geologist, and Josie’s stepfather was a community college instructor. The supervisory middle class includes workers who may function as first-level supervisors and line foremen. Such employees frequently are promoted from a position as a worker; they continue to socialize with working-class peers and live in working-class areas (Zweig, 2004). Monica’s mother was the district manager of a hosiery and dancewear corporation, and Ursula’s father was an Extension county agent and her
mother a home economist. Finally, the third component of the middle class consists of small business owners (Zweig, 2004). Tara’s parents owned a small business once her father left the military.

The other two participants, Daniel and Chris, came from working-class families. Chris’ family were laborers in the trades, since both of his parents did not have a college education. Chris’ father worked in the oil fields when he was in/out of the penitentiary and his mother worked in various labor positions—creamery cooperative and various retail stores. Chris described his mother as a caretaker and that “all she wanted to do was have a family, and be a homemaker.” Daniel’s parents divorced when he was very young. Daniel’s father, a high school dropout, performed various labor jobs, such as painting houses, and started his own construction business when he was a teenager. Zweig’s (2004) definition of working class included the following:

The working class is made up of people who, when they go to work or when they act as citizens, have comparatively little power or authority. They are the people who do their jobs under more or less close supervision, and who have little control over the pace or the content of their work, who are not the boss of anyone. They are blue-collar people like construction and factory workers, and white-collar workers like bank tellers and writers of routine computer code. They work to produce and distribute goods, or in service industries or government agencies. (Zweig, 2004, p. 4)

Participants described their childhoods as lacking “infrastructure” and “fragmented” due to their families moving to establish financial security. It was important to their parents to provide a brighter future for them and provide opportunities they never had, such as attending better schools and participating in school activities. Tara, Nancy, and Ursula said it was difficult
to make friends, due to moving so much, and believed the transient nature of their childhoods contributed to what they viewed as more introverted personalities. Nancy commented:

Other people have infrastructure. You talked about your friend in grade school, and I don't have any of that. You become really independent really fast, and really strong willed. My mother was a very vocal, say what I think and screw you if that's rude or inappropriate. She didn't care, and you pick that stuff up, and that's not always a good thing. Some of it gets you into trouble. We lived around. We've lived abroad. We've lived mostly in the western part of the US.

Tara’s father was in the military. After he was discharged, the family moved so he could find employment.

We did a lot of moving around those first 8 years or what not. It was kind of hard to make friends. That's what your siblings are good for though. I don't remember a whole lot, because we kept moving around a lot. It was just because usually dad was changing jobs. Got out of the military, trying to find jobs, trying to find a good place to hunker down. It's always been kind of hard for me to make friends, so part of that is because we moved around a lot. I didn't really learn how to make friends. Part of that is because I have an intrinsic personality.

Daniel characterized his family life as “chaotic” because his father could not stay employed once he was discharged from the military.

It was very chaotic. I don't ever remember living in a house for more than a year, at one time. Dad was really never around much. When he was, everything was chaos.

Ultimately, you probably don't want this to go on too long so I'll put this in a nutshell, in
essence, before it was over, my dad served four terms in the penitentiary. My mother was married numerous times; I came from a very fragmented family. Due to his family’s instability, he got into trouble, which led to him staying at various places until he was eventually placed at a juvenile correction center until he was legally an adult.

The lack of stability as children resulted in participants feeling more isolated and maturing faster than the average child. Lightweis (2014) stated children of first-generation college students are more apt to allow their children to find their own ways in the world, much as they did. Participants, whose parents were first-generation college students, described how they were expected to go to college and were left on their own, much like their parents were. There was no counseling or career guidance from their parents about what to expect once they left the household. Amelia’s father, a first-generation college student, now a high school English teacher, told her she would eventually determine her career path. Amelia reflected:

I didn’t feel guided by my school and I also didn’t feel guided by my parents. I think it was pretty expected that all of us girls would go to college, but it was still kind of new in our family and we didn’t talk about it. We didn’t talk about jobs or careers or what college is like or what you do. It’s sort of like, oh, you just go and then you figure it out. I remember maybe one conversation with my dad after maybe like my first semester at college, and coming home, and he’s like, “Well, the counselors at the college will help you figure it out.” So I went to college knowing what I was interested in but having no idea what I wanted to do. I had a 4.0 in everything, so they probably just thought, “Oh, she’s fine. She’ll figure it out.” But it took me a really long time to figure it out.
Nancy, whose father was a first-generation college student, also described how the value of obtaining a higher education degree was viewed in her household when she was an adolescent:

Education was always a very prized thing at our house. It was just always assumed that you would go to college. My dad was the first person in his family to go to college, and they moved away from the farm to do that. My mother worked hard so he could go to school, and then later on, she went back to school herself, too.

Ursula described how her father would read to her almost nightly, and how both parents stressed the importance of reading and writing. She spoke of how her aunt and uncles were gifted public speakers. Both parents were college graduates; her mother was a first-generation college student. When it came to college, it was just expected, mostly by her mother, that she would go. Ursula said, “I knew I was going to college. I think my mom had more of an influence about where I went. I was socially inept, like extremely.”

Chris and Daniel’s experiences with education in their families were more unique, since they both came from working-class families, where both parents worked hard labor jobs and education was promoted externally from outside family members. While their parents supported their children, they did not discuss with them the importance of attending college or what their life plans should be after college. Daniel’s father, a high school dropout, built a successful business. His mother didn’t seek a bachelor’s degree until he was well into his 20s. Daniel’s stepmother was a physical therapist. Education was prized on her side of the family. Daniel’s step-grandmother was the first woman in the United States to attend Cornell University, which always fascinated him: “The expectation that you go to college was pretty . . . that was in my family. My step-mother was a physical therapist, she had an education.” When Daniel said the
word ‘education’, there was an emphasis of pride behind it. Daniel did not follow in the footsteps of his stepmother, but dropped college to follow his father’s entrepreneurial spirit, starting several businesses before deciding to return to college. Because his immediate family didn’t push the importance of education when he was going through adolescence, the drive to pursue higher education was not there until later into adulthood.

Chris was influenced to go to college in a manner very similar to Daniel’s, as neither parent offered any type of educational support; Chris’s family life was very fragmented. Although his parents did not attend college, he described how his childhood experiences influenced him to earn a bachelor’s degree. Due to his rebellious nature, he left home when he was a teenager to live with his mother’s sister and her strong Catholic family. The support he received while he attended a juvenile correctional institution pushed him to graduate high school and, eventually, college.

Parents who were first-generation college students and came from middle-class families supported their children academically, but this is where the support stopped. Chris and Daniel had outside influences pushing them to pursue college degrees later in their careers. The lack of family infrastructure and being second-generation college graduates caused participants to mature faster, to be more independent, and to influence their professional career decision-making process to be uniformly less linear.

**Accidental Academics**

While participants described not having much parental guidance past high school, they also reported lacking mentors and career guidance while pursuing their various degrees. Children, whose parents are professors or work in higher education, have a greater likelihood of following in their footsteps. Individuals who have mentors and/or career guidance in the
professorship also tend to gravitate toward higher education professions (Lindholm, 2004). This was not the case for any of the seven participants. Amelia described her frustrations with career advisement,

I had an advisor who I didn't really ... didn't have much to do with me, I didn't have much to do with him. I didn't feel very connected, or I didn't feel like much happened with that. I knew I had to talk to this person once in a while. I didn't really feel guided or even that questions were asked of me by that person, and I didn't know the questions to ask myself. I don't think. I mean I graduated, I did well, I graduated in anthropology, but I still came out of it without a path, without knowing what I wanted to do with it, what I could do with it. Even though I was one of the best students in class, no one talked to me about grad school or had suggestions.

Participants recalled disciplines that interested them as children. Amelia recalls finding her true passion when she took some anthropology classes, since she was always interested in people and then later became interested in education/ teaching when she took a few education electives, while working on her master’s degree. The same experience occurred to Chris, who discovered his enjoyment for sociology and anthropology because it helped him to understand better his own family dynamics. Ursula enjoyed reading and writing, so when she went to college it was only assumed she would major in literature. Nancy, Daniel, and Tara also chose undergraduate and master’s degrees based upon childhood interests in science and biology, as they were always outside, fascinated, asking questions about nature.

As a result of needing to find their own career paths, the participants’ professional career decision-making processes progressed in a less linear fashion than what past research has found for individuals who aspire to become professionals in higher education (Astin, 1984; Lindholm,
2004). For all participants, there was little recollection of any sort of clearly-delineated, intentional path to teaching at the community college. All paths were unique. It took a series of trials before they realized teaching at the community college level was the “fit” they had been seeking. The participants described their decisions to teach at a community college as “accidental,” with teaching far from their minds as they worked their way through their education and career experiences.

Amelia, after several career setbacks in the community where she resided, said she wondered if Plains Valley Community College would take her application seriously because of her lack of teaching experience. Chris applied for an adjunct position because his wife worked at Urbanville Community College. Five years later, the dean asked him if he was still interested in teaching. They still had his application on file. Josie recalled applying for an adjunct position because she was tired of her current position and her step-father, a full-time instructor at a local community college, encouraged her to apply.

Only two participants recalled thinking about teaching when they were children. Tara remembered her mother telling her stories of her playing school when she was younger. Josie fondly recalled playing school with her sister. Teaching was the last career considered when they were in college. Both participants discounted teaching as a viable career path.

All participants but Daniel were able to teach while working/finishing their master’s degrees, which opened doors for them to adjunct at a community college. Amelia’s father was a high school teacher. She began as an English major, but later realized it was not what she wanted, even though she was a good writer:

I started out as an English major and very quickly became bored because it just wasn’t me, the people weren’t me, and it just felt way too dry and boring for me. I changed
majors to anthropology, which was much more exciting to me. It’s really important for me to think expansively, think outside the box. Anthropology does that. Literature can do that, but in a Midwestern small college, that’s not what they’re about.

The lack of consistent career guidance and acting as their own academic guides caused participants to journey down several paths before finding themselves in a community college classroom.

**I Am Not a Professional**

Thirolf (2013) stated adjuncts first begin their teaching careers feeling excited, committed, wanting and willing to serve students, and become better teachers for the institutions they serve. Over a period of time, this commitment and energy began to fade, feelings of frustration and resentment surfaced, and they began to “hate teaching” (p. 180). Soon, they began to experience a life depicted as “often exhausting, underpaid, undernourished, and rife with logistical challenges” (Pompper, 2011, p. 457).

This study’s participants accepted their positions as involuntary adjunct faculty with a positive attitude and with hopes it would be a foot in the door to full-time teaching. The professional image they had imagined for themselves diminished, due to their experiences over time. The participants expressed how teaching satisfied their professional needs, since it allowed them to educate, help, and guide diverse groups of students and be a part of the community college mission. This allowed them independence, to remain true to who they were, to have flexible schedules, and to use their creativity in the classroom.

While all the participants expressed working as an adjunct fulfilled their love of teaching, they experienced aspects of their work that prevented them from feeling like professionals. For example, Amelia commented, “I like teaching, and I like the students. I feel like the community
college is the right place for me.” She spoke of how finding her love of teaching established her professional identity as a teacher. But over time, her identity as a teacher and gratitude for the few classes she was allowed to teach began to lessen. Amelia very quickly realized there was no way she could sustain her professional needs and her family by continuing to adjunct a handful of unguaranteed classes. She said:

It does not meet my professional needs because it does not pay well. It is not sustainable for my family. You don’t feel valued. There are two kinds of value at your workplace. One is just personal, how you feel personally within the culture, the environment and the people. I feel very valued that way. But you also need to feel valued on the way you are compensated, and I don’t feel that way at all. I think it affects your self-esteem. There’s no security. There’s no stability.

