

**COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY IDENTITIES**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Although it is not widely known, community college faculty teach close to half of all undergraduate students in the country (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014; Snyder & Dillow, 2013). Because nearly all community college students commute to campus and many are employed off-campus (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Horn, Nevill, & Griffith, 2006), it frequently is the case that the only individuals with whom community college students consistently interact at their colleges are their instructors. As a result, many community college faculty come to play a pivotal role in shaping the higher education and life trajectories of their students (Rose, 2012). Indeed, student-faculty interactions at community colleges have been shown to be associated with several positive student outcomes, including academic integration, student retention, and degree and certification completion (Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Deil-Amen, 2011; McClenney & Marti, 2006). Despite their influence, community college faculty have been largely overlooked and under-researched (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). The goal of this dissertation is to gain a better understanding of the professional identities of community college faculty members so as to enhance ways to support and encourage community college faculty and the work they do.

Framed using the definition of identity from the symbolic interactionism perspective—namely, “what it means to be who one is” (Stryker, 1980, p. 1)—this dissertation is a study of the faculty identities of fifteen (15) community college faculty (including both part-time and full-time faculty) who teach English or math at a comprehensive suburban community college located in the United States. Three analytical chapters are presented.

Guided by identity control theory (Burke, 1980; Burke & Stets, 2009), Chapter 3 examines the ways in which participants described their faculty identities. Participants described four common and meaningful components of what it means to be a community college faculty member: (1) being a passionate and expert teacher, (2) providing students with the support they need or connecting students to the support services they need, (3) caring about students, and (4) serving their communities.

Chapter 4 closely analyzes metaphors that participants used to describe their faculty identities. A clear theme across all participants' metaphors is that their relationships with their students are at the core of their faculty identities. A common grouping of metaphors that they used to describe their faculty identities was as trusted guides to their students, including "priests" who reduce suffering and can be trusted, "shamans" who point the way to success in college and life, and "shepherds" who educate and walk alongside them to make sure they stay on track with their academic and life goals. Their metaphors also point to the importance they place on building, feeling a part of, and serving their communities; supporting their students; and nurturing their students.

Guided by identity frameworks (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Positive Organizational Scholarship concepts (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; L. M. Roberts & Dutton, 2009), Chapter 5 is a case study that examines positive influences on community college faculty identities that occur outside the classroom at the college level. Results show that interactions with colleagues had a very strong positive influence on how participants viewed their professional identities. Data also suggest that thoughtful design and use of workspaces, technology, and faculty gatherings can help to initiate and facilitate these types of important collegial and identity-affirming connections.

This dissertation has many implications for research and practice. Future studies should continue to use a framework like identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) to examine the faculty identities of community college faculty and examine to what extent these findings resonate with faculty who teach in other disciplines and at urban and rural community colleges. The scholarship that has debated whether community college teaching is a profession should instead focus on ways community college faculty identities can be fostered and strengthened. Future research also should take the next step and analyze the ways in which students respond to the multiple ways in which community college faculty define themselves.

Department chairs and hiring committees should seek individuals who aim to continually be better teachers, understand the types of support their students might need, care about students, and value service to their communities. Colleges and professional associations should facilitate more faculty colleague interactions—including more full-time and part-time interactions—and offer orientations and professional development opportunities that focus on the multiple missions of community college and how they relate to the multiple identities of community college faculty.

Research on community college student outcomes is of course important. This dissertation suggests that more attention should be devoted to the study of community college faculty as well. If we aim to better support community college students and enhance their student outcomes, we also must aim to better support community college faculty and encourage the development of their professional identities.

## **CHAPTER 1:**

### **Introduction**

Although it is not widely known, community college faculty teach close to half of all undergraduate students in the country (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014; Snyder & Dillow, 2013). Compared to college students at four-year colleges or universities, community college students are more likely to attend college part-time, be employed off-campus, and be responsible for caring for children and/or older relatives (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Horn et al., 2006). Furthermore, the typical community college student does not live in on-campus housing or participate in extensive campus or student life offerings (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Epstein, 2007; Kubala & Borglum, 2000), all of which help to engage many four-year college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For students enrolled in on-campus classes, many drive to campus, go to class, and then leave (Krause, 2007; Kubala & Borglum, 2000). If they are taking online courses, they are even less likely to connect with anyone at the college other than the faculty members teaching their classes (Lee, Srinivasan, Trail, Lewis, & Lopez, 2011; Yen, 2011). Because of these circumstances, it frequently is the case that community colleges chiefly interact with their instructors above all others at their colleges. As a result, many community college faculty play a pivotal role in shaping the higher education and life trajectories of their students (Rose, 2012).

Research on community college faculty is necessary, especially given today's climate, which focuses on the "completion agenda" (e.g., Kelly & Schneider, 2012) and increasing the

percentage of individuals with a postsecondary credential. We know from decades of education research that teachers have a significant, undeniable influence on student learning and outcomes (Gates Foundation, 2010). In fact, when it comes to student outcomes, teachers matter more than any other aspect of schooling, including services, facilities, or leadership (RAND Corporation, 2012). Therefore, one way to enhance college student success and achieve our nation's completion agenda goals is to study faculty and determine ways to better support them so they, in turn, can better support their students. Simply put, if supporting the academic success of college students is a top priority of our country, our colleges, and our field, then enhancing our understanding of the identities and work of college faculty also should be a priority.

However, nearly all extant research on faculty has focused on instructors at four-year institutions, even though one in four instructors at colleges and universities in the United States are teaching at community colleges (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). As Townsend and Twombly (2007) point out, no published work on community college faculty exists that is comparable to *American Professors* (1986), *The New Academic Generation* (1998), or *The American Faculty* (2006), all publications that concentrate on four-year college faculty. Despite the significant differences in the missions of four-year and two-year institutions, the backgrounds of their students, the characteristics of their faculty, and the demands faced by their faculty (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), too often it is (wrongly) assumed that the structures and methods used to understand, study, and support faculty in four-year institutions also must apply to faculty at community colleges (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). As a result, community college faculty are left primarily misunderstood, understudied, and undersupported, which has unknown consequences for the millions of students they teach every day.



This dissertation seeks to address this wide literature gap and achieve a greater understanding of community college faculty by focusing on an analysis of their faculty identities. Framed using identity theory from the structural symbolic interactionism perspective (Burke & Stets, 2009), this dissertation defines identity as “what it means to be who one is” (Stryker, 1980, p. 1). According to identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009), individuals have various and specific meanings that they apply to themselves. These identities are based on the roles they occupy (e.g., spouse, parent, worker), the groups they affiliate themselves with (e.g., church groups, political parties, ethnic groups), and the personal characteristics they claim for themselves (e.g., outgoing, moral, hardworking). In brief, identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) seeks to understand and explain the specific meanings that individuals apply to themselves for the multiple identities they claim.

This dissertation, a study of community college faculty identities, is primarily focused on role identities because they are based on the roles (including professional roles) that people play, such as, mother, friend, lawyer, doctor, or faculty member. Role identities are defined as the “internalized meanings of a role that individuals apply to themselves” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 114). This study, therefore, defines “faculty identities” as the internalized meanings that faculty members apply to themselves that define who they are as faculty members. Guided by this framework, this dissertation seeks to understand what it means to be a community college faculty member from the faculty perspective.

### **Significance of Study**

This inquiry on community college faculty identities is important for many reasons. First, research has shown that the way in which individuals view their role identities, including their professional identities, affects how they feel about themselves (Rosenberg, 1979; Stryker, 1980)

and, therefore, how they act and perform in those roles (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). A quantitative study of 640 undergraduates found that the way in which participants viewed their college student identities influenced their career plans (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). For example, students who rated themselves high in terms of being academically responsible were more likely to plan for an advanced degree than students who did not rate themselves as highly (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). In their longitudinal study of new freshman in college, Serpe and Stryker (1987) found that the specific meanings that students applied to themselves when they started college (e.g., an athletic identity, academic identity, or extracurricular identity) influenced their decisions about what organizations they joined and activities they participated in over the course of their freshman year. Specific to professionals, an ethnographic study of graduate students attending law and social work schools found that the development of “a suitable, subjectively internalized professional identity” was essential to feeling competent and perceiving that others viewed them as competent in their chosen profession (Costello, 2005, p. 23). In short, identities are important because they influence an individual’s feelings of competence as well as an individual’s decisions and actions.

This claim has been tested and affirmed by research on teachers and their professional identities. Because community colleges are teaching institutions and being a teacher is “the centerpiece of community college professional identity” (Townsend & Twombly, 2007, p. 53), research on teacher identities is relevant to (and can help inform) research on community college faculty identities. In fact, an extensive amount of research has examined the professional identities of teachers (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Oxford et al., 1998; Saban, Kocbeker, & Saban, 2007; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). One of the findings from this scholarship is that teacher identities have an

influence on pedagogical choices and attitudes toward educational change (Beijaard et al., 2004; Knowles, 1992; Nias, 1989). Summarizing their findings on secondary school teachers, Hammerness and colleagues (2005) stated that “the identities teachers develop shape their dispositions, where they place their effort, whether and how they seek out professional development opportunities, and what obligations they see as intrinsic to their role” (p. 384). Furthermore, Alsup (2006) found that preservice teachers who engaged in critical reflection of their teacher identities and formed a professional identity as a teacher were more likely to have a successful transition into the teaching profession and to remain in the profession. A multiyear, mixed method study on 300 teachers in 100 schools found that teachers’ sense of professional identities influenced their motivation to be better teachers and their commitment to their jobs (Day, Stobart, Sammons, & Kington, 2006). The authors also found that teachers’ sense of positive professional identity was a key factor in how effective they were as teachers, as measured in part by value added measures of student progress and attainment (Day et al., 2006). Indeed, research suggests that teacher identities are significant because they influence teacher attitudes, decisions, actions, and effectiveness, including student outcomes.

An inquiry on community college faculty identities is also important because, as scholars have argued, an understanding of professional identities is needed to conceptualize the support professionals require (Miller, Balmer, Hermann, Graham, & Charon, 2014; Monrouxe, 2010; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998; M. T. White, Borges, & Geiger, 2011). For example, based on her qualitative research on medical students, Monrouxe (2009, 2010) has argued that aspiring doctors will find it hard to be successful as doctors until they have developed their professional identity, even if they learn all the knowledge and skills required of them. She recommends that medical students and doctors be offered professional development opportunities that focus on

their professional identities and enable them to explore experiences which appear to uphold or challenge their understandings of what it means to be a doctor. Similarly, according to Alsup (2006), teachers need more than just learning the skills of how to teach; they need professional development opportunities that develop and support their professional identities so that they can navigate challenging institutional environments and teach and support their students to the best of their abilities. A case study of licensed and trained career advisors found that engaging in professional development that combined exposure to theory, discussions about policy, and opportunities for reflection on their perceptions of themselves as professionals (i.e., their professional identities) facilitated more confident and empowered practitioners (Neary, 2014). Based on their mixed methods longitudinal study of teachers and teacher effectiveness that found an association between positive teacher identities and teacher effectiveness, Day et al. (2006) recommended that initial and continuing professional development programs be relevant to teacher's professional identities and aim to support the continued development of a positive professional identity throughout teachers' careers. This literature suggests that the current dearth of research on community college faculty identities prevents full realization of the professional development and support they require.

Unlike other professionals, like doctors, nurses, or research faculty, who undertake rigorous doctoral degree education and training before they enter their profession, community college faculty usually require only a master's degree and teaching experience before teaching their first class. Their education and pre-professional training experiences can therefore be widely varied and not always relevant to working and teaching in the community college context. While some community college teaching certificates do exist, they are limited in

number, reach, and demand.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, community college faculty typically lack structured experiences (like residency or student teacher assignments) that could allow them to reflect on and consciously develop their own specific professional identities—both prior to becoming community college faculty and as they grow as community college faculty. For this reason, research on community college faculty identifies (like this dissertation) is all the more important so that it can suggest ways that community colleges and community college organizations can enhance professional development at the local, regional, and national levels.