Tara also described how she enjoyed working with students and still felt undercompensated for her time and energy: “The reason why I like being a teacher is I like the interaction with students and being able to share my knowledge of science and help teach others. That’s the community college mission.”

Tara described how she was unable to meet the needs of her students as a teacher because she did not possess the necessary tools.

Not having an office makes it really difficult for the students to come and find me and ask for help because I didn’t have an easy way for them to get ahold of me. It’s a lot harder to talk to the other instructors in order to make the course better. We don’t get to work with anybody else in order to make things better.
Tara was making sufficient money as an adjunct before the institution limited the number of classes she could teach. As some adjuncts’ teaching responsibilities qualified them for healthcare and other benefits, new enforcement of the Affordable Healthcare Act reduced an adjunct’s teaching load. Once this policy was enforced, Tara said, “Then it wasn’t it wasn’t quite enough pay anymore.”

Daniel, who has worked so hard to find a place for himself at the community college he served, stated, “This is a job that comes with honor and I can make a difference in people’s lives. It’s a great opportunity to get into your teaching and really learn your discipline.” Daniel saw an adjunct position provided ways to use his creativity and perceived it as a stepping-stone for gaining pertinent experience for a full-time position. Daniel became bitter when he talked about how being an adjunct did not meet his need to feel like a professional. He talked about how being an adjunct was demeaning in many ways:

I think Wal-Mart learned from us how to treat employees. We are being asked to go the extra 10 and 20% for these students and I am sitting here with this college education and I can’t send my own daughter to college on my income, when I can’t go to the doctor, when I can’t buy a house, when I can’t . . . There’s no opportunity.

To pay her bills, Josie taught on several campuses and worked primarily out of her car, due to a lack of space and resources in the shared adjunct office:

The main reason I want to be in education is to teach. But it does not allow me to have full-time benefits and to be able to develop my career to the fact that I feel secure and well-rounded educator because I’m out of the loop. It’s made me feel really insecure. It’s like driving a car with no insurance. You have to fulfill what you want to do professionally and yet you’re short changed because you don’t get the whole package.
On average, adjunct faculty are paid 25–35% less than full-time faculty, even though they may work 50 hours a week preparing classes. In addition to few opportunities for promotion and salary increase, adjuncts rarely had access to benefits regardless of length of service at the institution nor are they recognized for teaching excellence (Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014). The challenges adjuncts faced make it difficult for instructors to commit to the institution’s mission and the students they served.

**No One Was There To Tell Me What To Do**

Because they drive decisions related to policies that affect faculty wellbeing, deans had a significant impact on the types of experiences adjuncts had at their institutions. In a study of 264 academic deans, Gehrke and Kezar (2015) found administrators tended to support full-time faculty more than part-time. If deans do not value part-time adjunct faculty or prioritize specific policies to support their work, adjuncts will receive little professional support on campus.

One of the biggest criticisms of adjunct faculty was their lack of expertise in the classroom (House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2014). Full-time faculty had access to resources for curriculum development, class preparation, and student interactions that adjuncts may not access. Adjuncts needed to know the curricular, performance, and mentoring standards to be good teachers for students in the classroom (Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014). Adjunct faculty lacked information and resources necessary for success in their positions.

At Plains Valley and Urbanville Community Colleges, the deans were in charge of the evaluation process, selection of classes, and mentoring process. The mentoring and evaluation processes were similar experiences for all adjuncts—nothing of note. The participants spoke of mentoring and what the administrative evaluation process was like for them. Only Chris could
remember being assigned a mentor to help him become acquainted with his teaching assignments. Even though Chris was assigned a mentor, he rarely saw him as he started teaching.

I've never taught or anything like that, so someone was supposed to keep their eye on me. He was supposed to be available to me all the time and everything. I never really ever availed myself of his services. I mean the first couple of years I contacted him a couple of times. Once I asked him if I could use a different textbook from what he had chosen which I could tell pissed him off, so I withdrew that. I think he was supposed to come in and evaluate me and some stuff at different times. He never did. I can only assume that because of the feedback I was getting from my students and stuff like that, that there was no sense in doing that. I have subsequently learned that that's real touchy feely in academics, having someone come in and evaluate you.

Several participants described their first day and how they felt, due to a lack of guidance or help, especially during their first semester. Josie recalled her first day of class as “being scared to death.” She was unable to sleep the night before. She recollected how much the absence of mentoring support added to her anxiety: “I remember getting a tour of the college, offices and classrooms. Not a lot. I think for some people that would be very intimidating.” Josie utilized her theater and communication skills to get through her first classes. It was not until later that she met a full-time faculty member who would become her mentor. Her first experiences were difficult and intimidating.

Nancy recalled her first day of teaching at the college almost 12 years ago. The adjunct she replaced had left suddenly, so she was asked to step in and take over without much time for preparation:
They just kind of gave me a box of paper of all these notebooks and things, everything she had taught the class. It wasn’t structured. There was no format. There were no objectives. There was nothing. You kind of just had to figure out what to do on your own. It was just almost impossible. The thing you spend all your time doing as an adjunct is not only figuring out how to teach, but what to teach, and how much of it to teach. How much of the information should the student really know?

Nancy shared because of her full-time position now as lab coordinator, she does her best to prepare other adjuncts as they start teaching in the science department.

Daniel started teaching courses unrelated to his field of study. He received a call from the dean’s office asking if he would be willing to teach an anatomy and physiology class. The dean said he was qualified because he had a master’s degree in biology. Because Daniel saw this opportunity to enter the community college at a low level, he agreed, “I went in there teaching brain parts. I didn’t know the terminology and it was embarrassing. It’s like a pit in the stomach kind of experience. Plus all the work. They just want warm bodies in the classroom.” Teaching the course led to other teaching experiences later on for Daniel.

Adjuncts learned how to teach based on their professional experiences, and through trial and error. When participants were asked about the evaluation process, they all had similar experiences—most were rarely evaluated. Even when they were evaluated, nothing came of it. This caused more frustration and eventually made the process seem useless. All participants but Chris experienced the evaluation process. He was supposed to be assessed, but it never happened.
During her seven years of teaching, Tara had two full-time faculty evaluate her for about an hour each. She described her experiences as pleasant, but they did not help her professionally.

How much information can you actually get about someone’s teaching style from an hour of lecture? You don’t get a whole lot, so those kinds of evaluations don’t really give you much idea. It’s nice, and the full-time faculty is always nice about it. They don’t ever write up anything bad. Each time I think they gave me one or two things like, “You might try this, or you could try this instead,” but it was kind of more how they teach their class. After teaching for over six years, I think I have it nailed down.

At Plains Valley Community College, the dean evaluated staff. Daniel described how honored he was the dean would take time to evaluate him and provide feedback: “He took notes and provided feedback. It felt so honorable for him to sit down with me and tell me what I was doing and giving me ideas. Again, I thought, well this must be leading somewhere . . .” but for Daniel, it did not change anything. He spoke of how he would get excellent reviews, and yet there were teachers still teaching who he believed should not be there. He called it “embarrassing.”

Lack of information and support was apparent from administration for the participants, especially when they first started teaching. The evaluation process, in place to help faculty grow professionally, was inconsistent and absent substance.

**Insider Yet Outsider With Full-Time Faculty**

Participants discussed their relationships with full-time faculty. Although they received some support from full-time faculty inside of their departments, they still felt very much like outsiders. Research on adjuncts and their employment satisfaction at two-year institutions found
they feel a level of disrespect and a general perception of being ignored or devalued by full-time faculty (Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014). Adjuncts reported being slighted or ignored by their full-time colleagues when their expertise could have improved departmental decision-making (Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015).

While they felt some support from full-time faculty, five of seven participants (Monica, Nancy, Tara, Ursula, and Josie) expressed it was not always genuine or freely given. They spoke warmly of a faculty member or two whom they considered friends. Nancy described her relationship with a biology instructor:

My relationship with the faculty that I need to have a relationship with is fairly good. In that regard, (Tom), a full-time faculty member and I are close. When I need something I go to him and ask for help. It is always nice to have some positive reinforcement from a full-time faculty member.

Josie described a full-time faculty member, who taught a stage fright class with her. Since Josie was nervous when she started teaching, the faculty member provided insight. “She was very helpful and she was very comforting and encouraging; she really seemed genuine that she wanted me to be full-time faculty member, not knowing at the time, that she was leaving. I didn’t know this. I got to know her very well and I would go to her, always the go to person.”

Daniel shared in his department, he felt supported: “We have the greatest faculty. They are so supportive and they’ve been real in their professions. They responded to me wanting to do really well. They would give me any time or advice; they took me right into their family and everything.” Chris said, “Overall, I really don’t have any complaints against the full-time faculty.”
After participants shared their more positive descriptions, they spoke of full-time faculty, outside and inside their department, who were challenging to work with. Describing her relationship with full-time faculty, Josie said:

There were other people that were just the opposite end of the comfort zone where they seemed . . . All these awful words come into my head like manipulative, vindictive, and jealous. Even to the point of sabotage, that if I had a class, they’d want it. Some of them didn’t even want technical students. If they had technical students in their class, or a majority of them, they’d try to switch my section. They said, “I want the nursing students, the premed students, the one that are going on in their education.”

I felt like I didn’t fit in. I voiced this to the dean. I just said, I’m not part of the good old girls club’. It was because I was going between different colleges and I wasn’t completely devoted to them. I said, ‘I just don’t feel like I’m being considered for other opportunities’. Then they really started messing with my schedule.

Tara consistently worked with full-time faculty in her dual positions. She described her experiences with faculty as “difficult.” Full-time faculty in her department were willing to help with questions, but they did not like change: “Trying to get them to talk about changing things is really difficult, and it pretty much goes through one ear and out the other. They’re like, ‘I’ll listen, but nothing is going to happen’. We are just kind of stuck where we are.”

Although he had a collegial relationship with faculty in his department, Daniel still felt like an outsider. He worked with professionals younger than him, who had houses and families. Yet, Daniel could not pay his bills. He could not understand how some faculty seemed uninterested in their disciplines. He poured his heart into teaching and his students, and the fact that some faculty did not embrace their jobs frustrated him. Although Ursula commented she
gets along well with colleagues, her one major issue of full-timers is “they steal your classes.” Nancy indicated, “I don’t feel that the full-time staff does anything to help adjuncts, ever, unless they ask for help and then the full-time faculty does as little as possible because they have this attitude that, ‘If you didn’t pay me for it, I’m not going to do it’.”

While one may argue full-time faculty are not expected to help adjunct faculty, such support and guidance did help several participants. Struggling for resources and classes, and teaching in a hostile work environment, diminished the quality of teaching in the classroom (Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Kramer, Gloeckner, & Jacoby, 2013).

**Undercurrent of Ambiguity with Administration**

Deans’ attitudes about faculty were important. Institutions, where deans were supportive, were more likely to have policies to support faculty. Scholarly literature on administrators’ relationships with adjunct faculty was far from positive. At many institutions, administrators treated adjunct faculty like second-class citizens (Washington, 2012; Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015).

Participants’ experiences working with administration differed by institution. All experienced times when they felt mistreated and were taken advantage. The four participants from Plainsview Community College (Josie, Amelia, Daniel, and Ursula) expressed some satisfaction working with administration, but in the end, according to Amelia, there was always an “undercurrent.” Amelia’s face flinched and she softly laughed when she described how her relationship with administration was quite positive when she could teach their schedule requirements. When she had to make schedule changes due to working another job “to make enough money to survive,” the dean suddenly was not “as happy about it or as peachy.” She said
they can take a class away from an adjunct last minute, but when you give a dean short notice, it’s “a black mark.”

Josie and Ursula had similar nonverbal reactions when asked about their relationships with administrators. Josie said, “Overall, I get along with the deans, except for the female president who coldly fired then rehired adjuncts the next day because they were making too much money and had benefits that the president saw as unnecessary.” She described how she felt when she went to see her dean. “I teared up when I went to go meet with the dean. I didn’t realize at the time we were going to come back. They didn’t say, ‘We are going to invite you back tomorrow. We are just going to get rid of you today so we can get rid of all your benefits and you’re not so expensive’. At the time I was in tears. I said, ‘You just took away from me something that I love to do’.”

Participants from Urbanville Community College (Nancy, Tara, and Chris) described their relationships with the former dean as “frustrating.” The dean never answered emails, evaluated, or provided helpful feedback to help Tara and Nancy advance professionally. Tara said, “If you emailed him, it may be a week or more before responded to you.” He did not compare to their new dean. Tara described her new dean as “awesome.” He comes in to evaluate her, answers her emails, and “any kind of problems you can go talk to him and he’ll respond back super quick.” Nancy feels the same way about her new dean. “… The dean is wonderful. I can’t say enough nice things about (John). (John) is there when I need him and when I need to talk through student issues.”

Through the described stories of the participants, the attitudes of the dean really affected their wellbeing. The more information and support provided by his/her dean, the more satisfaction they reported teaching in the classroom.
Placebound By Family

When participants described why they had not left the area to pursue full-time faculty positions, it was because they were all “placebound.” According to Shields (2004), placebound is “the perception of an inability to leave the immediate geographical area to attend college, that is, it would be difficult to pursue other alternatives” (p. 355). The objective factors that arose from the participants’ descriptions were the availability of financial resources and family responsibilities that might prevent an individual from leaving an area. Spouses tended to follow one another to new locations, especially women (Thompson & Dahling, 2010). For all participants, one or more of these factors influenced their choices regarding career choice, which landed them teaching as adjuncts at nearby community colleges.

After finishing her undergraduate degree, Amelia thought about seeking a master’s degree in journalism. Instead, she ended in the Midwest because her boyfriend (and later husband) lived there. They had a family, which further limited her career options. While she tried to put her creative energy into staying home with her children, she desired something more. When her kids were in pre-school:

It was time to go back into the workforce. At this point was like, here I am; I’m a mom, I have kids, I have a family and I am established in this town. I can’t think in terms of what career I want, I have to think in terms of: What can I do here? What can I do to survive this place? Which is kind of how its been ever since—a little frustrating. The world here is a little small for me. I’ve made due.
Amelia shared that when her children are grown, she will have more opportunities to travel and apply for full-time teaching positions at other institutions. For the time being, she perceives herself as placebound.

Daniel described how he came to teach at the community college. He followed his spouse to the Midwest, where he later divorced with sole custody of his two children. He applied for an adjunct position, since it was the only position that truly fit with his education. While he wanted to pursue his career, he had to face the reality of placing his daughters’ needs first. In retrospect, he could not afford to relocate. Instead, he worked hard to “make myself useful to them and hoping they’d see the value and eventually get a full-time job.”

When Nancy described her educational experiences, she realized how things would have been different had she not followed her husband to the Midwest:

I got married when I was a junior. My husband was going to be a dentist. He was the first in his family to go to college, so it was a big deal. You can’t afford for two people to go to school at the same time. Somebody’s got to work. It was just my turn to work. That’s how I got to the Midwest. His education was just more important. It never occurred to me mine should have been more important.

Ursula also put her husband’s career above her own as she moved to various places so he could finish his Ph.D. Chris was nearing retirement when he started teaching at the community college, but his wife was teaching at the same institution. They supported each other. Josie, though never married, remained in the Midwest close to her parents. Her parents care for her animals throughout the week, due to her constant traveling from campus-to-campus and juggling her teaching responsibilities. Because she did not have a family, it was easier for Josie to be able
to travel to teach at other campuses. Tara followed her husband because of his job, which provided for their family.

Being placebound greatly reduced the choices an individual can make about education and career goals. Participants were placebound, due to family and/or financial reasons that kept them from pursuing employment beyond their geographical locations.

**Interviewing For Full-time Faculty: Trying To Get A Foot In The Door**

The interview process for a full-time faculty position can be an exciting, stressful time, especially if it is an adjunct’s first such interview. Being selected for an interview is one step closer to a position that could offer stability, benefits, and higher pay. Due to community colleges cutting the number of full-time positions, rarely did they become available—making the process competitive and intimidating to the applicant.

The participants accepted their adjunct status with a hope of eventually obtaining a full-time teaching position within the college. When a faculty position opened in their curriculum, all but one applied. Five participants (Amelia, Daniel, Ursula, Tara, and Nancy) received an interview at least once with the search committee consisting of administrators and full-time faculty from the department with the vacancy. Three of the five participants (Nancy, Amelia, and Tara) were called for at least a second interview. Nancy applied four times, and made it all the way to the Vice President’s Office for the final interview process. Josie applied up to three times, with no callback for an interview. No one was selected for a full-time position. Five of the participants (Daniel, Tara, Monica, Nancy, and Monica) reached out for guidance on how they could better their interviewing process and prepare for the next time, but received very little helpful feedback.
Josie thought when she discovered how much she loved to teach, the remainder would fall in place. Fifteen years have passed with few openings:

When I found out I wanted to teach, and I was trying to get my foot in these doors I just thought somewhere I could find a place where I could get in full-time and have that security because I didn’t have benefits. I like stability so much. I thought I proved myself. I’d gotten my three degrees. I had secured where every semester they would ask me if I wanted classes, but you just never know because your contact was up at the end of every semester, and nothings guaranteed. Nothing is guaranteed even if you’re full-time. It feels more secure that you’ve got at least a year or nine months verses four. I tried. It’s quite a process to apply to apply for those jobs. You don’t just turn in a resume. After you get all your transcripts and go through the ten-page application and do everything you’re supposed to do. Then you don’t get the interview and I’d think, why? I give up.

Nancy described her four experiences interviewing throughout the 12 years she has been an adjunct at the Urbanville Community College:

I have applied four times. Four. The first time I got all the way to the Vice President’s office. I was one of two candidates, and they did not hire me. You have to do a teaching demonstration. They gave you two subjects, one in anatomy and physiology, which in not my major field and then biology for the second subject. I did okay. I think I had been teaching for a couple of years at that point and I was super excited because I just knew they were going to hire me. I was so naïve. When I asked why I didn’t get the job they said, “Well, we wanted to find a candidate from a different part of the country that a difference experience to the faculty. They hired this asshole that graduated one
year before me from the same school. The second time I applied they said the candidate pool wasn’t diverse enough; the third time, I did the whole interview process, and they didn’t hire me. I asked, “Why didn’t I get hired?” They said, “Well, we wanted to hire someone a bit different,” and then they hired a female the same age as me.

My husband recently said, “There’s going to be an open position, you should definitely apply.” I would rather quit than work with these people at this point because they have been so disrespectful and difficult to get along with that I just couldn’t possible work with them as colleagues now.

Daniel was very excited when he applied for an open faculty position in his department, but quickly realized things were not always as they seemed. He said, “I went into the interview and it went off fantastically. I was definitely the person they were smiling at. They hired someone from Canada who had a master’s in Chemistry.”

When asked if he would consider taking classes in chemistry so he would have sufficient credits to teach in this area and increase his chances for full-time work, he said, “The reason I haven’t gone back and taken a few classes in chemistry, and being able to apply for those jobs is that you got to be kidding. I got a master’s degree with a 4.0 and lot of experience, and I’m doing more than anybody else in our wing. Why do I have to jump through so many hoops with no promises on the other side?”

Tara was asked to present a mock teaching demonstration to the search committee twice. Each time she was told ‘no’. They were going to hire a more qualified candidate. To better her future chances of being hired, she emailed the dean:

In the email that I sent him, I asked him what I need to work on so that I could be better qualified for the next time that I interview. The response back from him that I got was to
have someone come in and evaluate you while you teach. That was his response. That response was disappointing because it was not helpful at all.

Chris never applied for a full-time position. He assumed he would not have gotten an interview because of his age. Ursula did not have a good experience during her teaching presentation, as her PowerPoint presentation would not work for her. She said, “It was not a good experience, let’s put it that way. I didn’t get hired anyway. They had their favorites they wanted to hire.”

Six of the seven participants negatively experienced the interview process at the institutions they serve, leaving them more disheartened and frustrated than when they began. When hiring full-time faculty, one would think administration would consider an adjunct, who has been with the institution for a significant length of time. Tara commented about her institution not hiring adjuncts:

It's disappointing, because you would think that they would want to hire from within, because they know --or at least they should have known-- what your teaching style is from reports from students and whatnot. You would think they would want to hire somebody from within, because they already know their style. They already know that you're going to be there, but most of the time, they always hired somebody from outside of Urbanville and not somebody that's already teaching with them for full-time faculty. It makes it really disappointing for the adjuncts that are here trying to get on full-time. At least over the past couple years. With the old dean, that's pretty much how it went. It was if you were already an adjunct, you're probably not going to get picked to teach full-time.
Applying for full-time positions, and passed over time and time again for candidates outside the college took its toll. Several of the participants began to feel jaded about the entire process. Josie stated, “the application process is tedious, and it’s not like you just hand in a resume… so why bother?”

Full-time positions at community college institutions are rare and that is not being shared upfront by administrators to their adjunct faculty. When one does open, stress, apprehension and competition are in full force for adjuncts who apply (Gustavo, 2014). With tightening budgets and shrinking state appropriations, the logical solution for community colleges is to not fill full-time vacancies. Instead, they simply hire more adjuncts (House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2014; Gustavo, 2014).

Reevaluating My Career Aspirations: Why Am I Still Working As An Adjunct?

The participants were asked toward the end of the interview about their current and future aspirations. Their answers were essentially the same for both questions. While they all entered the community college system wanting to become full-time faculty, their aspirations changed due to their experiences. Issues, such as being “financially strapped,” “feeling undervalued,” and “going backward instead of forward professionally,” were concerns that made participants re-evaluate their career aspirations. Four participants (Josie, Nancy, Chris, and Ursula) plan to continue working as adjuncts until they retire. They stated they are now too old to repeatedly apply of positions and cope with feelings of rejection. The other three participants (Amelia, Daniel, and Tara) plan to pursue full-time employment elsewhere to support their families.

Amelia, who just acquired an excellent teaching evaluation from her dean, said:

It made me depressed, because I’m sort of like, “Well, you say I’m doing a good job but you are not rewarding me in anyway.” That was frustrating. I kind of talked open-
minded with him about my situation as far as how I can’t make it financially doing this, what I’m doing right now and that I had recently applied for another full time job and just where I was at with it all. Still, it just kind of shocked me that he’s still encouraging me to just tough it, keep living in poverty because there might be something down the road for me there. He encouraged me to take classes in another area so that if a full-time position opens up in another subject area that I would be able to teach in that area. You know, it just adds to my confusion and frustration about, should I really be doing that? Is that just another carrot dangling because there is no guarantee? I’m living off of 1,500 a month right now and classes are 1,000 apiece. How would I take those classes? It’s frustrating. I have to keep applying for a full-time job that pays better.

Josie, teaching at numerous campuses, thought about how jaded she was becoming and did not want to be one of those teachers who retire because they just cannot do it anymore. She spoke of taking a research contract to compensate for not having sufficient summer classes to teach due to low enrollment.