Lastly, community college faculty identity is an important area of inquiry because, as Danielewicz (2001) explains, what makes someone a teacher is not methodology, or even ideology; rather it requires “engagement with identity” (p. 3). She studies the way teachers conceive of themselves because “teaching is a state of being, not merely ways of acting or behaving” (p. 3). This is true of teaching at community colleges as well. In his seminal ethnographic study of the culture of a newly formed community college in Massachusetts, London (1978) remarked, “To study [faculty] careers is to study identities” (p. 29). This dissertation focuses on community college faculty identities because teaching, the heart of what community college faculty do, requires an exploration into the way in which teachers conceive of themselves; indeed, as Danielewicz (2001) describes, it requires engagement with identity.

### **Review of the Literature on Community College Faculty**

It is unfortunate, however, that only a few studies have examined “what it means” to be a community college faculty member. In the seminal compendium, *The American Community College* (now in its sixth edition), the authors begin their chapter on faculty by defining them as follows: “As the arbiters of the curriculum, the faculty transmit concepts and ideas, decide on

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<sup>1</sup> Community college teaching certificate programs are offered by North Carolina State University; San Diego State University; and California State University, Dominguez Hills, among others.

course content, select textbooks, prepare and evaluate examinations, and generally structure learning conditions for the students” (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014, p. 79). While all true statements, this is a strict definition of what community college faculty *do* in terms of curriculum and instruction only. It does not intimate who community college faculty *are* or how they might conceive of themselves as faculty. Indeed, scholarship on community college faculty has attended more to the teaching that takes place at community colleges and less to the actual teachers and their complicated faculty identities (Cox, 2009; Grubb, 1999; Mesa, 2010; Mesa, Celis, & Lande, 2013). Furthermore, research has tended to rely on survey responses, instead of the actual voices and perspectives of faculty members, to study community college faculty (Bayer & Braxton, 1998; Outcalt, 2002). As a result, these surveys tend to flatten the particularities of identity and may be based on erroneous assumptions about what it means to be a community college faculty member.

In fact, with few exceptions (Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2014; Thirolf, 2012, 2013; Toth, Griffiths, & Thirolf, 2013), very few peer-reviewed empirical studies have examined the professional identities of community college faculty. The original scholarly experts on the topic were Arthur Cohen and Florence Brawer (1972), whose book was published following the “boom years” of the 1960s, a decade when more than 700 new two-year colleges opened their doors to more than one million students (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). Cohen and Brawer (1972) argued that the emerging identities of community college faculty were critical to the emerging institutional identity of community colleges. Although more than forty years old, this argument is surprisingly accurate. (For more on this point, see the final chapter of this dissertation.) However, much of the discussion in the book is outdated, including the characteristics of students at community colleges and the exclusive use of male pronouns and descriptors when

describing two-year college instructors (e.g., “rational man,” “indispensable man”). Furthermore, compared with the situation today, the institutional identities of community colleges (let alone the characteristics and professional identities of their faculty) were different when *Confronting Identity* was published. For example, research has documented the growing number of institutional missions that community colleges have taken on since the 1970s, including developmental education, workforce and economic development, and community service and support (Bailey & Averianova, 1998; Bailey & Morest, 2004; K.J. Dougherty, 1994). As a result, today’s community college faculty members arguably assume more roles (and more complicated roles) than faculty in the past. Cohen and Braver return to the topic of community college faculty in subsequent editions of their well-known compendium, *The American Community College* (2008), but they focus more on the professional status of community college faculty than on their professional identities.

More recently, Levin, Kater, and Wagoner (2006, 2011) devoted a chapter in *Community College Faculty: At Work in the New Economy* to the topic, but in keeping with their neoliberal conceptual framing, they focus their discussion on the external and internal forces that affect community college faculty and their professional status. Levin et al. (2006) theorize the ways in which community college faculty may be able to redefine their profession, but they do not empirically examine the actual professional identities of community college faculty. They suggest the importance of this inquiry, however, when they remark that community college faculty “must take a more central role in both the fashioning and directing the institution to enhance their professional identity as faculty” (Levin et al., 2006, p. 142). This suggestion is one that Townsend and Twombly (2007) likely would embrace as well. They make clear in their tome on community college faculty that scholars and community college administrators should

focus attention on the professional identities of community college faculty and, in particular, “how new faculty members are socialized to this professional identity” (p. 117). Certainly, Levin, Kater, and Wagoner (2006) as well as Townsend and Twombly (2007) deserve credit for compiling some of the most comprehensive research on community college faculty to date, but, like Cohen and Brawer (2008), they too do not make empirical or theoretical contributions to the existing research on the specific topic of the professional identities of community college faculty.

Although it is discipline-specific, scholarship conducted by community college faculty members in English departments have contributed to the literature on community college faculty. For example, Tinberg’s (1997) ethnography focused on the discussions that developed over the course of a summer workshop he participated in with a group of his colleagues. They came together to talk about “writing, reading, and knowing” (p. ix), but discussions often led to reflections on their faculty identities. Tinberg (1997) explained that he and his colleagues did not view themselves narrowly as “instructors,” but rather “we expect to change those students who happen to make their way into our classes, and change them in profound ways” (p. 11). His book, *Border Talk: Writing and Knowing in the Two-Year College* (1997), was an attempt to represent community college faculty “as deeply reflective and impassioned practitioners” (p. 71). Andelora (2007) documented the struggles that English community college faculty have faced for decades in trying to forge a professional identity, struggles that have included lack of understanding about community colleges, lack of funding for professional growth, and the self-defeating attitude of the faculty themselves. As a way to overcome these struggles, Andelora (2008) discussed the importance of the emergence of their professional association, the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA), and its goal to redefine the identity of two-year college faculty from that of teacher to that of “teacher-scholar” and to encourage community



college English faculty to engage in scholarship. Although these pieces and others (Reynolds & Holladay-Hicks, 2005) are limited in reach, lack theory-informed research designs, and focus on a specific discipline, they emphasize the importance of identifying and developing the professional identities of faculty who too often have been overlooked and misunderstood.

Based on interviews with faculty at a large suburban community college, Fugate and Amey (2000) were among the first to contribute peer-reviewed empirical research to the topic of community college faculty roles and identities. They examined the career paths of community college faculty, the roles faculty take on during the early stages of their careers, and the impact that faculty development has on their career development. Finding that faculty development programs had a positive impact on participants, Fugate and Amey (2000) noted that faculty “valued opportunities to improve their teaching either through individual means or institutional programs” (p. 13) but also yearned for more focused professional development on better understanding, motivating, and teaching the diverse student population at community colleges. However, Fugate and Amey’s (2000) inquiry has its share of limitations, including its lack of a guiding theoretical framework and its sole focus on full-time faculty, even though part-time faculty represent more than two-thirds of all community college faculty today (AFT Higher Education, 2009). The researchers also focused more on the concept of careers than on professional identity, leaving both concepts undefined and the latter concept noticeably underdiscussed.

It is only in the past few years that additional peer-reviewed empirical research has been published on the topic of community college faculty identities. However, these studies have focused solely on either part-time faculty (Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2014; Thirolf, 2012,

2013), faculty of color (Levin, Walker, Haberler, & Jackson-Boothby, 2013), or faculty teaching composition (Toth et al., 2013). Nevertheless, these studies are worth reviewing here.

Thirolf (2012) used discourse analysis methods to examine interviews with three part-time community faculty member—two who taught English and one who taught social studies. These part-time faculty described feeling positive about their faculty identities (proud and happy) when they talked about teaching and interacting with their students, but they experienced negative emotions (frustration and disconnection) when they described their faculty colleagues (Thirolf, 2012). A follow-up study with the same participants found that these feelings intensified over time (Thirolf, 2013). However, Thirolf (2013) also found that genuine connections that participants made with other faculty (albeit rare and by chance) ultimately affirmed their faculty identities. This dissertation aims to advance this research by employing a larger sample size drawn from a different community college and using more robust theoretical frameworks and methods.

Levin et al. (2013) focused on a critically important population of faculty: faculty of color at community colleges. Framed using critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the authors conducted research at four California community colleges and found that faculty of color (both full-time and part-time) experience several challenges, including feeling divided between their professional identities and ethnic or racial identities, leading to a condition of “double consciousness” and a “divided self” (Levin et al., 2013, p. 320). Although this research is certainly important and necessary, it remains that little is known about the professional identities of community college faculty in general.

Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf (2013) specifically examined the professional identities of faculty who teach English at community colleges. They examined full-time faculty engagement

with professional organizations, the ways in which full-time faculty attempt to assert professional authority in institutional decision making, and the role of organizational socialization in the shaping of part-time faculty professional identities. One of their findings suggested that interactions with faculty colleagues greatly influenced how English part-time faculty identified and enacted the norms and goals associated with their profession. This dissertation builds on that research by considering the influence of colleague interactions on the professional identities of English *and* math faculty at community colleges (see Chapter 5).

Finally and most recently, Levin and Montero Hernandez (2014) examined the construction of academic identity for social science and science part-time faculty at a research university, a comprehensive university, and a community college. Arriving at findings similar to Thirolf (2012), the authors found that part-time faculty felt positive about their professional identities vis-à-vis their position as teachers in the classroom, but when they viewed themselves outside the classroom, they felt undervalued, isolated, and less confident about their professional value (Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2014). Levin and Montero Hernandez (2014) mentioned that the identities of the part-time faculty they interviewed were not “dramatically dissimilar” across institutional types (p. 543), but they did not proffer a reason why this was the case or note where differences, however small, did emerge. They also acknowledged that the meanings of professional identity for part-time faculty in public colleges and universities are “contingent upon their positionality within their institutions—their socio-cultural contexts” (p. 552), suggesting that institutional context, not just faculty status, is an important factor to consider. Because existing scholarship too often assumes that the experiences of faculty at four-year institutions are the same as faculty at two-year institutions (Townsend & Twombly, 2007), it is important for multi-institutional research to discuss the fundamental differences among the types

of institutions included in their samples and the influence that institutional context might and can have on the professional identities of faculty.

With the exception of the studies described above, most scholarship on community college faculty, like Cohen and Brawer (2008), has tended to perseverate on whether community college teaching can be considered a profession (Bayer & Braxton, 1998; B. R. Clark, 1989; Levin et al., 2006; Outcalt, 2002; Palmer, 1992). While interesting and thought provoking, the actual practice implications for this line of inquiry are slight. Whether researchers agree on whether community college teaching is a profession or not does not influence the work community college faculty do. More important and with more potential impact is an examination of the complicated and important concept of the faculty identities of community college faculty.

The following sections of this introductory chapter review the missions and student characteristics of community colleges because an understanding of the professional identities of community college faculty hinges in part on an understanding of the institutional identities of community colleges. Next, a profile of community college faculty is discussed, including the range of their personal and professional backgrounds. This chapter concludes with the research questions that my dissertation investigates.

### **Community Colleges: Unique Mission(s) and Diverse Students**

Today, there are 1,738 community colleges across the country, including public, private (profit and nonprofit), and tribal colleges (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). Nearly all households (90-95%) in the United States are within 25 miles of a community college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Despite their numbers and influence, community colleges and their mission (or rather missions) are often misunderstood (Bailey & Averianova, 1998; K.J. Dougherty, 1994). Briefly reviewing

the history of community colleges helps to provide context for what community colleges are and do today.