I am going to take a different approach this summer. I’ve never been much for research, I was put into that situation because enrollment is down, which means there’s not as many opportunities this summer to teach so I had to look somewhere else to try and pay the bills and make some money. I don’t want to completely get burnt out of teaching. I don’t want to be one of those that had to retire because I just can’t do it anymore. I want to, maybe, phase out and have a change to gradually get out of it instead of throwing my hands up and saying, “I’m done with this. I just can’t do this anymore”.
Ursula, tired of her negative experiences teaching, spoke of taking a completely different professional path, if she could: “Write for the New Yorker. I like working in the library too. It’s not like I don’t like teaching; there are days where I just want to throw it all away. I wouldn’t be teaching high school students that’s for sure.” When asked if she would apply should a full-time position open, she said, “Probably wouldn’t get it; so probably not. I might consider it, but they wouldn’t hire me because of my age. There has only been one opening since I’ve worked here.”

Finally, Daniel spoke of an uncertain future for his family:

I’m really worried about losing my mojo with academics. Really, it’s my life course. I’m tempted to go back into construction, but I know I’ll be bored out of my mind. The other thing is to think about downsizing and live as an adjunct and be satisfied with that. I resent people who do that. I resent people who don’t stand up for what we know is right. Some people think that it’s honorable for people to live humbly and get paid peanuts. I can’t get any positions to open up in my college and basically need to wait till someone needs to retire. I asked my dean when we would actually create a full-time position in the Science department. He said, “I will only create a full-time position when I absolutely can’t find an adjunct.” Well, when people are starving with PhD.s, they’ll find adjuncts.

Daniel is currently applying for positions at neighboring institutions and in other areas of interest, so he can better help his two daughters when they are ready to attend college in a few years.

All the participants spoke of starting their respective involuntary adjunct careers with the hope of obtaining full-time employment as a faculty member. As time passed, their hopes began to lessen when they realized the barriers associated with obtaining a full-time position. When
participants were talking about their future career plans, their answers merged into a unified theme—“We don’t want to go through this again.”

Thank You For Listening

In their third interviews, four of the seven participants spoke about how much they appreciated talking to someone about their professional challenges without being judged or ridiculed. Tara said, “It’s nice to talk to somebody about the troubles in getting a full-time faculty position with somebody that kind of has an idea but isn't actually employed at Urbanville. It's been a good experience. It's been nice to know that it's not just happening at Urbanville.”

Nancy, who works a full-time job within the college she teaches for believes people are constantly judging her, and commented, “It’s been nice to be able to talk about it and it’s nice for somebody to listen to what you have to say and be interested because people around you are just like, ‘Yeah, I’ve already heard that story’. I would say that’s probably the one thing that it’s been nice to talk about it and kind of make it final and put to rest.”

Ursula, who had a bumpy ride working with faculty and administration, said:

I learned that it helps to talk about this topic of being an adjunct. We don't really have on outlet otherwise. We talk to each other, but that isn't heard by ... The administrators don't want to hear it. They won't listen to it. There is nobody to really listen except you and other adjuncts. My husband is sort of sympathetic, but not really. He's got his. Why should he ...Whatever. Listen in. There is nothing he can do really. I think the adjuncts just have to stand up and do something like go on strike or shut down schools or something.

Daniel expressed how happy he was that someone was researching adjunct faculty:
Personally, I think it’s kind of like admitting a problem or looking at it as a first step to a solution and maybe even a big step because once people are aware of what is actually going. I appreciate that very much and I wish people in my profession were advocating for themselves. It’s amazing that you listen to people.

Amelia, when asked what she learned from the interview process, commented,

It's helped me clarify my feelings and my perspective a little bit more about being adjunct. It's been helpful to talk about it with someone because when you're out there doing it, you're on your own, you never talk to anyone about it. That's been nice and helpful.

Thirolf (2013) conducted a qualitative study utilizing positioning theory and discourse analysis to examine the faculty identities of three community college instructors. Thirolf (2013) learned the love of teaching and interacting with students was at full force at the beginning of their teaching. As time passed, the feelings of pride and enjoyment of being in the classroom faded. Participants did not feel ‘safe’ enough to talk about their individual situations of because they feared possible repercussions and judgment for expressing their feelings at their institutions.

The toll of being an involuntary adjunct faculty member left its mark with all seven participants. The disappointing job interviews, experiences working with faculty and administration, lack of support and information, and feelings of being undervalued have combined to push hopes of teaching full-time to the wayside.

**Subthemes Analysis**

Two subthemes emerged from the participants’ experiences. They included: (1) I hope I set an example and (2) We are the Wal-Martification of higher education. These subthemes are discussed and contextualized within the current scholarly literature.
I Hope I Set An Example

Three participants spoke of pursuing their master’s degrees because they wanted to set a good example for their children. They wanted to show even during difficult times, they could still succeed. Daniel emphasized, “While you can lose everything, the one thing that cannot be taken away from you is your education.” Daniel made this quite clear when he said:

Another reason why I went back to pursue my undergrad and eventually masters was I did think it would be a good thing for my children to see. That my girls could at least see I pursue education through turmoil. I tell my students, there’s one thing that cannot be taken away from you. You wake up and you’re bald and naked on the side of the road, and what do you still have? You still have your education. It’s really the only thing that can’t be taken away. I wasn’t going to let it go.

Amelia, who believed one needed to care for yourself in this world, divorced while she pursued her education. She did her best to prioritize her family needs as well as to balance school. While she understood the sacrifice her education brought to her family, she wanted to set a good example for her children:

I think they were proud of me and I am glad I did it for that reason too, that they could look and say, “My mom did this.” Now, they are already thinking in terms of graduate school. Even my middle school daughter talks about, “Oh, I want to at least get my masters and probably my Ph.D.” I’m like, Yay! Because I didn’t think that way when I was a kid, and no one ever talked to me that way, so I hope I set an example that will then help them reach as high as they can, and I think they will.
Nancy, when describing her educational journey into the college classroom, beamed with pride as she talked about her daughter working on her Ph.D. “She has it all figured out,” she said. Nancy hoped her experiences pursuing her higher education degrees would be a positive influence on her children.

These three participants did not have much academic guidance or support as children, especially when it was time to enter college and/or decide on a career. They wanted to be good role models for their children to provide them with opportunities they never had from their parents.

We Are The Wal-Martification Of Higher Education

Throughout the interview process, three participants (Amelia, Daniel, and Nancy) compared their professional value to a Wal-Mart model. Adjunct faculty rank the lowest in the community college hierarchy in prestige and perceived importance, since they are considered a cheap labor source (Wallin, 2010). Community colleges hire adjunct faculty to fill full-time positions because they cost less. According to Hoeller (2014), Wal-Mart seems to provide an apt analogy for the economic trend of hiring adjuncts. Wal-Mart has become well known for retaining a minimum number of full-time workers and hiring many part-time workers with low pay, no benefits, and no job security, resulting in the “Wal-Martification” of higher education. It is much cheaper in the short term to hire part-time faculty (Hoeller, 2014).

Amelia described feeling like she’s part of a Wal-Mart model of education:

I wanted to comment that I feel really strongly that this trend of community colleges not creating or even replacing full-time positions and just adding more and more adjuncts is externalizing the costs onto the community, because adjuncts like me are on food stamps, housing assistance, and medical assistance. I really do feel it is the Walmartification of
the higher education system, and it’s wrong. It’s wrong to do this to the teachers and it’s wrong to do to the community. They claim to be such good community members but the hidden fact is that they are not being good community members. Good community members prioritize the creation of good, full-time jobs with benefits. What they are doing is not good for the economy, and it is taking advantage of the people who are struggling in the economy.

Daniel felt strongly he had practically given away all the hard work he invested in his institution. Possessing honor in his work is important to Daniel:

This is a job that comes with honor and I can make a difference in people’s lives; it’s because people love teaching they can take an advantage of it. In other countries like Finland, because people love teaching and they know how important it is, they pay them like doctors. It’s a societal decision that we have not valued and we basically ran like the Wal-Mart model.

Daniel does not feel honored by his institution’s policies and procedures. Chris agrees the system appears to be taking advantage of its adjuncts, and like Daniel and Amelia, adjuncts must stand up for themselves and make their voices heard.

Community colleges have come to depend on low-cost labor to balance the budget. As long as the law or collective bargaining agreements do not stop them, administrators will continue to employ lower paid, part-time instructors.

**Astin’s Need-based Socio-psychological Model of Career Choice**

Before analyzing the five unique phenomena found in this study, a short review is presented of Astin’s (1984) need-based socio-psychological model of career choice. This model can explain both between-group differences in career outcomes, e.g., why women and men tend
to engage in different types of work activities, and within-group differences, e.g., why some women engage exclusively in family work, while others choose paid employment, and still others engage in both. Astin’s model incorporates four important constructs: (1) motivation, (2) work expectations, (3) sex-role socialization, and (4) the structure of opportunity. It is a developmental model intended to explain changes in career choice and work behavior. The model defines the psychological factors (work motivation, expectations) and the cultural environmental factors (sex-role socialization, the structure of opportunity) that interact to produce career choices (Astin, 1984; Lindholm, 2004).

Astin’s theory is comprised of four major principles:

1. Work behavior is a motivated activity intended to satisfy three basic needs: survival, pleasure, and contribution.

2. Career choices are based on expectations concerning the accessibility of alternative forms of work and their relative capacity to satisfy these three basic needs.

3. Expectations are shaped in part by early socialization through family, childhood play, school experiences, and early work experiences and, in part, by the perceived structure of opportunity.

4. Expectations developed through socialization and through early perceptions of the structure of opportunity can be modified by changes in the structure of opportunity. This modification in expectations can lead to changes in career choice and in work behavior. (Astin, 1984; Lindholm, 2004, p. 608)

Human behavior is directed to satisfy basic needs. Work is important because it has the capacity to satisfy these needs. The ideal career is one that satisfies these needs in a balanced way. When listening to participants’ reasons for striving for faculty careers, the categories of
career choice motivation that Astin (1984) delineates—survival, pleasure, and contribution—were clearly evident.

**Unique Phenomena Analysis**

The following themes were fit into Astin’s (1984) model to enhance an understanding of men and women’s occupational behaviors. Participants each had distinctive paths to academics. While large themes were drawn from the data along with two subthemes, there were five unique smaller subthemes or phenomena, drawn from the participants’ experiences. They include (1) survival needs, (2) work satisfaction, (3) contribution, (4) sex-role socialization and (5) structure of opportunity.

**Survival Needs**

In terms of survival, employment that provides shelter, clothing, and other essential items necessary for our physical wellbeing and health was not met for three of the seven participants (Amelia, Daniel, and Josie). Community college adjuncts make less than full-time faculty, rarely receive benefits, have limited rights to raises, and are seldom promoted to higher paid positions (Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014). Participants described compensation as being a consistent concern as they worked on a contract basis, had no guaranteed number of classes each semester, and could not afford health insurance. They described their lives as chaotic, unstable, and lacking in security.

Amelia’s family was on food stamps and lived below poverty. Daniel, who worked three jobs for the college, commented he could not make it financially, even if it was only to buy a windshield wiper blade. Josie taught at multiple campuses to pay her bills. She described taking a research position over the summer that she did not like, since she did not have sufficient classes to survive the summer term. She said, “Being an adjunct allows me to teach, but it also doesn’t
allow me to have those full-time benefits and I feel insecure. I have floated several years without health insurance.”

The other four participants (Ursula, Nancy, Chris and Tara) are married. Therefore, they had their spouses’ incomes to assist in meeting their survival needs. Chris reflected on how lucky he was not to rely on adjunct work as his only means of survival. Ursula, Nancy, and Tara were also thankful to have a spouse who contributed financially. Ursula, whose husband is a professor at another small, private institution, commented, “I’m lucky because my husband’s always been employed, as I am not paid as a professional.” When a professional is not making sufficient money to meet basic needs, constant worry and financial strain may prevent that person from advancing professionally.

**Work Satisfaction**

In terms of pleasure, all participants engaged in their work with a degree of satisfaction. A study was conducted to examine the satisfaction and commitment of community college adjuncts. Results found little is known about adjuncts at community colleges, since literature is sparse (Valadez & Anthony, 2001). One research team posited part-time faculty teach because teaching is their passion. They are generally satisfied with their roles, and are extremely concerned with salary, benefits, and long-term security—as they should be (Valadez & Anthony, 2001). Nancy described her enjoyment working with students: “I feel good because I like to teach. I like the students. I love it when somebody says, ‘Oh, Mrs. N, you’re my favorite teacher’. Those are just words everybody wants to hear that at least once a quarter.” Tara, even though she is married and working to help her husband with the bills, described how much teaching fulfills her love of sharing her knowledge of science with others: “I like the interaction with the students and being able to share my knowledge of science. That’s really the main
reason I teach as an adjunct is because I like to share my knowledge and help teach others.” Participants spoke of accomplishing what they like to do best—teach. Adjuncts in community colleges are not required to conduct research or to become involved in the same level of institutional service required of full-time or university faculty. Josie described how much she loved the freedom being an adjunct provided her:

The main reason I want to be in education is to teach; I want to help people learn or develop skills. I am not required to or even asked necessarily to be on any committees or attend meetings. I am not a meeting person. I get to teach and I go out and teach some more from one place to the next and I am not locked in and stationary in one place where I have to have those office hours…. I get to just teach, teach, and teach.

**Contribution Needs**

Adjuncts teach for a variety of reasons. Part-time faculty choose to remain in the profession they are in because they reported a dedication to their students. “Teaching is often their core passion and career goal” (House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, 2014, p. 4). An individual’s sense of self-worth is derived from the satisfaction of contribution needs (Astin, 1984; Lindholm, 2004). All participants believed they were giving back to their communities by helping their students and they are in a profession that uses their education. They described the pride they felt being a part of their students’ success and the community college mission. They loved to teach. Josie described teaching akin to having a good cup of coffee and not being able to stop with just one cup.

Participants described feelings of being ignored and undervalued by full-time faculty and administration, especially when they wanted to contribute curricular ideas or needed help. Tara commented in regard to full-time faculty assistance:
It goes in one ear and out the other. The full-time faculty that are associated with my class, they don’t like change very much. Trying to talk to them about changing things is really difficult. They’re like, “Alright, I’ll listen, but nothing is going to happen. They’re helpful most of the time if you need something for class, or if you have questions about the class, but if you have good ideas to change the class or make it better, it’s in one ear and out the other.

Amelia described how feeling undervalued professionally affected her self-esteem. She emphasized she wanted to feel valued for the work she contributes as a professional, something an adjunct has not achieved. Daniel, who has built several programs for the institution he serves, spoke of being jaded. After all the work he has contributed and time he has committed to his institution, he feels he has been given nothing in return. He described his as the last vehicle in the parking lot at night when he left for the day, and his teaching load and responsibilities tended to far outweigh a full-timer’s load. He commented:

It was great to be a part of something that seemed very real. In my subconscious of it, I was so excited, I was in, I did everything, I built it up, everything, everything you are supposed to do to make your career move forward. And then in was like an arc, and I got in the middle. After a certain point, I was jaded.

Adjunct faculty view themselves as professionals lacking the professional status they work so hard to secure. They receive satisfaction teaching with the freedom to show their expertise in the classroom—outside the classroom, their professional value lessens (Levin & Hernandez, 2014).
**Sex-Role Socialization**

Work expectations begin to develop at an early age through the process of socialization. An individual slowly takes in a society’s values through word and example by parents, teachers, friends, and other adults (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Parents tended to treat boys and girls differently, which appears to have long-term implications for children’s interests, skills, independence, achievement, and interpersonal relationships. Play, household chores, and early paid work are differentiated by gender. These differences produce different skills and perceptions of what the world of work has to offer; in other words, children form gender-linked expectations about needs gratification through work.

Girls satisfied both pleasure and contribution needs by direct service to others (Thompson & Dahling, 2010). In education, teachers tended to reinforce particular behaviors in boys and girls. Children’s early experiences resulted in the formation of gender-differentiated expectations, which, in turn, result in gender-differentiated career choices and work behaviors (Domenico & Jones, 2006). Participants expressed gaps in guidance related to career choices, while pursuing their education.

Two distinct components that shape the vocational behavior of prospective academics are career-specific sources of influence and early developmental experiences. From a developmental standpoint, professors are more likely to be first born or only children and come from families that stress the value of academic achievement (Shapiro et al., 2015). They also tended to be highly intelligent, and show strong needs for achievement and autonomy as children (Lindholm, 2004). From the time they were young, people who eventually pursued academic careers tended to prefer intellectual modes of mastering experiences, to display a noticeable sense of “apartness” from their peers, preferring solitary and autonomous activities (Shapiro et al., 2015).
Lindholm (2004) stated the psychosocial portrait of faculty experiencing education is more unequivocal. Children who pursued academic careers tended to have rewarding school experiences, while others found faculty expressed a majority sentiment that school was boring. Individuals aspiring to academic careers were more likely to report greater independence from their parents when making their educational and occupational decisions (Lindholm, 2004).

Participants described their family life as fragmented: many moved a lot, preventing them from making friends and having a stable household. None had parents who worked in higher education, except for Josie, whose stepfather taught at a community college once she was out of the house. All described the need for autonomy and independence. Amelia and Daniel spoke of needing to “think outside the box” and having an entrepreneurial spirit. They started several businesses before incurring adjunct positions. Ursula and Tara spoke of being very introverted growing up, valuing their independence, and being dependent on themselves for work. Josie, Daniel, Chris, and Nancy said they were not always the best students. Daniel and Chris failed community college at first. None of the participants spoke of being mentored into academics. For the most part, parents let their children find their own way into higher education.

Structure of Opportunity

The structure of opportunity included economic conditions, family structure, job market, occupational structure, and other environmental factors influenced by scientific discoveries, technological advances, historical events, and social/intellectual movements. The main determinant of individuals’ work expectations was the structure of opportunity in the world of work (Astin, 1984).

Due to tight community college budgets, the prospects for an adjunct faculty person to attain a full-time position were dim (Levin & Hernandez, 2014). The participants in this study
entered the community college hoping the institution would provide an entry into full-time work. Applying for the few full-time positions that became available over the years was an eye-opening experience for several of the study’s participants.

Each participant described the interview process, since they all had applied for a position at least once. Three participants shared only one position had become available during their years teaching at the same institution. One participant applied four times with no feedback on how she could improve on her interviewing skills. Over time, participants’ hopes of achieving a full-time position faded as they realized the opportunity of being offered a full-time position was very slim. When asked if they would consider applying for an open position at this point in their careers, participants all answered ‘probably not’ as more than likely they would not be selected anyway. Tara, after describing what the interview process was like for her, said,

It’s disappointing because you would think they would want to hire from within, because they know—or at least they should have known—what your teaching style is from reports from students and whatnot. You would think they would want to hire somebody from within, because they already know their style. They already know that you’re going to be there, but most of the time, they always hire somebody from outside Riverside and not somebody that already been teaching for them for full-time faculty. It makes it really disappointing for adjuncts here trying to get on full-time. If you are already an adjunct, you probably aren’t going to get picked to teach full-time.

When participants were asked about their future career aspirations, it was not teaching full-time. Astin (1984) posited an individual must seek opportunity to advance and grow in his/her professional position, and feel he/she is meeting most, if not all, of his/her professional needs.
Discussion

The ideal career is one that effectively meets three primary needs: survival, pleasure, and contribution. Participants described throughout the three-step interview process, that while some of these needs were met, others were not. This is impacting them personally and professionally. Participants entered the community college as involuntary adjunct faculty, excited, and with hopes of new opportunities. As time passed, participants’ hopes of obtaining a full-time position began to slip away. Several participants already were looking for other full-time work. Hart Research Associates (2012) interviewed over 500 adjunct faculty, inquiring about their work conditions at community colleges. The researchers found, while adjuncts were not satisfied with their level of compensation and lack of professional resources, such as offices, computers and health benefits, the lack of feeling included in the institutional culture and valued by full-time faculty and administrators were the most prevalent factors influencing adjunct faculty work dissatisfaction (Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Flaherty, 2015).

Amelia was looking for a full-time position, even if it was outside academia, so she could care for her family’s needs; the same was true for Daniel. Daniel and Amelia had to seek other employment to effectively balance these three primary needs. Although they all had spouses who helped them, Tara, Nancy, and Ursula did not feel like professionals in their disciplines. Tara planned to apply for a full-time position outside academia and to continue teaching part-time. Nancy will retire during the next few years. Chris and Ursula will do the same. Finally, Josie, who on average teaches at seven different campuses and juggles up to 13 classes a semester, was worried about becoming burned out. She will continue to teach, but also planned to branch out and work in a different field. Josie accepted a research position for the summer term, not just because she does not have sufficient classes to teach, but also to prevent her from
exhausting her teaching motivation.

Astin’s (1984) need-based socio-psychological model of career choice was developed to explore how needs drive the individual as well as the critical importance of social and environmental variables in educational and career choices. Six of the seven participants took non-traditional paths to pursue their graduate degrees. Perhaps, if participants had followed a more traditional academic route, it would have enhanced their chances of finding mentors and received additional career guidance, while working on their graduate degrees.

None of the participants’ parents or any mentors significantly influenced their pursuit of academics as a career. Although participants all desired employment teaching and appreciated the ability to give back to their communities, it was not enough. As time passed, a lack of communication from administration and a better understanding of the systematic processes of community colleges in higher education had taken a toll.
CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter contains the following: study summary, conclusion, implications, recommendations for community college practice, future research, policy implications, reflexivity statement, and final thoughts.

Study Summary

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of involuntary adjunct faculty working at multi-campus community colleges, who aspired to become full-time faculty and how their experiences may have altered their career aspirations. The study’s participants, five women and two men, served at two multi-campus community colleges in the Midwest. The participants’ described experiences that clearly illustrated how adjunct work experiences shape career paths and aspirations. Data were gathered through 21 semi-structured interviews (three each participant), member-checking with participants, an outside peer reviewer, and field notes. Major themes from the narratives included the following: (1) They thought I’d just figure it out, (2) Accidental academics, (3) I am not a professional, (4) No one was there to tell me what to do, (5) Insider yet outsider with full-time faculty, (6) Undercurrent with administration, (7) Placebound by family, (8) Interviewing for full-time faculty: Trying to get a foot in the door, (9) Reevaluating my career aspirations: Why am I still working as an adjunct?, and (10) Thank you for listening. Two subthemes emerged from the data: I hope I set an example and We are the Wal-Martification of higher education. The data were situated within Astin’s (1984) need-based socio-psychological model of career choice, and analyzed to determine why individuals choose to stay/leave their occupations. Each participant had altered his/her career aspirations over time. At least two participants, who were single parents, were seeking full-time employment outside academia due to financial obligations.
The following research questions guided this study:

1) What are the experiences of adjuncts aspiring to become full-time faculty at multi-campus community colleges?

2) How might adjuncts’ career aspirations have changed as a result of their professional and personal experiences?

**Conclusions**

This study consisted of 21 in-depth narrative accounts by seven participants describing their experiences as involuntary adjuncts at two multi-campus community colleges in the Midwest, and how these experiences may have altered their career paths and aspirations. The participants’ described experiences, although unique, painted similar pictures. Even though only two male participants were interviewed, their experiences mirrored those of the five female participants. They all shared experiences of feeling undervalued or not a “real” professional because of underpayment, not being a “part of the good old girl’s club,” or included in the college’s culture. Participants’ experiences confirm the disparities community college adjuncts have faced in the past, as scholarly literature describes (Kramer, Gloekner, & Jacoby, 2014; Eagen, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Schmidt, 2015) are still just as much of an issue, if not more so, at the community college level.