Joliet Junior College in Illinois awarded the first associate of arts degree in 1901, but it was not until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that two-year colleges really began to take shape. In the late 1940s, millions of World War II veterans returned home and were given tuition vouchers as part of the G.I. Bill of Rights. As a result, enrollment in junior colleges (as community colleges were known at the time) nearly doubled (Kane & Rouse, 1999). The Truman Commission of 1947 declared that America's community colleges offered the best way to increase access to higher education for people of all backgrounds because they were the most affordable and accessible postsecondary education institutions in the country and they could be constructed quickly (Brubacher, 1997; Gilbert & Heller, 2010). Another period of growth for two-year colleges occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. Approximately 700 two-year colleges existed in 1960, but by the end of the 1970s, more than 1,200 colleges were in operation, nearly doubling the number of community colleges in those 20 years (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Even more impressive, student enrollment grew exponentially during this time frame: two-year colleges enrolled about 500,000 students in 1960 and *four million* by 1980 (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

In the 1970s, junior colleges came to be called "community colleges," signifying a shift in their institutional mission and identity. Community colleges came to be seen as providing more than the first two years of college, which is the way in which junior colleges were perceived. Today's community colleges typically offer a wide variety of functions and services to their communities, including academic transfer (i.e., preparing students to transfer to four-year institutions), vocational-technical education, continuing education, developmental education, and

community service (e.g., hosting cultural and recreational events for their communities) (Bailey & Averianova, 1998; Bailey & Morest, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Given the range of courses that they offer, community colleges confer a diverse array of degrees and certificates. Overall, the most popular associate degrees awarded by community colleges are in liberal arts, general studies, and humanities, which represented 33 percent of all associate degrees awarded in 2010-11 (Cohen et al., 2014). Health professions and related sciences make up the second most popular field, representing 21 percent of all associate degrees awarded (Cohen et al., 2014). (See Table 1.1 below for statistics on associate degrees awarded in 2010-11.) Community colleges also award certificates, which are credentials that are awarded for completion of a specialized form of training and typically require much less time and fewer credits to achieve than a degree. More than 430,000 certificates were awarded by community colleges in 2011-12, including in culinary arts, alternative fuel technology, and web design, just to name a few (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014). Recently, some community colleges have begun to offer baccalaureate degrees in fields that are in high demand in their communities. Such degrees include B.S. and B.A. degrees in education, health, business, and science and mathematics. In 2014, 63 public community colleges in 16 states in the United States were conferring baccalaureate degrees, according to the Community College Baccalaureate Association (2014).

*Table 1.1: Fields in which associate degrees were conferred, 2010-11*

Main Fields	Associate Degrees	Percent of Total
Liberal arts, general studies, and humanities	306,670	33
Health professions and related sciences	201,831	21
Business	139,989	15
Homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting	44,923	5
Computer and information sciences	37,677	4
Engineering technologies and engineering-related fields	35,521	4
Multi/interdisciplinary studies	23,729	3
Visual and performing arts	21,379	2
Education	20,459	2
Mechanics and repair technology/technicians	19,969	2

Source: (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 314; Snyder & Dillow, 2013)

Another important function that community colleges have undertaken is providing developmental education to students who do not demonstrate the skills necessary to be successful in college-level courses. Also known as remedial or basic skills courses, developmental courses typically are offered in reading, writing, and math. Although a high school degree is supposed to signify basic competence in these areas, a high percentage of community college students require remediation (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). One study found that 58 percent of first-time community college students enroll in at least one developmental course (Attewell, Domina, Lavin, & Levey, 2006).

Another characteristic of community colleges is the diversity of its students. Compared with students at four-year institutions, community college students are more likely to be older, female, living below the poverty level, a racial minority, and financially independent from their parents (Horn et al., 2006). Furthermore, community college students are substantially more

likely to be single parents, to be employed, and to attend part-time (Horn et al., 2006). In fact, 79 percent of all community college students report working at least part-time and 35 percent of community college students report their primary role as “employee who studies” (as opposed to “student who works”), as compared with 16 percent of students at four-year institutions (Horn et al., 2006, p. 14). Additional details on the ages of community college students also are worth nothing. More than half (53%) of community college students are aged 24 or older. Eighteen percent of community college students are in their late 20s, and 35 percent are 30 years or older (Horn et al., 2006). These statistics are not surprising given the high percentage of community college students who report being financially independent from their parents.

The community college student body has always been racially diverse—in fact, more racially diverse than the country at large—and statistics show that racial diversity at community colleges has grown over time (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). For example, the percentage of community college students who were African American in 2003 exceeded the African American proportion of the 18 to 44-year-old population in 36 states, up from 18 states just four years earlier in 1999 (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Hispanic enrollment is similar. In 2003, the proportion of Hispanic students at community colleges exceeded the Hispanic proportion of the 18 to 44-year-old population in 17 states, up from 11 states in 1999 (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Although community colleges have grown and evolved significantly since 1901 when Joliet Junior College was first founded, three foci of community colleges have remained the same—access, affordability, and teaching. Unlike many four-year institutions that take pride in their low acceptance rates for incoming freshman—something that can improve a college’s ranking in the influential *U.S. News and World Report* college rankings (Morse & Flanigan, 2012, September 11)—community colleges take pride in their open access policy and near 100



percent acceptance rates. Community colleges are the most accessible higher education institutions in the country. They also are the most affordable. In 2010-11, the average annual tuition at a community college was roughly \$2,700, essentially one-third the cost of the average in-state annual tuition at four-year public colleges at \$7,600 (Baum, Little, & Payea, 2011). Moreover, community colleges are a mere *10 percent* the cost of private four-year institutions, which run over \$27,000 a year on average (Baum et al., 2011).

Lastly, and most important to this dissertation study, community colleges are teaching institutions, first and foremost. One of the first comprehensive books about community colleges is Walter Crosby Eells' (1931) *The Junior College*, which refers to junior colleges as "teaching institution[s] par excellence" (p. 389), something that experts say is still true today (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). As noted earlier and as the next section of this chapter deals with in more depth, teaching, not research, is the primary focus of community college faculty.

To conclude this section, community colleges often have been referred to as America's "Democracy's Colleges" (Boggs, 2010; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). They are the most affordable and accessible postsecondary education institutions in the United States and are the gateway to educational opportunity for an increasing number of students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010).

### **Profile of Community College Faculty**

Community college faculty comprise 40 percent of all faculty at public higher education institutions in the country (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). They, like community college students, come from a diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds. The majority of full-time community college faculty are women (54%) and white (82%), and both percentages are higher than those found at public four-year institutions (Southern Regional Education Board,

2011). Unlike most four-year institutions, only a master's degree in the field of study is typically required for a person to be hired as a full-time community college faculty member. Thus, it is not surprising that a majority of community college faculty hold a master's degree (53.5%), whereas a majority of their peers at four-year institutions hold a doctoral degree (51.8%) (Levin et al., 2006). Nearly half of all community college faculty (47%) teach in academic areas, including math, English, the physical sciences, and the social sciences. Forty percent of faculty teach professional courses, including nursing, physical therapy, and education. Faculty teaching in vocational areas (e.g., heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; autobody repair; and construction management) account for 8 percent of faculty at two-year colleges. The remaining six percent include faculty who are librarians, counselors, or specialists (e.g., tutors) in areas such as reading, writing, and math.

Community college faculty focus on and spend most of their time teaching, not conducting research. This focus is very different from that of faculty at four-year institutions, particularly research universities, where faculty focus primarily on their research rather than on their teaching (Table 1.2).

*Table 1.2: Faculty characteristics of community colleges and four-year institutions*

Category	Faculty at community colleges	Faculty at public four-year institutions
Gender	54% women	40% women
Race	82% white	80% white
Highest degree attainment	11.8% doctoral degree 53.5% master's degree 19.2% bachelor's degree	51.8% doctoral degree 25.7% master's degree
Work	Spend more time teaching	Spend more time engaged in research
Employment status	68.6% part-time	15.8% part-time at public research universities 43.9% at public comprehensive colleges (does not include graduate assistants)
Employment satisfaction	79.1% report being somewhat or very satisfied with their workload	72.4% report being somewhat or very satisfied with their workload

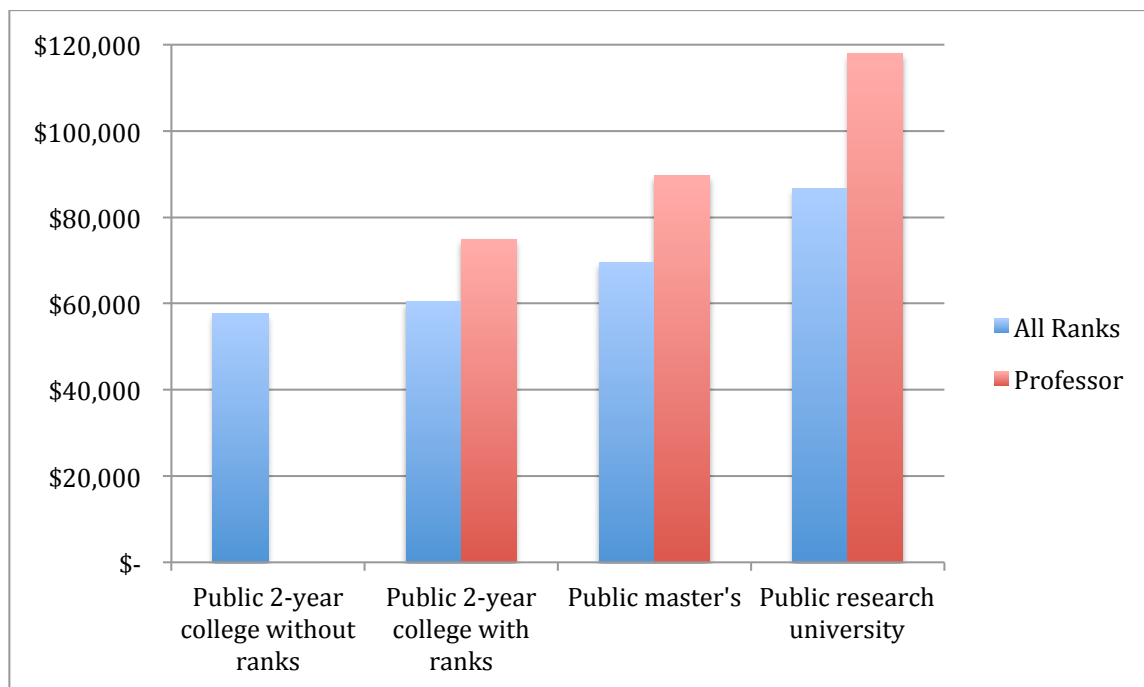
Sources: (AFT Higher Education, 2009; Levin et al., 2006; Southern Regional Education Board, 2011)

Another difference between faculty at community colleges and faculty at four-year institutions is the very high percentage of part-time faculty at two-year colleges. Although both types of institutions have seen rising rates of part-time faculty, the rate at community colleges has increased very quickly (AFT Higher Education, 2009). According to longitudinal analysis conducted by Palmer (1999), in 1962, 38 percent of all faculty at two-year schools were part-time, reaching 40 percent in 1971. Just three years later, in 1974, the number grew ten percentage points to 50 percent. In 1995, it reached 64 percent, far greater than the percentage of part-time faculty at public four-year colleges, which was 24 percent at the time. Overall, from 1970 to 1995, the number of part-time faculty members at two-year institutions grew by 210 percent, compared with a growth of only 69 percent at four-year institutions (Schneider, 1998). Based on 2005 estimates, 225,000 faculty taught part-time at public community colleges in 2005, whereas

110,000 faculty taught part-time at public four-year comprehensive universities and public research universities combined (JBL Associates, 2008). The most recent data suggest that nearly 70 percent of all faculty at community colleges teach part-time (AFT Higher Education, 2009), although it is important to note that full-time faculty still usually teach more than half of the total number of credit hours offered each semester (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014b; McNair & Hebert-Swartz, 2012).

Yet another difference between community college faculty and their peers at four-year institutions involves compensation. On average, the annual salary for full-time faculty at community colleges is at least \$16,000 less than their peers at research universities, and faculty with the rank of professor at research universities make double what most faculty at community colleges make (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2011). See Figure 1.1 for details on faculty salary comparisons.