One of the main themes drawn from the participant interviews was a lack of clear, consistent engagement and communication from administration and full-time faculty, as suggested by past studies (Kramer, Gloekner, & Jacoby, 2014; Eagen, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Schmidt, 2015). Repeated language throughout the interviews suggested adjuncts feel undervalued as academic entities on campus. Participants emphasized their beliefs they were playing an important role in students’ education and in the overall success of their respective
colleges. They also believed their contributions went unnoticed, mainly due to cues from interactions with administration and full-time faculty.

Due to a lack of engagement and clear communication from administration, each participant accepted his or her position as an adjunct with a level of optimism that, eventually, it would become full-time. Their employment interview processes were brief, informal, and never resulted in the desired scenario. Without clear guidance from administration concerning the actualities of the position during the hiring process, adjuncts will continue to accept the offers of part-time employment with unrealistic expectations of obtaining a full-time teaching position. Many adjuncts teach not for extra cash or as a hobby, but with the goal of obtaining full-time employment (Hart Research Associates, 2010). The lack of communication and engagement from administration will continue to cause misconceptions of what the part-time job description truly entails.

Thirolf (2013) posited:

Adjuncts initially experienced positive faculty identity development through their teaching and interactions with students, but over time, these feelings of professional pride and commitment lessened. Furthermore, when they positioned themselves vis-à-vis full-time faculty, feelings of disconnectedness and isolation emerged and ultimately intensified over time. (p. 177)

As time passed, their excitement and energy for teaching diminished, due to low compensation, as well as feeling underappreciated and invisible. These feelings resulted in resentment and frustration, a lowering of teaching standards, and ultimately leaving (Thirolf, 2013). The participants’ narratives began with stories of excitement and wonder at being in the community college classroom. Over time, the initial hopes of obtaining full-time employment
started to fade as they realized being an adjunct was not what they had imagined originally. During one interview, Amelia spoke of applying for a full-time position that would require her to leave the classroom. She emailed me a few weeks later to inform me she received the position. She is shutting the door on her aspirations of teaching full-time, at least for now.

**Implications**

Analysis of this study’s data clearly demonstrates the participants’ diversity of experiences, and how they were affected personally and professionally. This study was accomplished through a descriptive phenomenological approach and biographical interviewing techniques. Each participant related unique experiences through individual, semi-structured interviews—two conducted face-to-face and the third by telephone. Their stories are constructivist and constructionist in nature. Much of the academic literature on adjuncts relates their experiences as a life riddled with strife, due to being undercompensated and undervalued by administration and full-time faculty.

Participants believed they brought quality to the classroom. Each one articulated they teach because they enjoy it. Unfortunately, several participants (Monica, Amelia, and Daniel) did not meet the three main needs outlined by Astin’s (1984) need-based socio-psychological model of career choice—survival, pleasure, and contribution. They had to reevaluate their career aspirations and ultimately sought other professional avenues, some outside academia.

**Recommendations for Community College Practice**

This section lists recommendations community colleges can implement internally to support adjunct faculty. Recommendations include the following: dedicate ample time for the interview process, implement onboarding/mentorship programs, recognize part-time faculty commitment, provide more than the necessities and offer other benefits to adjunct faculty.
Dedicate Ample Time for the Interview Process

Each participant joined the community college hoping eventually to teach full-time. The hiring process for most was a brief ten-minute telephone call or a one-on-one conversation. Two of the seven participants were hired to teach courses in which they had no expertise, but were told they were qualified because they had a master’s degree. Never were they told the chances for a full-time position utilizing their qualifications becoming available was highly unlikely when they first started teaching. Two participants were told it would be highly unlikely an adjunct would be hired full-time. A dean told a third participant that a position would only become available when he could not find adjuncts to teach classes in a particular discipline.

All participants spoke about the lack of regular communication and support from administration. They described consistent administrator turnover. Daniel had seen two deans walk in and out of Plains Valley Community College’s doors during his four years at the institution; Nancy and Tara described their experiences working with several deans throughout their time as adjuncts at Urbanville Community College. How the dean approached his/ her duties as an administrator varied, making his or her approach unpredictable at best.

Administrators and deans, the people in charge of the hiring process, should provide honest, up-front, clear communications during an adjunct’s hiring process. Candidates should be told the realities of the position (low pay, no guarantee of classes, hired on a per-semester contract basis, no office space), as well as the likelihood of attaining full-time employment at the college. The more information provided during the interview process or at orientation, the better equipped the adjunct.
Implement Onboarding/ Mentorship Programs

Administration and full-time faculty should play a role in an adjunct’s professional life, but this need is neglected at many community colleges. Involuntary adjuncts, who seek employment in hopes of obtaining full-time employment, feel disrespected and ignored by their colleagues (Kramer, Gloekner, & Jacoby, 2013; Eagen, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Schmidt, 2015). Individuals need to feel valued in their professional work environment and socially accepted by their peers (Lindholm, 2004). Three participants defined their relationship with full-time faculty as being “okay,” while the other four described feeling as though they were unimportant and were perceived as burdensome when asking for assistance. Participants described their relationships with community college deans as being similar to full-time faculty, i.e., colleagues and administrators were unapproachable and problematic to work with someone.

Participants also shared feeling unequipped and floundering during their first days of teaching. Josie recalled being “scared half to death,” unable to sleep the night before. Nancy recalled just being given a box of papers on her first day. Daniel was asked to teach a course he did not have any expertise, but was told he was qualified. He characterized his experience teaching the class as embarrassing and arduous, since he did not understand the academic language or material.

To help adjuncts adjust to the institutional culture, especially as a new hire, administrators should consider creating and delivering visible and meaningful mentoring programs with full-time or seasoned part-time faculty at the helm. Administrators also should create practices that set up mandatory departmental meetings for full-time and adjunct faculty to attend, and be compensated for prior to the beginning of each semester. Departmental heads and
deans should meet one-on-one with each new adjunct faculty member to start building inclusive, positive relationships.

Research shows mentorship produces many positive outcomes. For example, when a novice educator is formally mentored by a more experienced, accomplished academician, the more quickly he/she will assume the full scope of his/ her academic role and be more productive (Nick et al., 2012). Mentoring contributes to higher career satisfaction and increased departmental or organizational morale. Mentored faculty reported augmented professional identity and experience a smoother bridge from practice to the academic environment. They report increased self-confidence and growth in professional development. Higher education institutions benefit from sponsoring faculty-mentoring programs. These benefits have been evidenced through improved retention rates and increased productivity (Nick et al., 2012).

When an adjunct is hired, he/she could be assigned an onboarding mentor, who is either a full-time or a seasoned part-time faculty member, to help with adjustment to the community college’s culture. An onboarding mentor can provide him/ her with the opportunity to meet other faculty and adjuncts, and teach the new instructor how to navigate the community college environment. This mentor can help the mentee prepare for classes, show the new employee where he/ she can obtain copies and supplies, and be an important contact, in general. The mentor could use an onboarding checklist provided by the department head or Human Resources to assist with the process.

For example, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach’s Director of Professional Development, Dr. Carol Heaverlo, developed an onboarding checklist for departmental managers and supervisors to use for new employees. This checklist is designed for use before an employee’s start date, and the document walks the new employee through pertinent practices for
at least a year. Once an employee starts, he/she can work together with the hiring manager and an onboarding mentor to complete the checklist. The hiring manager may add additional activities relevant to the new employee’s area to make it unique to the department and discipline (Heaverlo, 2015).

Community colleges should consider using a checklist to onboard adjunct faculty. This checklist could be designed to assist with the department’s orientation process as well as training and development. The new hire could work with the assigned onboarding mentor to complete all the checklist’s items in chronological order.

As part of the onboarding process, a second option for community colleges to learn more about adjunct faculty is to straightforwardly ask what they need as new and current employees. Murray (2001) discussed the tendency at community colleges to offer professional development activities that have little relevant value, meaning, or purpose to their faculty. To promote faculty and institutional integration, as well as collegial engagement, it is critical to include adjuncts in the conversation about what type(s) of professional development fits their needs. One low-cost method to help adjuncts feel more included, and to identify their needs and top priorities as faculty members, is to design a universal professional development needs assessment survey. For example, as part of the graduate assistantship work at Iowa State University during my doctoral program, Dr. Carol Heaverlo and I developed two universal professional development needs assessment surveys for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

One survey was designed specifically for Extension employees and the other for County Council Members. The surveys were developed in Qualtrics, an inexpensive survey assessment software, and the links were emailed to all ISU Extension employees and council members. Seventy-five quantitative and open-ended questions were designed, using a Likert-type scale. A
side-by-side format was chosen to collect quantitative data and an open-ended format was selected to gather qualitative data. From the data, the Director of Professional Development identified the top professional development needs of Extension employees and Council Members. The director planned workshops and other professional development opportunities for the 2016-2017 fiscal year, based on these findings. She will continue to utilize the data results from the assessments to plan for future professional development opportunities for all Extension employees and Council members (Bakley & Heaverlo, 2015).

Within the community college, departmental chairs and/or deans can design professional development needs assessments uniquely specific to instructors within each academic department. They can use data drawn from assessments to assist in determining the professional development needs of adjunct faculty and planning of future workshops/programs the college can implement to fulfill them.

**Recognize Adjunct Faculty Commitment**

Not feeling valued was another issue the study’s participants described. They felt appreciated by their students, but not by administration or full-time faculty. When describing how being an adjunct did not meet her professional needs, Amelia said, “You don’t feel valued. It affects your self-esteem.” Discussing how being an adjunct may not meet his professional needs, Daniel said, “This system is taking advantage of me. You can pour your heart and soul into it and it’s not going to make a difference to anybody.” They did not feel they were recognized for their accomplishments or hard work. Flaherty (2105) suggested even the smallest incentive toward recognizing part-time faculty may increase job satisfaction, making them feel valued and supported.
Instead of only full-time faculty given first choice for courses, adjuncts who have taught for a predetermined number of years, should be given priority to teach courses they wish to teach. They should also be allowed to serve on hiring, textbook, and curriculum committees. When a full-time position opens, adjuncts who have served the institution for a certain amount of time should be given first choice before opening the opportunity to those outside the institution.

Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2005) suggested administrators provide for their adjuncts “opportunities for faculty members to feel part of a mutually respected community of colleagues who value their contribution to the institution and feel concern for their well-being” (p. 38). Examples of inclusive activities include allowing adjuncts to contribute to departmental discussions, decision-making, regularly communicating that all instructional contributions are valued regardless of status, and providing recognition ceremonies for long-serving full- and part-time instructors, as well as for excellent teachers.

**Provide More Than the Necessities**

Adjuncts dedicate abundant time and resources to their classes. Participants described spending hours grading over the weekend, using their homes and cars as offices, bringing their own computers and tools for classroom instruction, and sacrificing time with their families to meet student and administrative demands. All participants stated serving as an adjunct faculty member does not meet professional needs because they feel they are not paid or given access to the tools of the trade that will allow them to be successful educators. Participants spoke of not having office space for student privacy, classroom materials, or updated course content. When describing how hard it was to make ends meet while he raised two teenage daughters, Daniel said, “We are being asked to go the extra 10 to 20% for students and I am sitting here with this
college education and I can’t send my own daughter to college on my income, when I can’t go to the doctor, when I can’t buy a house, when I can’t . . .”

In a perfect world, raising adjunct faculty salaries would do much to ensure adjuncts feel respected as professionals. Higher salaries may also improve attitudes, satisfaction, and increase retention, which, in turn, would provide continuity and a better quality of instruction for students. Due to low budgets, raising salaries may not be realistic for many community colleges. If community colleges cannot raise adjuncts’ salaries, they should consider reexamining budgets and making small adjustments to provide adjuncts with more office space and supplies, such as paper, pens, etc., and use of updated computers and copiers. Private office space could be provided to adjunct faculty who have taught for a certain number of years, and have shown dedication to the college and its students. Josie was offered her own office when she was teaching/ grading at one of the campuses she taught for many years. The action immediately affected her in a positive manner.

They put my name on the door. That was really freaky. I was like, "What is that? Who is that?" I had to take a picture of it. I couldn't believe it. I sent it to all my fans. I still have it I was just so proud. They gave me this big desk and this big cushy chair. It was wonderful because I'm there all day. I was camped out from morning until night class. I would go in there and work and I can get everything so that my weekend ... I could do other classes or online where I didn't feel so overwhelmed. That worked really slick. Otherwise, using my car or the weekends. That's what I do on the weekends.
Offering adjunct faculty the tools they need to be successful as professionals may not only help them inside and outside of the classroom, but also may restore perceptions of being expert practitioners in their field(s) of study.

**Offer Other Benefits to Adjunct Faculty**

Due to tight budgets and the impact of the Affordable Care Act, offering full-time benefits and higher pay may be next to impossible for some community colleges. Other, less-costly benefits might improve adjuncts’ experiences. One example would be offering discounts or free tuition for additional master’s-level credits for part-time faculty. Many community colleges already offer 100% tuition remission for eligible employees at their institutions and discounted rates for spouses or dependents. Some community colleges are beginning to partner with neighboring universities to allow staff, who has completed a certain number of years of service to enroll in post-secondary, credit coursework, if it is related to employment or a potential position at the college.

For example, Southeast Community College partnered with neighboring colleges and universities within the State of Nebraska to provide their instructional staff reimbursement for costs incurred for the completion of graduate credit courses. This, in turn, provides professional development opportunities for adjunct faculty and may lead to full-time positions when part-time instructors acquired additional credit hours in other disciplines (Southeast Community College, 2016).

A second example of community colleges partnering with universities and offering discounted tuition rates to adjunct faculty is the University of Northern Iowa (UNI). UNI is partnering with all Iowa community colleges to meet the need for graduate education as a result of recent changes set forth by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). By offering graduate
level courses at a discounted rate, faculty can earn sufficient credit hours to teach their respective discipline per HLC requirements. Faculty must seek permission from their dean to ensure the credits will meet HLC’s requirements before they apply, but the agreement provides an opportunity for the adjunct to complete a master’s degree in their intended discipline (University of Northern Iowa, 2016). Community colleges should work to partner with neighboring universities and colleges to provide continuing educations such as this.

Amelia and Daniel both considered pursuing an additional 18 credits in another discipline to open doors to a full-time faculty position or to teach more classes at other campuses. As noted earlier, Amelia’s dean evaluated her and provided her with excellent remarks. When she confided in him she needed more financial support from the college to provide for her family, the dean encouraged her to take classes in another area to increase her professional flexibility. As Amelia expressed, the cost of classes was beyond the budget of someone who barely earned $1,500 a month. A discounted tuition rate and/ or free tuition would help adjuncts, like Amelia and Daniel, to increase their skill sets and to pay for courses they would not otherwise be able to afford.

Future Research

While research on adjunct faculty is growing, there are still visible gaps—such as studying involuntary adjunct faculty who aspire to become full-time at community colleges. Data for adjuncts’ working conditions, their experiences with full-time faculty and administration, and the challenges caused personally and professionally have basically remained the same over the past 40 years. With looming budget deficits at both the state and federal levels, and continued enrollment increases at community colleges, the use of adjunct faculty will only expand. More academic scholarship is needed to illustrate the issues adjuncts face at multi-
campus community colleges so that administrators and full-time faculty can provide more support and create inclusive environments for all faculty and students.

Future studies can advance this topic by collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data as a means to better understand involuntary adjunct faculty whose career aspirations are to become full-time faculty. A suggestion would be to conduct a replication of this descriptive phenomenological qualitative study at other multi-campus community colleges in the Midwest. The data drawn from the second study can then be compared with the results of this study. The data results could provide additional recommendations and future research. To strengthen future studies, adding focus groups to the data collection methods could provide a deeper understanding of participants’ experiences.

Administrators’ attitudes affect the well-being of the faculty they lead. More research is needed on community college administrators at multi-campus community colleges, in particular, that analyzes administrative attitudes toward adjunct faculty support. Future research also should examine interactions among full-time faculty and adjuncts to determine ways of facilitating positive feelings of inclusion. Using quantitative research methods, such as surveys inquiring about cultural inclusion among faculty, and administrative attitudes and perceptions of their staff, could provide data to identify paths towards creating a more inclusive environment for all.

**Policy Implications**

Findings from this study have implications at the state/ federal and institutional levels for both policy and practice. Participants spoke of the many challenges they face and the systematic issues that need to be addressed. Based on the participants’ stories and pertinent literature, the community college system should consider existing hiring and compensation policies to
determine whether they truly support instruction. This evaluation process could lead to rewriting existing or creating new policies to support all faculty, using best practices for hiring adjuncts, and quantifying their salaries and benefits.

Quality Matters (QM) developed a faculty-centered, peer-review process designed to certify the quality of online courses and their components. A system of peer-review, led by full-time faculty using QM could be beneficial in this development. Utilizing a method such as QM could ensure quality and continuous improvement of adjunct faculty. QM also provides on-site, online, and web conferencing professional development opportunities to a broad audience of educators, including faculty, administrators, and adjunct instructors (Quality Matters, 2016). Creating faculty-driven professional development can strengthen community colleges’ efforts toward improved teaching and learning.

Compensation is a top concern for involuntary adjunct faculty. Adjuncts are paid 25 to 35% less than full-time faculty. The pay difference is not because of variations in faculty qualifications, but in institutional policy and surrounding market conditions (Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014). Part-time faculty are rarely compensated with increases commensurate with length of service, a practice common for full-time employees. At the state and federal levels, college administrators need to do more to make policy leaders aware of the challenges adjunct faculty face. More specifically, the consistent lack of funding has forced institutions to hire increasing numbers of adjuncts with low salaries and few or no benefits. Administrators and faculty leaders should provide policy leaders yearly information concerning the amount of pay per credit load hour compared to full-time pay, and the staffing patterns exhibited. Local, state, and federal leaders should evaluate this information, and consider offering benefits and rewarding long-time adjuncts for their experience.
The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) provide benefits to adjunct faculty that other states may consider implementing. Examples of the benefits Minnesota offers individuals with adjunct appointments include the following:

- Pay raises that equal or exceed the percent increases for full-time and part-time each fiscal year.
- Two days of sick leave per semester.
- Five days leave without loss in pay in the case of a death in the immediate family, including siblings, children, wards, grandchildren, grandparents, parents or parents of the spouse, or any individual who regularly resides in the faculty member's household.
- Up to one day of paid emergency/personal leave per semester.
- Pension benefits if he/she works at least twenty-five percent (25%) time in an academic year, i.e., 6 credit hours.
- Two voluntary, tax-sheltered savings programs accomplished through payroll deductions regardless of the number of credits taught.
- Participation in the State Employee Group Insurance Program (SEGIP), if an instructor works a combined total of at least fifty percent (50%) FTE during an academic year, i.e., fall through spring semester, at two separate MnSCU locations (Inter Faculty Organization, 2016).

Adjunct faculty continue to lose benefits and access to allotted classes due to the Affordable Care Act, leaving them to struggle to meet basic needs. At Plains Valley Community College, Josie was teaching a sufficient number of classes per semester to entitle healthcare benefits, sick pay, etc. When a new president joined the institution, everything changed. She, along with other adjuncts, was told her position was no longer available. Within two days, the
college called, asking if she wanted to reapply for her old teaching position. Josie agreed, but she accepted the position with no benefits and at decreased pay. This changed everything for her, professionally and at home. Offering benefits to adjunct employees will not only help them financially, but may increase their likelihood of feeling more valued and included in the academic culture.

Another important issue is hiring of adjunct faculty at the last minute. This practice does not allow sufficient hours to seek a full-time faculty member. Due to cancellations and late enrollments, the college’s typical hiring process is circumvented. This in turn, causes crucial information to be lost during the hiring process (Jolley, Cross, & Bryant, 2014). Local, state, and federal leaders should develop policy language that would require community colleges to adhere to the same hiring regulations for adjuncts as those used for full-time faculty.

Challenges surrounding the needs of adjunct faculty should be a concern for state, federal, and local institutions as well as state departments of education value for student learning. Results from this study indicate adjuncts are abandoning their aspirations to become full-time faculty, regardless how much they love to teach, due to a lack of communication and support from administration and colleagues.

**Reflexivity Statement**

After traveling and visiting with involuntary adjuncts working at multi-campus community colleges throughout the Midwest, I realize how systemic are the problems and disparities they face. More studies are being conducted concerning the work experiences of adjunct faculty, but little seems to have changed to improve their work conditions.

Five of the seven participants did not have a full-time job. Since three of these five participants were the main providers for their families, financial worry and stress were a
consistent theme. Also important to participants was the need to feel valued, since they did not have the luxury of a full-time job to feel like a valued professional. I had the luxury of a full-time job outside of the community college while I was an adjunct, but I still preferred to teach. When I put my career aspirations aside, I felt like a part of me was missing. I recognized this same need for professional fulfillment with the study’s seven participants.

As I met with participants over an eight-week period, it was amazing to listen to them make meaning from their own stories and careers. I experienced their emotions as they openly shared their journeys to higher education and how this voyage may be coming to an end. Feeding their families and the need to feel valued outweighed their love of teaching and giving back to their communities. I saw tired, frustrated adjuncts, and was awed by their strength to continue to teach and give back, despite everything they had experienced.

I was surprised at how the male participants experienced similar hardships to those of the females—finding their paths to academics, discovering their love of teaching and wanting to help students, and the frustrations of being passed over for full-time positions. I would like to have interviewed more male faculty who aspired to become full-time faculty, and to learn more about their experiences, to determine whether men are more apt to be promoted and have other advantages over women in higher education. Women constitute an estimated 58% of adjuncts at community colleges and have a crucial role in shaping the direction of postsecondary education (Townsend & Twombly, 2007; American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). More women drop out of academia than men due to spousal and family obligations (Winkler, 2010). Almost all of the female participants expressed frustrations about being place bound because of their husbands, unable to move or to expand upon their careers due to their family obligations.
The two male participants were also place bound, due to following their spouses for career advancement.

I was also taken aback when several participants spoke of adjuncts as being the “Wal-Martification of higher education.” Hearing this phrase makes me believe there is a lot of work to do for adjuncts to feel valued and fairly compensated for their hard work and dedication to the community colleges and students they serve. All participants understood this was a systemic problem and are trying to not find fault with administration. I thought about what Daniel said to me about being angry at being taken advantage of and trying to determine whom to blame. Still, he knew it was not rational to blame anyone at his college. Still, it was difficult.

He spoke about bringing honor to anything he did. Daniel said, “What honor is it to live in poverty, unable to raise your children?” I also thought about the story Amelia shared of her concerns trying to raise three children while living in poverty, as well as the tired and worried look on her face as she expressed them. She is a professional, has a master’s degree, receives food stamps and housing assistance, and feels like her life is in pieces. It is no wonder their career aspirations to become full-time faculty have faded.