Figure 1.1: Average annual salary for full-time faculty by institutional type (2010-11)



Source: *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2011)

### Part-time Faculty

Because nearly 70 percent of all faculty at community colleges teach part-time (AFT Higher Education, 2009), part-time faculty deserve special attention in this chapter. First, a general profile of community college part-time faculty and their backgrounds is presented. Then a summary of the debate over their extensive use is reviewed.

Based the most recent National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)<sup>2</sup> data, Eagan (2007) analyzed the demographic backgrounds of community college faculty. He found that gender differences between part-time and full-time faculty have generally disappeared; women and men had essentially equal representation in community college faculty appointments in

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<sup>2</sup> Initiated in response to a continuing need for data on faculty and instructional staff in American colleges and universities because “[f]aculty are the pivotal resource around which the process and outcomes of postsecondary education revolve” (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.), the NSOPF was last administered in 2004. Since then, the U.S. Department of Education has indefinitely suspended the study. There no longer exists a current national database focused on faculty that can be used to understand and compare faculty backgrounds, work, and trends across and within institutional types.

2004. Age differences also have diminished. Although part-time faculty tended to be younger than full-timers twenty years ago, the approximate average age in 2004 for both part-time and full-time faculty was 49 years old. Faculty identifying as white represent more than 80 percent of all community college faculty.

Over the past twenty years, a majority of part-time faculty reported holding another job; in 2004, that figure was 71.8 percent (Eagan, 2007). It is important to note that a total of 10.7 percent of part-time faculty reported holding another academic appointment at another institution (Eagan, 2007). The majority of part-time faculty at community colleges are employed in non-teaching jobs. Indeed, research has shown that part-time faculty teach part-time for several different reasons. Gappa and Leslie (1993) identified four categories of part-time faculty that are often still referenced today (Kezar, 2012; Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2014). These categories include “career enders” (individuals who are about to retire), “specialists, experts, and professionals” (who typically work full-time elsewhere), “aspiring academics” (who eventually want a full-time faculty position), and “freelancers” (who prefer the flexibility of teaching part-time). In line with Eagan (2007), Leslie and Gappa (2002) found that a minority of part-time faculty at community colleges hold multiple teaching jobs, are eagerly seeking full-time positions, or are aspiring to become career academics. They also found that both full- and part-time faculty spend between six and seven hours teaching, planning classes, and interacting with students (Leslie & Gappa, 2002).

Several reasons have been posited for the high numbers of part-time faculty at community colleges. The dominant reason is what Brewster (2000) explains drives all market economies—money. Simply put, hiring part-time faculty costs significantly less than hiring full-time faculty, and as Cohen and Brawer (2008) have explained, community colleges “have come

to depend on low-cost [part-time] labor to balance the budget” (p. 95). Studies have shown that part-time faculty are paid 60 percent less than their full-time colleagues on average, and that part-time employment often does not include employee benefits (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). Since instructional labor costs account for largest part of community college budgets, as Grubb (1999) has stated, no efficiency-minded administrator can afford *not* to use a high percentage of part-time faculty.

Scholars tend to agree that the mission expansion of community colleges also has contributed to the part-time faculty trend (Banachowski, 1996; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). In order to teach the increasing numbers of students seeking occupational training and certifications classes, community colleges look to hire people who are experts in their field, especially in the growing fields of computer systems, legal and health professions, and business. Many of these experts typically hold full-time jobs in their field and, as a result, are only employable as faculty on a part-time basis. In addition, due to their mission expansion, community colleges have been enrolling more students who are working full-time and attending school on a part-time basis (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2009; Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). Studies have shown strong correlation between a college’s percentage of part-time faculty and its percentage of part-time students (Roueche, Roueche, & Milliron, 1995). Working adults who are returning to school tend to seek flexible, nonstandard course times, such as early in the morning, late at night, and/or during the weekends (Hoffman, Posteraro, & Presz, 1994), and part-time faculty are generally more willing and able to teach during these times than full-time faculty.

However, many believe that the increase of part-time faculty is not at all innocuous; rather, they view it as an extreme problem with many unfortunately consequences. One of the utmost critics of the growing trend of part-time faculty has been Benjamin (1998), who has

strong affiliations with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and has claimed the growing trend of part-time faculty has adverse effects—notably on the faculty profession—and must be stopped and reversed. Instead of grouping all part-time faculty together, as many studies have done, Benjamin (1998) segmented the data between vocational and liberal arts disciplines. The vocationally oriented cluster included fields such as nursing, law, business, and engineering. The liberal arts cluster included fields such as history, English, sociology, and political science. He found that the liberal arts oriented faculty are substantially more discontent and rely more on their part-time faculty wages for their overall personal income than vocationally oriented faculty. Benjamin's (1998) study is one reason why this dissertation focuses on faculty who teach general education courses like English and math, so a deeper understanding of who these faculty are and how they view their faculty identities could be attained.

Several studies have explored the impact community college part-time faculty have had on community college student outcomes. For example, compared to full-time faculty, Burgess and Samuels (1999) found part-timers are more lenient and grade higher. Schuetz (2002) found that part-timers have less teaching experience and interact less with their students. Furthermore, studies employing advanced quantitative methods have shown that student transfer and graduation rates at a community college decrease as part-time faculty rates increase (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Jacoby, 2006).

Instead of blaming part-time faculty, however, scholars have argued that the focus should be on the colleges that hire them and do not adequately support them and the professional organizations that fail to consider them and their professional needs (Kezar, 2012). Part-time faculty encounter a range of challenges, including that they typically lack access to any



professional development funds, lack private office space to hold meetings with students or store class-related materials, are sometimes hired within days of teaching their first class, have no guarantee that they will be hired to teach subsequent semesters, and experience minimal interactions with other faculty peers (Kezar, 2012; Levin et al., 2006; Thirolf, 2012). One of the goals of this research is to better understand the professional identities of part-time faculty so as to determine specific ways that can effectively support them.

### **Review of Dissertation Study and Research Questions**

This dissertation is a study of the faculty identities of both part-time and full-time community college faculty who teach English or math at a comprehensive community college located in the Midwest. Research on community college faculty has tended to study full-time faculty (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Townsend, 1998) *or* part-time faculty (McLaughlin, 2005; Thirolf, 2012, 2013; Wyles, 1998). They have rarely been studied together. As a result, little is known about the similarities and differences between the faculty identities of full-time and part-time faculty. Understanding the differences between full-time and part-time faculty is important because it can inform the potentially different ways in which they should be supported in their faculty roles. In addition, research on community college faculty either has focused on faculty in a single discipline (Toth et al., 2013) or has studied faculty in multiple departments without closely considering the ways in which departmental differences may affect faculty members' views of themselves (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Levin et al., 2006; Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2014; Thirolf, 2012, 2013). My dissertation studies faculty from both the English and math departments and examines the similar and different ways in which these faculty express their faculty identities. I chose the English and math departments because, at most community colleges, they are the largest departments both in terms of number of faculty hired (including

part-time faculty hired) and number of students taught. Also, because community college students must demonstrate English and math competency to be considered college-ready and obtain a degree (Conley, 2007), English and math faculty have some of the greatest reach across students and, therefore, the most potential impact on the greatest number of students.

As a way to advance research on community college faculty, the purpose of this dissertation is threefold. First, I seek to understand how community college faculty describe their faculty identities. Extant literature suggests that community college faculty view themselves as more than just instructors (Cohen & Brawer, 1972; Fugate & Amey, 2000), but no research to date has used theory to investigate how else they conceive of themselves. Chapter 3 sets out to accomplish this goal. I also seek to understand how community college faculty synthesize the meanings they ascribe to their faculty identities. As Chapter 3 reveals, community college faculty do indeed view themselves as being many things besides instructor, but it does not reveal how community college faculty are able to make sense of and synthesize these multiple identity meanings. Chapter 4 addresses this open question. Finally, I seek to identify organizational-level influences that have positive effects on community college faculty identities. Achieving a better, theory-backed understanding of community college faculty identities is a first step towards identifying ways in which colleges can better support their faculty. Chapter 5 is focused on this goal.

With these goals in mind, my dissertation investigates the following research questions:

*How do community college faculty who teach English and math describe their faculty identities?*

1. How do they describe the meanings that they ascribe to their faculty role identities?
2. What organizational-level factors positively influence community college faculty identities?

3. How do the faculty identities of full-time faculty compare to the faculty identities of part-time faculty?
4. How do the faculty identities of English faculty compare to the faculty identities of math faculty?

To investigate question 1, I frame my research using the concept of role identities (Burke & Stets, 2009; McCall & Simmons, 1978) and ask my respondents to describe their faculty identities (Chapter 3). I chose to focus on role identities, which are based on the roles that people play, including professional roles, because they are directly related to professional identities (Burke & Stets, 2009; Chreim, Williams, & Hinings, 2007). Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal work guides my analysis in Chapter 4. They explain that a large part of self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of their lives. Because context is so important to shaping identity (Gee, 2000), to address question 2, I asked the participants a range of questions about the extent to which college-level contexts influence their faculty identities (Chapter 5), including connections with colleagues, college leadership, and workspace factors. One reason why I focus on positive influences is because one of the main goals of this research is to identify what colleges can do to better support their faculty. In all three analytical chapters, I compare and contrast responses from participants by faculty status (full-time or part-time) and disciplinary affiliation (English and math) to determine to what extent these contexts may shape community college faculty identities (questions 3 and 4).

Because I and others (Gee, 2011) take the view that, to effectively understand and study identities, one must also understand and study the contexts of those identities, in the next chapter (Chapter 2), I describe in detail the community college where my participants taught and the personal and professional backgrounds of my participants. I also describe the justifications for

and limitations of my data collection processes and the sample I have chosen. Chapter 2 also presents a thorough review of identity theory, the main theoretical framework that undergirds all three chapters.

The subsequent chapters (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) look and feel very much like standalone papers. Although they are based on the same data described in detail in Chapter 2, they each begin with a review of the distinct literature and theoretical frameworks on which they are based. I also describe the various analytical approaches that I use in each chapter. Chapter 3 focuses on the meanings that participants attribute to their community college faculty role identities and the way in which they describe the community college faculty identity standard (Burke, 2007). Chapter 4 closely analyzes the various and insightful metaphors used to describe what it means to be a community college faculty member. Chapter 5 investigates the most positively influential college-level factors that shape faculty identities. Each of these chapters concludes with specific implications for research and practice.

In my concluding chapter, Chapter 6, I examine the findings from all three previous chapters and highlight the new knowledge that is gained from my dissertation as a whole. I then propose several ways in which community college faculty and their faculty identities may be cultivated and supported. I end with a discussion of future research recommendations and highlight ways that new studies can build on this dissertation to further advance our understanding of community college faculty and their professional identities.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **Theoretical Frameworks, Methodologies, and Context**

Aligned with a constructivist approach, this dissertation takes the view that to effectively understand and research identities, one must understand and appreciate the contexts of those identities. In this chapter, I describe in detail the multilayered contexts that surround this study, including the theoretical, methodological, and participant contexts. The previous chapter, Chapter 1, provided the big picture, macrolevel perspective of what community colleges are and who they serve as well as who community college faculty are and how they have been studied. Moving from there to more microlevels, in this chapter, I describe the community in which Eastern Community College (ECC) is located and describe ECC as an organization, including its finances, structure, faculty, and students. Because I agree with Gee (2000) that “a focus on the contextually specific ways in which people act out and recognize identities allows a more dynamic approach than the sometimes overly general and static trio of ‘race, class, and gender,’” I provide rich, detailed vignettes of each of the faculty participants that go beyond a description of their demographic backgrounds. To protect participant identities, however, I make slight, inconsequential adjustments in the contextual details described below.

First, I begin this chapter with a review of the common theoretical framework that I employ throughout this dissertation: identity theory developed by structural symbolic interactionists, Stryker (1968, 1981) and Burke (1980). (For readability purposes, I refer to this theory simply as “identity theory” for the remainder of this chapter, although it is important to

note that there is no one identity theory; there are several.) As part of this discussion, I review the historical roots of symbolic interactionism and identity theory and describe their fundamental tenets. I then describe the strengths of identity theory and why I selected it as the undergirding framework for my dissertation. Next, I provide a thorough, detailed account of my methodological approach, including the common processes I followed in collecting and analyzing the data for each of my subsequent analytical chapters. I also discuss the way in which my connection to this topic and my role as the researcher are additional important contextual factors to consider. Because the data were collected through one-on-one interviews that I arranged, conducted, analyzed, and interpreted, it is important that I acknowledge upfront my background, biases, and impetus for conducting this study (see Taylor, 2001).

The three analytical chapters that follow this chapter read very much like standalone studies. They each use identity theory's definition of identity—i.e., “what it means to be who one is”— to frame their studies, but they also incorporate other theoretical frameworks that are appropriate to their specific inquiries. I save discussion of those specific theories for their specific chapters and use this chapter to provide a detailed explanation of structural symbolic interactionism and identity theory, the common undergirding perspectives that guide all three analytical chapters and, thus, the dissertation as a whole. Similarly, each analytical chapter employs the common methods described in this chapter, but they also use specific methodological approaches that are appropriate for their specific inquiries. I save discussion of those specific methods for their specific chapters and focus on describing the common methodologies across all three analytical chapters in this chapter.

## Symbolic Interactionism and Identity Theory

The concept of identity has been studied widely across several disciplines by multiple generations of scholars. The theoretical framework I use for this research—identity theory—has its roots in the work of philosophers dating back more than a century. Among the early scholars to explore the concepts of self and identity was William James. Known as the father of American psychology, James (1890) developed a theory of self that distinguished the “me” self (the material, social, and spiritual self) from the “I” self (the thinking self, or “pure ego”). James (1890) also recognized that people have as many different selves as there are others who recognize them, a concept that has a direct influence on modern-day identity theory. A little more than a decade after James’ seminal work, Charles Horton Cooley (1902) theorized about the importance of the relationship one has with others. He proposed the widely cited idea of a “looking-glass self,” whereby people see themselves and define themselves vis-à-vis the reactions that others have of them (Cooley, 1902, p. 152). According to identity theorists, these reflected appraisals constitute one of the formative ways we come to understand who we are (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Even more so than James or Cooley, George Herbert Mead has had a tremendous impact on the basic tenets of identity theory. In his seminal book *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), Mead argued that self and society are intrinsically linked. He described how a person’s mind and self are “embedded in society and developed through communication and interaction with others” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 19). Sociologists, like Mead, view the self as both emerging in society and being reflective of society; thus, the self is both individual and social in character (Stets & Burke, 2003).

Given that society is complex and differentiated, and because the self is reflective of society, it follows that the self must, too, be complex and differentiated (Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker, 1980). This claim mirrors James' (1890) argument described above that individuals have as many different selves as there are others who recognize them. Here is where the concept identity enters into the discussion of self. In short, identities are the multiple parts of the overall self. Stryker (1980) has described identity as an "internalized positional designation" and has argued that one has an identity for each of the different positions or role relationships he or she holds in society (Stryker, 1980, p. 60). For example, the self as mother is an identity, as is the self as an American, a teacher, a friend, and so on, each corresponding to the various roles one may play in society (Stets & Burke, 2003).

Mead also argued that a person's perceptions and actions (including behaviors) are always intertwined. He provided the example of people playing baseball. Not only must baseball players be aware of their individual positions during a game, they also must be simultaneously aware of all the positions on their team and the opposing team and their relationship to one another, including their own positions. To arrive at this understanding, a player must consider others' points of view in relation to his or her own role. Using the same terms that James (1890) used, Mead suggests an "I" self is continuously acting while a "me" self is continuously perceiving. These ideas form the basis of the symbolic interactionist perspective, the perspective from which identity theory has emerged.

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

The term "symbolic interactionism" was coined by Herbert Blumer (1962), one of Mead's students, but several scholars have contributed to its theoretical development (Stryker, 1981), including Howard S. Becker (1963), Erving Goffman (1963), Thomas Scheff (1966), and



George J. McCall (1977). At the heart of symbolic interactionism is the importance placed on *meaning* and the view that meanings are social products, created and revised through social interactions and interpretations (Blumer, 1969). In line with Mead's social psychological dictum that self and society are linked, Stryker (1980) developed the following basic premise of symbolic interactionism:

Behavior is dependent upon a named or classified world. The names or class terms attached to aspects of the environment, both physical and social, carry meaning in the form of shared behavioral expectations that grow out of social interaction. From interactions with others, one learns how to classify objects one comes into contact with, and in that process also learns how one is expected to behave with reference to those objects (pp. 53-54).

In short, this premise suggests that people behave toward things they encounter in life depending on the meanings those things carry for them, and these meanings derive from and are shaped by social interaction and interpretation.

The original or situational approach to symbolic interactionism views society as constantly being created through the interpretations of actors in situations (Blumer, 1969). Blumer (1969) described three basic premises of this perspective: (1) Humans "act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them"; (2) "the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with [others]"; and (3) "these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he [or she] encounters" (p. 2). This perspective views individuals as confronting a world that they must interpret in order to act, rather than an environment to which he responds (Blumer, 1969). In other words, the situational approach to symbolic interactionism

posits that “individuals are free to define the situation in any way they care to” because society is considered to always “be in a state of flux with no real organization or structure” (Stets & Burke, p. 128).

Believing that this perspective fails to take into account that some possibilities are more probable than others, Stryker (1980) developed a structural approach to symbolic interactionism. He posited that people, through interaction, learn the “symbols that are used to designate ‘positions,’” which are linked to what we conventionally call “roles” (Stryker, 1980, p. 54). According to Stryker (1980), people in society label others and are labeled by others according to the positions they occupy, and we also name ourselves with respect to these positional designations to the extent that we internalize them and they become part of our self. Stryker (1980) states that “we are thus identified and defined by self-labels in terms of positions in society” and that these positions “are tied together structurally and serve to tie individuals together” (Burke, 2003, p. 3). For example, the role of mother is tied to son or daughter through structural positions in the family; the role of employer is tied to employee through structural positions in the workplace; and the role of teacher is tied to student through structural positions in educational contexts. Stryker notes that given the multiple roles a person holds in society (mother, teacher, wife, friend, colleague, etc.), people have multiple identities. This is a theoretical principle that Stryker shares with his fellow symbolic interactionists and identity theorists McCall and Simmons (1978). The self, composed of multiple identities, reflects society, and these identities, in turn, shape society (Burke, 2003). In sum, these concepts form the basis of identity theory (Stryker, 1968, 1980).

## **Identity Control Theory**

Building on these concepts and Stryker's work, Burke and his identity theorist colleagues developed identity control theory (ICT) (Burke, 1980, 1991; Burke, Owens, Serpe, & Thoits, 2003; Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009). Compared with Stryker's (1968) approach, ICT focuses more on the internal dynamics of self and the concept of meaning around which identities are formed (Burke, 1980, 2007). The central question identity theorists ask is "What does it mean to be who one is?" In the spirit of Mead, ICT defines the concept of "meaning" as a response that a person has to a stimulus. For example, being a student (the stimulus) brings forth a set of meanings (or responses) for an individual who claims a student identity. In turn, these responses define for a person what it means to be a student, such as being academic, regularly attending class, and achieving good grades (Reitzes & Burke, 1980). ICT argues that "the meaning of one's identity has implications for how one will behave, and one's behavior confirms the meanings in one's identity" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 49). Per ICT, each identity is viewed as a system whereby identity and behavior are linked and a feedback loop is established.

This feedback loop is used as a guiding framework in Chapter 3, where it is described in detail. In summary, an individual's identity is verified when the meanings of one's identity in a given situation match the defining set of meanings of a specific identity for a person, known as the identity standard (Burke, 1991; Stets, 2005). Furthermore, when a person's identity is verified, he or she is likely to experience positive emotions, such as satisfaction, happiness, and self-esteem (Burke & Stets, 2009; Cast & Burke, 2002; Stets, 2005). As a result, a person is likely to continue his or her same behaviors that led to their identity being verified. If a person's identity is not verified—whereby the meanings of one's identity at a certain time or situation are incongruent with the meanings held in the identity standard—he or she is likely to experience

negative emotions, such as stress, anger, or unhappiness (Stets, 2005; Zanna & Cooper, 1976). This, in turn, will lead a person to change his or her behavior with the goal of controlling perceptions and aligning them to once more be congruent with the meanings of the identity standard (Burke, 2007).

### **Social, Role, and Person Identities**

Identity theory from Stryker and Burke's perspective distinguishes among three different but interrelated bases of identities: social or group identities, person identities, and role identities. A *social identity* is based on a person's identification with a social group, which is defined as a set of individuals who share the view that they are members of the same social category (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Burke and Stets, 2009). Social identities may emerge, for example, from joining a fraternity or sorority, becoming a union member, or being active in a professional organization. Social categories may also include nationalities, political affiliations, and sports teams (Hogg & et al 1995). A social category into which one falls or feels one belongs, "provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category" (Hogg White et al 1995, p. 259). The assumption is that such group members share a social identity and, therefore, think and act alike. Social identity theory (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al, 1987) is primarily interested in social identities and argues that memberships in groups imply an ingroup (people who are members of the same social category) and an outgroup (people who are not members of that social category). Membership in groups helps reduce uncertainty for members by setting expectations about thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and can lead to feelings of positive distinctiveness, that is, the view that one's own group is better than another group (Hogg, 2006).

*Person identities* are based on the qualities or characteristics that individuals on their own internalize, such as how kind, considerate, or moral they are (Stets & Carter, 2006). Labeling oneself in terms of person identities means viewing the self as unique or different and distinct from others (Stets & Burke, 2003). Person identities consist of meanings that define for a person who he or she is as an individual. These identities operate across various roles, social interactions, and situations. Instead of being guided by social identities or role identities (discussed below), what guides person identities is one's own personal goals (Burke & Stets, 2009).

*Role identities* are based on the roles that people play, such as mother, friend, teacher, or (of most interest to this dissertation) community college faculty member. Identity theorists view roles as providing structure and meaning to selves and social situations (Burke & Stets, 2009). Roles are associated with certain expectations that help guide people's attitudes and behavior. For example, the role of being a friend may include expectations of being supportive, loyal, and reliable, and the role of being a teacher may include expectations of being educated and informative (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Role identities, in turn, are the internalized meanings of a role that a person applies to him or herself (Burke and Stets, 2009). For example, for some people, a "friend" role identity may include meanings of being a companion or a confidant. A "teacher" role identity may include meanings of being a mentor or a guide. The meanings in role identities are derived from culture and society as well as individuals' distinct interpretation of the role (Burke & Stets, 2009). In other words, individuals are socialized to roles but can also define for themselves what their role identities mean to them. As a result, different people may have different meanings for the same role identity. For example, for one person, a friend identity may mean being a loyal

confidant, while to another person it may mean being a playful sidekick. As Chapters 3 and 4 reveal, participants in this study describe very similar meanings that they ascribe to the community college faculty role identity.

Roles, and therefore role identities, do not exist in a vacuum. For every role that exists, there is a counterrole (Turner, 1962), and identities are related to counteridentities (Burke, 1980). For example, the role of a father does not make sense without the role of a child. A student identity has a corresponding counteridentity of teacher (Burke & Stets, 2009). In this same vein, Burke (2003) points to the importance of role partners and their influence on individuals' role identities.