**Final Thoughts**

While each of the seven participants’ experiences was unique, the end result culminated in similar stories. Their career aspirations of desiring to become full-time faculty had been set aside for a variety of reasons. The participants’ experiences of working with administration and full-time faculty were far from satisfying. The financial and professional pressures were difficult to shoulder, especially for the participants who did not have a dual income. From this study’s findings, it was recommended hiring processes and levels of compensation at the community college level be reevaluated to better support adjuncts. Daniel, who teaches for Plains Valley
Community College, wrote a short message updating his career status in an email when member-checking his narrative. He commented,

So I had to get my head across the line of accepting academics is probably not my future. The national consortium grant ended last week after 5 years, and with low student enrollment, I have only one class this fall: though my part of the grant ended. I am afraid of falling into a hole of failure, loneliness, whiskey and depression, but if I can keep my head up, I know there is a whole lot to excite me moving forward, and I really want to do that.

Daniel is leaving the community college he has loyally served for many years to move his family to a small town in the Midwest. He hopes to provide a better life by following his entrepreneurial spirit, and finding support from family and friends.

More studies on involuntary adjunct faculty are needed highlighting these professionals’ acceptance of positions with the aspirations and hope of achieving a full-time position (Hart Research Associates, 2010). Shrinking resources and tightening budgets make it difficult for community colleges to create full-time positions. Administrators must re-evaluate their priorities and turn towards providing a more inclusive culture for all faculty members, regardless of course load.
REFERENCES


Boord, M. (2010). Analysis of adjunct faculty at Des Moines Area Community College: Use and application of Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory to predict job satisfaction in teaching improvement and professional development Graduate Theses and Dissertations, Iowa State University, Ames, IA. (Paper 11739)


APPENDIX A1.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Date: 1/22/2016
To: Amanda Bakley
    4519 60th Place
    Urbandale, IA 50322

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Waiting to become full-time faculty: An exercise in career choice examination

IRB ID: 15-760

Study Review Date: 1/22/2016

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
  - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
  - Any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.
- You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application. Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.
- Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. Only the IRB or designee may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4565 or IRB@ilstate.edu.
APPENDIX A2.

IRB APPROVAL MODIFICATION DOCUMENT

Data: 2/12/2016
To: Amanda Bailey
4519 80th Place
Urbandale, IA 50322

CC: Dr. Larry Ebbers
N205 Lagomarcino Hall
11110 Extension 45 Building
Dr. Lyn Brodersen

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Waiting to become full-time faculty: An exercise in female adjunct faculty career choice examination

IRB ID: 15-760

Study Review Date: 2/10/2016

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
  - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
  - Any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.
- You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application. Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.) modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. Only the IRB or designee may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
March 15, 2016

Dear Academic Dean,

My name is Amanda Bakley and I am a PhD student in the School of Education at Iowa State University. I am nearing the end of my educational journey and writing the dissertation. I recently have had my dissertation proposal approved by my plan of study committee and Iowa State University’s Institutional Review Board. I have received IRB approval from Urbanville as well.

Currently, I am an adjunct faculty member working at a multi-campus community college and am interested in other adjunct faculty experiences and their career aspirations. The purpose of my qualitative study is to interview adjunct faculty, full-time faculty and administrators who were adjunct faculty in the Arts & Sciences Division during the past five years. Also, that their current/past career aspirations is/was to become full-time faculty. I will ask questions about their childhood, influences that may have shaped career aspirations while growing up, and what it is like teaching at a multi-campus community college. I will share my interview protocol if you like.

I believe my study will make an important contribution to the literature as there is very little literature on adjunct faculty and their career aspirations. Therefore, I am hoping my study will add to the literature on this particular topic.

How can you help? I have an email already generated. I am asking that you email it out to your adjunct faculty members, full-time faculty and administrative staff with an attached informed consent form. The email contains all the details pertaining to the study that needs to be shared with participants. If a staff member is interested in participating—they will then email me back in reply with the signed informed consent form attached to the email. I will then contact them within the next few days to setup dates and times for the three interviews. I will ask them to select a place on their campus or off campus that will fit my needs and theirs and will not incur expense for them.

For additional information on my study, I have attached the participant informed consent document and the email draft for you to send out to participants. Please let me know if you would like additional information.

Thank you for your time and assisting with my study!

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Amanda Bakley
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Good day,

My name is Amanda Bakley, and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at Iowa State University. I am working on completing my dissertation and need your help! As a current female adjunct instructor at a multi-campus community college, I am interested in adjunct faculty experiences working at multi-campus community colleges whose career aspirations are/were to become full-time faculty. Therefore, I am seeking adjunct faculty, administrators and full-time faculty (who have been adjunct faculty in the past five years) in the Arts & Sciences Division, willing to participate in my study.

I plan to conduct three interviews with each participant. Each interview will last approximately one to two hours. Two of the interviews will be face-to-face in a secured and confidential environment and the third interview will be over the phone. I promise to do my best to keep all your information confidential and a pseudonym will take the place of your name. You will be fully involved in the data collection process as I will email you a raw transcript from each interview so you may review and provide feedback.

Each interviewee will be given a $15.00 gift card for participating in the first two interviews. A $20.00 gift card will be given in appreciation for participating in the third interview which will be mailed to an address specified by you the next business day. Please note I will keep the address you provide to me confidential and will destroy it once your gift card is mailed to you. Please note, if you should choose to opt out at any time during the interview process, you will still be given a gift card to compensate for your time. As an adjunct instructor, I understand how important and valuable your time is. You will also be contributing to the gap of literature on this particular topic in academia.

To participate in my study, you must meet the following criteria:

- Identify as an adjunct faculty member
- Education attainment be no higher than a master’s degree
- Or adjunct faculty who have become full-time within the last 5 years
- Or administrators who have become full-time faculty after serving as an adjunct faculty member within the last 5 years
- Teach at a multi-campus community college
- Have/had professional aspiration to become full-time community college faculty
- Teach in the Arts & Sciences
- Teach at least two courses a semester
- Have taught for at least three semesters

Attached to this email is a participant consent form. If you are interested and meet the criteria outlined above, please read the consent form, and if you decide you would like to participate, sign and attach the form in your reply to my contact information (email) below. I will contact
you within a few business days once I receive it to further the discussion and to setup future dates/times for the three interviews.

I sincerely thank you for your time and appreciate all that you do.

Best regards,

Amanda Bakley
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of the Study: Waiting to become full-time faculty: An exercise in adjunct faculty career choice examination

Investigators: Dr. Larry Ebbers, Dr. Lyn Brodersen and Amanda Lynn Bakley

Introduction: The purpose of this research study is to understand the experiences of adjunct faculty whose career aspirations are/were to become full-time faculty and work at a multi-campus community college. Your participation in this study will not affect your professional status at your institution.

Description of Procedures: Participants will take part in three one-on-one interviews; each will last between one and two hours depending on how much you share. The third interview will be conducted over the phone.

During the interviews you will be asked open-ended questions about your experiences at the community college where you currently work and how those experiences have shaped your life personally and professionally. The interviews will be audio recorded. At any time during the study, you may skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and that of your institution and any other entity named in the interviews.

You will be emailed a summary and transcripts from our interviews. You may then edit the transcripts if you would like for clarity or to retract any statements you are uncomfortable having shared in the final report and subsequent disseminations.

During the interviews, I will also be taking field and memo notes. These notes may consist of your nonverbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, etc.) as well as descriptions of our environment. I will inform you of this before each interview to put you at ease. You have the right to object to this if it makes you feel uncomfortable for any reason.

Risks: Although minimal, you may experience emotional discomfort recounting stories related to your past experiences. There could also be adverse impacts of the information you share such as embarrassment or informational harm to your reputation should your identity be deduced. Some of the protections against your identity being deduced include conducting interviews off-site such as a secure library conference room, removal of your name and other identifying data, and other specific information such as where you teach will not be included in any reports. As a participant, you may refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable during the interview process.

Benefits: If you decide to participate, there may be no direct benefit to you. Your participation in the study has the potential to help administers better support adjunct faculty who serve their institutions as well as contribute to the gap of research in this subject area.
Compensation: Because your time is valuable, you will receive two $15.00 gift cards at the conclusion of the first two face-to-face interviews, and a $20.00 gift card that will be mailed to an address specified by you after the final phone interview for a total of $50.00. If you should choose to opt out of an interview while it is in session, you will still be given the gift card to thank you for your time. You will be asked to sign a research participant receipt form for each gift card you receive throughout the research process.

Costs: There are no costs associated with participating in the study.

Participants Rights: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality: As researchers, we are committed to protecting your identity. In the event you share personal and unique story information, we will withhold specific information such as your legal name. In addition, any information about third parties will not include their name.

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information. Your name, schools, and any identifying information will be removed from all documentation to assure the confidentiality of your participation. Although confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, we will do our best to make sure your identity is protected.

Questions: For further information about the study contact Lyn Brodersen at lbro@iastate.edu, Larry Ebbers at lebbers@iastate.edu or Amanda Lynn Bakley at albalkey@iastate.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

Signature: Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered.

Once signed, please reply to my email with an attached copy of the consent form. Once I receive it, I will contact you to setup the dates/times of the three interviews in the new few days.

Participant’s Name: (Printed) ____________________________________

Participant’s Signature: ________________________________ Date: ___________
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Seidman’s three-tier interview model

Interview 1: Face-to-face

1. Describe what it was like growing up in your family.
2. How did your childhood experiences shape your career aspirations?
3. Describe your experiences in college.
4. Describe your experiences in graduate school.
5. How did you come to realize you wanted to work in higher education?
6. Tell me about how you became an instructor at a multi-campus community college.
7. Tell me about your experience being an adjunct instructor at a multi-campus community

Interview 2: Face-to-face

1. Tell me about working with full-time faculty.
2. Talk to me about what it is like working with administration.
3. Describe to me what your particular class and workload is like a semester.
4. How does working as an adjunct faculty member meet your needs?
5. How does working as an adjunct faculty member not meet your needs?
6. How does being an adjunct shape your personal life?
7. What are your current career aspirations?
8. How do you think your experience in this position will help you meet your long-term career aspirations?
9. Describe to me your experience applying for full-time teaching positions.
10. Is there anything else you would like to share in regards to your experience being an adjunct faculty member at a multi-campus community college?
Interview 3: Telephone call

1. What have you learned throughout the interview process?

2. What aspects of the interview process inspired reflection for you?

3. Where do you see yourself in the future?

4. What other comments would you make about your experience throughout the interview process?
APPENDIX F

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH PARTICIPANT RECEIPT FORM

CONFIDENTIAL CONFIDENTIAL CONFIDENTIAL CONFIDENTIAL

Iowa State University
Research Participant Receipt Form (RPRF)
Use if this payment is less than $100

Iowa State University (ISU) is required to maintain the confidentiality of information about research study participants while still complying with record keeping requirements of the State of Iowa, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and funding agencies. The purpose of this form is to serve as documentation of the receipt of compensation associated with participation in a research study conducted by ISU personnel.

I, ________________________________, have received/or am requesting compensation in
(Print Research Participant Name) the form and amount indicated below:

☐☐Cash $ __________

☐☐Check $ __________

☐☐Gift Certificate/Card $ __________

☐☐Other Property – Describe: ________________________________

Value: $___________

__________________________________________  ______________
Research Participant Signature               Date

TO ISU PERSONNEL:
Research participants may be given the opportunity to participate without receiving payment if they choose not to complete this receipt form. This form provides documentation for gift certificates/cards or other property purchased by ISU p-card--keep original form as part of your p-card documentation. If an ISU check needs to be issued for payment, attach the RPRF to completed Simple Disbursement Voucher (SDV) in KFS. If a cash advance was used to pay the participants, attach the RPRF to a Distribution of Income (DI) form in KFS.