Identities based on roles are the identities of prominent interest to identity theorists like Burke (1980), McCall and Simmons (1978), and Stryker (1980). Given their focus and applicability to work identities, like teacher, doctor, manager, and faculty member, role identities are the identities of chief interest in this dissertation, although social identities, as per social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), also are discussed in Chapter 5. Therefore, to make clear, this dissertation focuses on identities from the structural symbolic structural perspective (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker, 1980), not the moment-by-moment construction of identities on which scholars like Goffman (1959, 1963, 1981) focus.

Although identity theorists distinguish between social, person, and role identities, it is important to note that they simultaneously operate in social situations, often overlap, and cannot be easily separated (Burke and Stets, 2009; Stets & Serpe, 2013). As Stets and Serpe (2013) succinctly describe: "Within groups, people play out various roles, and individuals enact these various roles in different ways given the unique person identity standards they bring to their roles" (p. 38-39). The authors use the example of a student who is a class president (role identity)

attending a particular school (group membership) during a pep rally in which their person identity of being aggressive and rowdy emerges. This situation activates and verifies the individual's group identity (member of a school), role identities (student and class president), and person identities (being aggressive). I explore the overlap between role identities and social identities in Chapter 5.

### **Strengths of Using Identity Theory to Study Community College Faculty Identities**

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, identity has been defined, studied, and theorized in a variety of ways. I selected identity theory (as developed by scholars cited above) as the chief framework of this dissertation for a variety of important reasons. First, earlier research I conducted on the topic of community college faculty identities suggested that their professional identities are indeed complex and multifaceted (Thirolf, 2012). Those studies could have benefited from a more robust framework to more effectively explain the many ways in which participants described their faculty identities. As Chapter 1 discussed, this is a weakness across the current corpus of literature on community college faculty identities. A strength of identity theory from the symbolic interactionist perspective, and a main reason why I chose it as the undergirding framework for this dissertation, is its focus on *meaning*, defining identity as “what it means to be who one is” (Burke & Stets, 2009). Past research has examined who community college faculty are (Eagan, 2009), how satisfied they are in their jobs (Valadez & Antony, 2001), and what their career paths are (Fugate & Amey, 2000), but with rare exceptions that include my own very small-sample studies (Thirolf, 2012, 2013), we know essentially nothing about what it means to be a community college faculty member. Meanwhile, research shows that we enact our identities and perform in our roles based on the meanings those identities and roles have for us (Reitzes & Burke, 1980). Identity theory's focus on meaning

equips me to address this research gap and explore what it means to be a community college faculty member from the perspective of community college faculty.

Furthermore, identity theory's three bases of identities—and specifically its delineation of role identities from person and social identities—allowed me to focus specifically on what I set out to learn, namely the way in which community college faculty describe their faculty role identities. The concept of role identity (Burke et al., 2003; McCall & Simmons, 1978) resonated strongly with my research aims because, as described above, role identities are the internalized meanings of a role—such as mother, friend, and community college faculty member—that a person applies to him or herself (Burke and Stets, 2009). In sum, choosing identity theory as guiding framework this dissertation has equipped me to be able to identify and analyze the multiple meanings that community college faculty ascribe to their faculty role identities.

In addition, unlike functionalists and in line with symbolic interactionists, I believe our identities and the roles we take on that form our identities, including professional identities, are not static; rather they are dynamic and largely shaped by our interactions with others. Relatedly, identity theory recognizes the important influence of others on identity, accounting for counteridentities and role partners (Burke & Stets, 2009). My earlier research aligns very strongly with these claims. I found that the way in which part-time faculty at community colleges described their faculty identities were strongly influenced by their perceptions of interactions with their students and perceptions of and (lack of) interactions with their faculty colleagues (Thirolf, 2012, 2013). Again, with its focus on counteridentities and role partners, identity theory enabled me to explore these influences in more depth in this dissertation.

Finally and in summary, using identity theory as the common and consistent theoretical frame across the three studies enabled me to accomplish the various goals of this dissertation.



Identity theory and its symbolic interactionist perspective are broad enough as well as specific and concrete enough to operate as the main framework for all three of the analytical chapters, despite their varying foci and analytical approaches.

Although I opted to use identity theory as the main framework for this dissertation, I believe other identity-related frameworks can be effectively used to further research on community college faculty identities. In fact, given the complexity of the concept of identity, I believe multiple identity-based frameworks *should* be used in future research. Indeed, the concept of identity is more complex than the data analysis presented in this dissertation, but there is still value in using theory to better understand the faculty identities of community college faculty. Again, with rare exceptions, most literature on community college faculty has lacked any type of theoretical framework (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). This dissertation is among the first to do so. Without a theoretical framework undergirding the research, concepts are left unclear, implications of the research remain limited and local, and mistaken assumptions and generalizations about the quality of community college faculty persist. Using a robust theory like identity theory to research and better understand the faculty identities of community college faculty helps to make concepts concrete, gives weight and more generalizability to identified research implications, and strengthens the study's ability to identify truths and test assumptions.

### **Methodology**

This section provides a detailed description of my research methodology and methods. First, I describe this dissertation study's methodology, research design, and the rationale for its design. I then describe the methods I used to select and recruit participants and the way in which I designed the interview protocol to guide my interviews. I also describe the interviews I

conducted in terms of location and length. Finally, I describe the analytical methods I followed and the limitations of this type of research design.

### **Approach and Research Design**

I strongly believe that understanding emerges from an emic perspective and depends largely on context (S. R. Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014; Merriam, 2009). I share the constructivist viewpoint that researchers construct concepts and theories based on the stories of research participants “who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and themselves” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 10). In turn, this dissertation is anchored in a constructivist epistemology.

Because this dissertation aims to “step beyond the known” and see the world from the perspectives of community college faculty, I selected a qualitative research approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 16). The current lack of literature and data on community college faculty, in particular on their faculty identities and role identities, precluded a quantitative research design (Creswell, 2003). A qualitative approach, with its aim and ability to address open-ended questions and discover (not test) variables (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), would allow me to achieve what I set out to do in this dissertation.

As noted in Chapter 1, the goals of this dissertation are as follows: (1) to identify ways in which community college faculty describe their faculty identities; (2) to identify ways in which community college faculty synthesize the meanings they ascribe to their faculty identities; and (3) to identify organization-level influences that have a positive effect on community college faculty identities. However, to accomplish each of these goals, a single qualitative analytical approach would be insufficient. Although all three goals require conducting interviews of community college faculty, the first goal is best achieved through qualitative coding of interview

transcripts using Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Charmaz (2006) as guides because this technique allowed me as the researcher to collect, examine, and interpret the data without any preconceived hypotheses in mind; capture and analyze the voices of community college faculty themselves; and identify themes present in the data. The second goal is best achieved by supplementing the aforementioned technique with a close analysis of the ways in which participants choose and use language to describe their faculty identities, specifically their use of metaphor. Metaphor analysis was selected for Chapter 4's study because metaphors are very powerful ways that people express and make sense of their identities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This led me to analyze participants' metaphors using Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as a guiding framework and research on teacher identity metaphors as examples (Alsup, 2006; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). The third goal is best accomplished through a case study approach, including qualitative analysis of interviews, to examine the organization-level factors that influence faculty identities (Yin, 2009). This is because a case study approach enabled me to incorporate multiple sources of data (including observations of faculty meetings) and explore in depth the organizational influences that had a positive effect on participants' faculty identities. See Table 2.1 for a summary of this dissertation's three analytical chapters.

*Table 2.1: Review of dissertation's analytical chapters*

Chapter	Focus	Theoretical frames	Data	Analytical approach
Chapter 3	Community college faculty role identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity theory (Identity Control Theory)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounded theory</li> </ul>
Chapter 4	Metaphors used by faculty to describe their faculty identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity theory</li> <li>• Metaphors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Metaphor analysis</li> </ul>
Chapter 5	College-level influences on faculty identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity theory</li> <li>• Social identity theory</li> <li>• Positive organizational scholarship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case study</li> </ul>

By its very nature, identity is a personal subject, and it also is quite complex and multifaceted. My study focuses on the meanings participants attach to being community college faculty members and, therefore, the ways in which they view themselves as faculty. Because these concepts are unobservable, I chose to conduct intensive interviews (Charmaz, 2006). Unlike informational interviews, observations, and focus groups, which typically do not provide an opportunity for the researcher to develop close rapport with participants, intensive interviews allowed me to tap into and capture my participants' perspectives directly and openly (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, I chose to conduct one-on-one, face-to-face interviews so that I would be able to meet all of the research participants, interact and converse with them as an active listener, and observe and guide them as they reflected on their faculty identities (S. R. Jones et al., 2014).

I designed a semistructured interview protocol that included broad, open-ended questions such as "Tell me about how and when you decided to become a faculty member at a community college" and "How would you describe your faculty identity?" To get at the concept of role

identities, I asked questions such as “What roles do you take on as a community college faculty member?” and “How easy or difficult is it to take on the multiple roles you’ve described?” (See Appendix A for the full interview protocol.) The structured aspect of the semi-structured approach allowed for consistency across participants, but this method also provided flexibility to ask additional questions as needed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This consistency allowed me to compare and contrast the responses for my analysis; however, because each participant’s responses were unique, I often asked additional follow-up questions to gain added detail. To ensure that I was understanding their points of view and their reflections on what it means to be community college faculty members, I restated important responses and concepts to the participants as needed. This technique allowed me to double-check the accuracy of my interpretations in the moment.

### **Sample Selection and Participant Recruitment**

I chose to select participants from a single institution, namely Eastern Community College (ECC), for a few reasons. First, one of the goals of this research was to identify ways in which colleges as organizations can better support community college faculty and their faculty identities. Because participants were all faculty at ECC, they were subjected to the same organizational influences, including organizational structures, processes, leadership, and culture. For example, they were exposed to the same union, professional development committee, faculty assessment process, president, provost, and college-wide organizational norms. This focus obviously limited any generalizability of this research, but because of this consistency, I was able to distill across my full sample the elements that were most influential in supporting their faculty identities. In addition, ECC is fairly representative of many public two-year suburban colleges in the country. These colleges enroll roughly one-third of all community college students in the

United States (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). (Urban and rural community colleges also each enroll roughly one-third of all community college students.) ECC's full-time versus part-time faculty ratio closely mirrors the national average—part-time faculty comprise 67% of all faculty at ECC and 69% of all faculty at U.S. community colleges (AFT Higher Education, 2009). Finally, I selected ECC as my research site because I already was familiar and acquainted with ECC and its multilayered contexts, including its surrounding area, campus, organizational and academic structure, and faculty and staff. As many studies on teacher identity have done (Alsup, 2006; Beijaard et al., 2004; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998), I intentionally selected participants who taught at an institution with which I am familiar because a pre-awareness of institutional context and environment helped me develop rapport and relate to my respondents better than if I were a complete outsider asking questions about a personal topic such as their faculty identities.

Because research has demonstrated differences between faculty who teach in academic-oriented disciplines and faculty who teach in vocational-oriented programs (Levin et al., 2006; Wagoner, 2007), I focused entirely on faculty who teach in the academic disciplines so as to control for these differences. To examine departmental differences within these disciplines, I chose to interview faculty from the math and English departments. These departments were selected because they are two of the largest departments at the college in terms of both number of faculty and number of students. Also, as more jobs and degrees require reading, writing, and math proficiency, more students require remedial education in these areas (Attewell et al., 2006; Brothen & Wambach, 2004; Parsad & Lewis, 2003). Therefore, community college students increasingly rely on faculty who teach English and math to provide formative knowledge and skills critical for subsequent success in school, work, and life in general. Finally, because research suggests that identity formation is an ongoing process and requires time (Beijaard et al.,

2004; Gee, Allen, & Clinton, 2001), to be eligible to participate in this study, faculty had to have at least one semester's experience teaching at ECC.

I started my participant recruitment by reaching out to two faculty members (one in English and one in math) who I had previously known through work I was involved in at ECC. They were willing to participate in my study and agreed to help me recruit other faculty members by sending an IRB-approved email on my behalf that introduced my study and asked for willing and interested participants (see Appendix B for text of email). This recruitment method was very effective. Only part-time math faculty required additional follow up. I interviewed the math department chair (Kim), and she suggested that I contact David about participating in my study. He agreed and was the last faculty member I interviewed. To assist with subject recruitment and to indicate that I valued their time and participation (Korn & Hogan, 1992), I offered a \$50 cash incentive to anyone willing and eligible to be interviewed for my study. This incentive also was used to attract faculty who would not otherwise participate in a study on faculty identities.

I initially planned to interview twelve faculty members: three each of part-time English faculty, full-time English faculty, part-time math faculty, and full-time math faculty. However, I received an overwhelming response from part-time English faculty who were interested in participating. They were eager to tell their stories, and I was eager to listen and incorporate their perspectives into my research. Furthermore, after interviewing three of them—including Sharita, who preferred teaching part-time; Lynn, who was hired less than a year before the interview; and Brian, who was lobbying for a full-time position—I realized that this sample of part-time English faculty was quite diverse in terms of their professional backgrounds and goals. Indeed, Levin and colleagues (2006) had found the same type of diversity in the population of English part-time faculty at community colleges. This realization led me to expand my 12-person sample to

include three additional part-time English faculty so that I would be able to paint a more comprehensive picture of their faculty identities and present a more detailed comparison and contrast. Also noteworthy is that several qualitative studies (including monographs) on teacher identity have comprised between one and nine respondents (see Beijaard et al., 2004). Therefore, with fifteen participants, this study actually has a larger sample size than many other studies on a similar topic.

### **Data Collection**

Before our scheduled interview, I asked each participant to take a brief, ten-question survey to collect his/her basic personal and professional background information. I used Qualtrics software to design the survey and sent the link out to participants by email. Questions included how long they have been teaching in general and at ECC, whether they were teaching full-time or part-time or had taught full-time or part-time in the past, what their career goal was, and questions about their gender, race, age, and family income. (See Appendix C for the list of survey questions.) Collecting this information in advance helped me to prepare for each interview by getting a sense of whom I would be interviewing. It also helped to condense the length of time of each interview and allowed me to focus on richer, more intensive questions when we met face-to-face. Finally, filling out the survey in advance prompted the participants to think about their experiences and identities as community college faculty and prepared them for more focused reflections during the interview.

I interviewed fourteen of the fifteen participants in a small private room on campus. Thirteen were interviewed in a private study room I reserved in the college library, usually before or after a class they were teaching that day. I interviewed Tim in this office in the Writing Center at ECC. Because of a scheduling conflict, Jane preferred to be interviewed in a quiet café



located in a bookstore not far from campus. Therefore, with the exception of Jane, I was able to interview participants on campus and in their element, that is, in the context of the environment where they work and develop and enact their identities as community college faculty. Many respondents talked about something that happened that day, even as they were heading to their interview. For example, just before their interviews, Lynn texted with a student about a conference meeting later that day and Kathy ran into one of her former students and chatted briefly with him. These types of instant, in-the-moment recalls provided rich and accurate data *and* helped to limit issues of recall bias, thereby supporting the accuracy and validity of the data (Weiss, 1994).

I believe the subjects of this study recognized my genuine eagerness to learn about community college faculty and my genuine appreciation for their time and participation in the study. I introduced myself as a Ph.D. student writing a dissertation on community college faculty and their faculty identities. I positioned myself—and believe I came across—as a curious outsider. I believe that the subjects of the study felt at ease and free to talk about their experiences. In fact, I was pleasantly surprised at how openly and honestly they talked about their faculty identities and the joys and challenges that they encountered as a community college faculty member.

On average, interviews were between two and two-and-a-half hours in length. Before each interview, I reviewed the consent form, answered any questions that participants had about my study, and ensured that they were still willing to participate. All of the participants consented to having their interviews audiorecorded.

## **Analysis**

I took notes using pen and paper throughout each interview as a way for me to keep track of key quotes and help guide the interviews thoroughly and efficiently. Therefore, I started my analysis immediately; during the interviews, I reflected on some of the participants' keen insights and considered emerging themes as they talked. All of the interviews were audiorecorded and then transcribed verbatim by an outside transcription agency. After receiving a transcription, I read it through from start to finish as a way to check for accuracy and to refresh my memory about the discussion. The quality of the transcripts was uneven; I had to go back to the original recordings to double-check the accuracy of certain points in most of the transcripts. Because the transcripts were created in Microsoft Word, I used Word to highlight important quotes and annotate initial codes for each transcript. However, all of the transcripts were eventually inputted into NVivo, a qualitative research coding software program, which enabled me to create, organize, and compare codes across transcripts thoroughly and efficiently.

I began my coding analysis with Sharita, Lynn, Tom, Kathy, and Jason's interviews, which provided a good mix of my sample because it included two part-time English faculty (Sharita and Lynn), one full-time English faculty (Tom), one part-time math faculty (Kathy), and one full-time math faculty (Jason). Using a grounded theory methodological technique (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), I created open codes based on what participants said, putting aside any preconceived categories of analysis. This initial coding process quickly led me to develop focused codes (Charmaz, 2006) that served as categories for many of the open codes I created. In line with the iterative process of qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), I went back and forth between creating open codes and creating focused codes into which the open codes fell. Three main focused codes that emerged included the main topics of the three

analytical chapters of this dissertation, namely the role identities of community college faculty (Chapter 3), metaphors that community college faculty used to describe their faculty identities (Chapter 4), and institutional factors that influence the faculty identities of community college faculty (Chapter 5).

In addition to coding, I employed several other analytical techniques and trustworthiness strategies. I used the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to identify similarities and differences with codes across the sample. This method led me to pay particular attention to the similarities and differences between full-time and part-time faculty, English and math faculty, and faculty who teach mostly developmental classes versus faculty who teach mostly college-level classes. In the spirit of theory triangulation, I revisited different theories and literature to test whether they helped to explain and shed light on my data, including work by Burke and Stets (2009) and McCall and Simmons (1978) for Chapter 3; Lakoff and Johnson (1980) for Chapter 4; and Tajfel and Turner (1986), Stets and Burke (2000), and Positive Organizational Scholarship concepts (Cameron et al., 2003; Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; L. M. Roberts & Dutton, 2009) for Chapter 5. Looking back on these other theories and literature helped me to clarify and elucidate the themes that emerged from my findings.

I also sought out informant feedback and conducted member checking throughout the course of my study. During interviews, I often asked the participants clarifying questions to ensure that I understood and correctly interpreted their comments (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition, I sent summaries of my analysis to each participant and asked for their feedback. To establish face validity (Lather, 2003), I wanted to ensure that I accurately represented and interpreted their words. Because the interviews focused on the faculty member's identity, I recognized that their discourse and perspectives were quite complex and that I may not have

fully grasped, for example, their “tacit knowledge, insider vocabularies, and/or positioned understandings” of an event, a student or faculty interaction, or work environment (Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 104). The feedback I received from participants on my analytical summaries supported my findings and interpretations of the results.

The aforementioned methods were used for each of the analytical chapters in this dissertation and are featured most prominently in Chapter 3. For Chapters 4 and 5, however, I incorporated additional methods that aligned with each chapter’s unique research goals. For example, for Chapter 4, I used a metaphor analysis approach that allowed me to closely analyze participants’ metaphorical language when they described their faculty identities. I based my approach on methods used by K-12 teacher scholars, including Alsup (2006), who have studied teacher identity metaphors. For Chapter 5, I conducted a case study (Yin, 2009) of faculty in ECC’s English and math department. As part of the study, I reviewed dozens of college documents and webpages, attended and observed college-wide and departmental meetings, toured campus buildings, and viewed faculty office spaces. More details specific to these methodological approaches are described in Chapter 4 and 5.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations associated with this dissertation. Community college faculty members are a very diverse and complex group of professionals. Interviews with fifteen community college faculty across two departments at a single community college obviously cannot fully represent every community college faculty member’s experience. This study is limited to an investigation of the faculty identities of people who teach English or math at a suburban community college. Because institutional context matters (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Kezar & Sam, 2010), findings should not be assumed to transfer to faculty who teach in other

departments or at urban or rural community colleges. To reiterate, however, faculty in the English and math departments were intentionally selected for this study because of their high numbers, reach, and potential impact on students. Also, compared with other similar and seminal qualitative studies on teacher identity (see Beijaard et al., 2004), fifteen individuals is a relatively large sample size. Furthermore, as the subsequent chapters will show, clear and consistent themes emerged across the fifteen transcripts, indicating that a point of saturation was reached (S. R. Jones et al., 2014). The goal of this study was not to arrive at generalizable findings, but rather to unveil a more nuanced and theory-backed understanding of the professional identities of English and math faculty at a single community college.

In terms of analytical limitations, it is important to note that I was the only researcher who collected and analyzed data. As a result, I was precluded from performing any inter-rater reliability (or inter-observer reliability for research conducted in Chapter 5). I do not know to what extent my interpretations of the data and resulting codes match others' interpretations and codes. Other studies have arrived at similar themes, however. For example, in their qualitative study of community college faculty, Fugate and Amey (2000) found that their participants used descriptors such as mentor, role model, coach, and advocate to describe themselves, which closely mirror some of Chapter 4's findings, and that their participants valued serving their community and college, which are themes that emerged in Chapter 3 and 4 as well. Still, one of the clear limitations of this dissertation is that I was unable to compare and calibrate my interpretations and resulting findings and conclusions with others'.

Also noteworthy is that I collected my data at an institution with which I was familiar. I had worked on special projects on an as-needed basis at ECC roughly two years prior to conducting interviews and worked a few hours a week on campus while I was conducting

interviews. I began working more hours a week at ECC while analyzing data and writing my dissertation. Of the fifteen faculty members I interviewed, I had met only two previously through my work. They, in turn, assisted me in my efforts to identify other participants.

Being familiar with ECC before I conducted my interviews was a circumstance that both strengthened and limited my research. As mentioned earlier, a pre-awareness of the institutional context at ECC allowed me to develop rapport with my respondents more quickly and effectively than if I were a complete outsider asking questions about a personal topic such as their faculty identities. During interviews, I did not have to interrupt a participant while they were reflecting on their faculty identities to ask for clarity about ECC-specific nomenclature, the department or division structure at the college, the faculty evaluation process, professional development offerings, or other similar specific information, because I was aware of that type of information already. In this sense, Merton (1972) would consider me an “insider” because I possessed *a priori* knowledge of the community and its members. If I did have to frequently ask for clarifications, it may have interrupted the flow of participants’ thoughts on their faculty identities and may not have resulted in gathering as rich of data as I was able to collect. At the same time, Merton (1972) describes “outsiders” as “neither been socialized in the group [being studied] nor has engaged in the run of experience that makes up its life” (p. 15), which also describes my status vis-à-vis my participants. I never have taught at a community college nor been socialized as one and have not encountered the same experiences that they have encountered. In this sense, I was not a complete insider but not a complete outsider either.

Still, it is important to note that an inherent bias is involved when collecting data at an institution at which you are not a complete outsider. To what extent did my *a priori* knowledge limit my ability to collect and analyze data objectively? To what extent did it influence the

themes I saw in the data? Were there assumptions I had (of which I was not aware and did not test beforehand) that may have skewed the way I heard participants describe their faculty identities? I made every attempt to realize my biases and analyze the data as objectively as possible, but biases can never be completely removed; they can only be recognized, made transparent, and managed.

In terms of theoretical limitations, my focus on role identities was an intentional choice because of its relevance with professional identities, but it also meant I did not explore person identities or social identities in as much depth. I refer to social identity theory and discuss the overlap between social identities and role identities in Chapter 5, and I provide in depth personal profiles of participants later in this chapter highlighting some of their person identity elements, but I maintained a central focus on role identities throughout this dissertation. Especially given the research that argues professional identity is really a conglomeration of role identity as well as person identity and social identity (Alsup, 2006), my focus on role identity is a notable limitation of this research. Indeed, future research should examine all three bases of identity to paint an even fuller picture of community college faculty identities.

Related to this point, I did not explore in depth the influence that teaching experience (i.e., length of time teaching) had on participants' faculty identities. As mentioned above, to be eligible to participate, participants had to have at least one semester's experience teaching at ECC, but my sample included a wide-range of experiences, including someone who had taught 30 years at ECC and someone who had five years of teaching experience elsewhere but had taught part-time at ECC for only one year. While I mention previous teaching experience as a variable to consider in Chapter 4, overall, it was not a prime focus of my dissertation. Indeed, future research should examine more closely to what extent length of time teaching (in general,

at community colleges, and at their current community college in particular) has an influence on the ways in which faculty describe their faculty identities.

## **About Eastern Community College**

### **Location and Community**

Eastern Community College is a single-campus suburban community college located in Hamilton, a city in the United States. (All names, including institution and participant names, are pseudonyms.) Located next to a state university and within thirty miles of a private four-year college and a large top-tier public university, ECC is surrounded by a community that strongly supports education. ECC is the only public two-year college in Jefferson County, which has roughly 300,000 residents—75% of whom are white. Fourteen percent of Jefferson County’s residents are African American and four percent identify as Hispanic or Latino. Indicative of the community’s strong support of education, more than 50% of Jefferson county residents have at least a bachelor’s degree, which is double the state’s percentage of the same metric. The county’s median household income is roughly \$56,000. When this study was conducted, the county unemployment rate ranged between 6% and 8%.

### **Students**

When interviews were conducted in fall 2012, roughly 13,000 students were enrolled in credit-bearing classes at ECC. About one-third of these students were between 20 and 24 years of age, while almost 40 percent of enrolled students were between 25 and 50 years old. Across fiscal year 2012, more than 21,000 students were enrolled in at least one credit hour. A majority of students (70%) were White and nearly 20 percent of students were African American; therefore, ECC had a higher percentage of students of color than Jefferson County had residents of color (30% compared with 25%). In terms of education background, roughly half of students



reported having only a high school degree. Almost 20% of students transferred to ECC from a four-year college, a process known as “reverse transfer” (Townsend & Dever, 1999). The retention rate for first-year students from 2010 to 2011 was just over 60%. ECC awarded nearly 2,200 certificates in spring 2012.

## **Leadership**

President Mary Lee had led ECC for nearly six years at the time interviews were conducted. She reports to a nine-member board of trustees, who are elected by county constituents for five-year terms. Amiable and essentially controversy-free, the board members work well together and vote unanimously on nearly every issue. Reporting to the president is Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Dr. Janet Tanney, who has five deans from across the college reporting to her. Dr. Tanney was hired two years before I started conducting interviews. In the short time that she has been at ECC, she had developed a strong and positive relationship with ECC’s faculty members and faculty union.

Each of ECC’s 31 departments is led by a department chair. Chairs are faculty members given reassigned time to carry out administrative duties within the department. They work with their Dean to set schedules and class assignments, convene meetings, and recommend part-time faculty. Although Chairs have no true administrative authority over the full-time faculty in their area, the Deans rely on them, especially when it comes to recommending and hiring part-time faculty in their departments. Full-time faculty members in each department nominate and elect their own Department Chair annually. The Chair position is a two-year term. Often the same person in each department is reelected over several terms, which is the case for the two departments in this study, the math and English departments. At the time of this study, the chairs

of the math and English departments had led their departments for seven and eight years, respectively.

### **Finances**

In 2013, ECC boasted a budget of roughly \$100 million. Almost half of its budget came from local government via property tax distributions. State appropriations had remained flat for several years and made up less than 15 percent of ECC's budget. Tuition revenue contributed to one-third of the budget, and other revenue sources, including contracts with industry organizations and donations to ECC's foundation, made up roughly five percent of the budget. College-wide audits of ECC's financials have routinely affirmed that ECC is on solid financial footing.

### **Faculty**

ECC employs roughly 200 full-time faculty and 400 part-time faculty across the college. In terms of the departments under study in this dissertation, the English department has sixteen full-time faculty and hires between 70 and 110 part-time faculty depending on student enrollment. When interviews were conducted for this study, the English department had roughly 80 part-time faculty. It was estimated by English faculty participants in this study that between 55% and 65% of part-time faculty in the English department would prefer a full-time position. The math department boasts fifteen full-time faculty members and about 60 part-time instructors. The department chair estimated that between 20% and 30% of those part-time instructors would prefer a full-time position.

ECC full-time faculty members are unionized. In addition to full-time teaching faculty, union members include full-time professional counselors and librarians. The average annual salary for full-time faculty members was \$70,000 at the time of interviews. Part-time faculty are

excluded from membership in the faculty union. They are paid about \$700 a credit hour, and because most courses are three contact hours, part-timers make roughly \$2,100 per course. They can teach up to eight credit hours a semester, which means they are usually limited to teaching just two courses a semester. They receive no extra funds to attend conferences, and only on rare occasions are they paid extra for participating in professional development opportunities. For example, they receive \$25 for attending the college-wide part-time faculty orientation, which lasts up to 2.5 hours.

### **Reflecting on My Role as the Researcher**

Because the core data of this dissertation were collected through one-on-one interviews that I arranged, conducted, and analyzed completely on my own, it is important that I acknowledge my identity as the researcher as another important contextual factor shaping this study (see Taylor, 2001). In terms of my background, when I was growing up (roughly between the ages of 7 and 13 years old), my mother worked as a part-time faculty member at a local community college. From what I remember and what she has since confirmed for me, she was quite content with her working situation during those years; her husband (my father) had a full-time job that supported the family, and she enjoyed teaching. However, when I started graduate school and began learning more about part-time faculty at colleges and universities, I came to realize that my mother's experience was indicative of only a subset of part-time faculty members. I learned that the growing use of part-time faculty was an increasingly complex, hotly debated, and very research-worthy issue. What started as a close family connection to a community college faculty member years ago has grown into a strong scholarly interest of mine.

This dissertation has its roots in a small study I conducted as part of a qualitative research class I took in fall 2008. I interviewed five recently hired part-time faculty who taught at Frost

Community College, located roughly two hours from ECC. The stories they told of the challenges they faced as they got up to speed in their jobs astounded me. One faculty member taught his first class *within 24 hours* of first inquiring about open positions, an experience he described as a “whirlwind” and a “nightmare.” For my term paper in that class, I used organization socialization theory (Jablin, 2001; Tierney, 1997) to frame the study, and I have since published elements of that work in a collaborative piece I wrote with fellow University of Michigan doctoral students (Toth et al., 2013). However, after glimpsing into the world and reality of community college teaching through the participants in that study, I realized there was much more to explore and uncover about community college faculty than just their socialization experiences.

In fall 2009, I took a discourse analysis class with Professor Lesley Rex. As I began to re-read and reanalyze my participant transcripts using discourse analysis, I realized there was a great deal revealed about the faculty identities of my participants. This led me to literature on faculty and teacher identity, including Alsup (2006), Danielewicz (2001), and Sachs (2001), among others. I also followed up with three participants to get their perspectives on their roles, work, and faculty identities since our first interview. From a combination of this work, I wrote two pieces on the faculty identities of community college faculty (Thirolf, 2012, 2013) but was not satisfied with how those studies turned out because I sensed that there was more about the participants’ identities as community college faculty that was extremely important but not fully discovered.

This realization led me to take a step back and seek a stronger, more robust theoretical framework to help me investigate a multifaceted and complicated concept such as identity. Once I began to read literature from the symbolic interactionist perspective, including the latest

compendium by Burke and Stets (2009), I saw great potential in using identity theory as a framework for my dissertation study. With the concept of role identities in mind (Burke et al., 2003; McCall & Simmons, 1978), I reimmersed myself in the interview transcripts of community college faculty from my previous studies and realized that an element of their professional identities that I had not yet fully understood (and that has essentially been overlooked by the literature to date) is that community college faculty are many things for their students—everything from teacher, of course, to counselor, confidant, and social worker. This realization formed the basis of what I wanted to study for my dissertation.

### **About the Participants**

In this section, I describe each of the participants who agreed to be interviewed for my study. I first describe the full-time English faculty (Tim, Jane, and Robin), then the part-time English faculty (Jon, Brian, Lynn, Sharita, Sam, and Alison), the full-time math faculty (Justin, Kim, and Laura), and, finally, the part-time math faculty (Kathy, Dan, and Sarah).

#### **Full-Time English Faculty**

**Tim.** A white married male in his 50s, Tim has been teaching English for 30 years. He taught high school English for 10 years until his wife’s job took them to Hamilton, the town where ECC is located. Soon after they moved, Tim started looking for teaching opportunities. One of his wife’s colleagues found out he was an English teacher and encouraged him to consider teaching at ECC. He was “hired on as a part-timer almost right away.”

Being a part-time instructor is “kind of a tricky business,” Tim says. He was “lucky” because his wife had a good-paying job, which also provided benefits, so unlike many part-time faculty who must string together multiple part-time teaching jobs to make ends meet, he and his

wife were always comfortable financially. “I never knew if I’d get a full-time job,” Tim admits, but after teaching part-time at ECC for 10 years, a full-time position opened up and he was hired.

Before teaching at ECC, Tim had limited knowledge about community colleges. When he was a college student in the 1970s, the view then was that community colleges were “where the dumb kids went.” He thought teaching at a community college would be a lot like teaching at a high school, but he soon realized there were substantial differences. “The first thing I noticed obviously is that a lot of the students were older,” he said. Despite his unfamiliarity with community colleges, pretty much from the start he “really liked the job” and thought work was “fun.” “I like the idea of helping people,” he said. “It’s a helping profession obviously. I [could] tell I was pretty good at ‘this community college thing.’ I got a good feeling from it.”

Now, after twenty years at ECC, being a community college faculty member is a career he loves. He has been very active on several committees and has started multiple literary-minded groups and journals at ECC. For the past eight years, Tim has directed ECC’s Writing Center, a large, open, warm and welcoming space on campus that offers large tables, computers, and walk-in support to all students seeking help with their writing. Students in developmental and gateway classes are enrolled in Writing Center activities to complement their coursework, and they become familiar with the center, including Tim, other English faculty, and the tutors who work there. One of the first things Tim did as director was to make the Center a friendlier and “fun” place for students. He painted the walls a warm yellow, decorated the Center with “funky posters,” and arranged for more comfortable seating. As Tim puts it, from the chairs to the easygoing atmosphere, “We have a lot of cushioning in all kinds of ways.”

To Tim, being a community college faculty member “means that my life has meaning.” He says his career and life goals are the same—“to reduce suffering.” Tim’s focus on “reducing

suffering” as a community college faculty member is explored in depth in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

**Jane.** A white married female in her 30s with two children, Jane has taught for fifteen years, the last eight of which have been at ECC. Like so many of her colleagues, the story of how she ended up teaching at a community college has a few twists and turns. After graduating from high school, she enrolled at her local community college and decided she wanted to become a special education teacher. She transferred to a four-year public university and got her bachelor’s degree and teacher certification in K-12 special education and English language and literature for grades 7 to 12. Her first teaching job was a unique one—she taught at a juvenile detention center. She worked with “reintegration students,” individuals in the process of moving out of the “boy’s prison” and back into the community. She taught “all the general basic skills,” including GED preparation, and also worked with individuals who were attending college while still technically incarcerated. Four or five of her students were attending ECC when her position was eliminated due to state budget cuts. Pregnant with her first child at the time, she sought a job at ECC and was hired part-time to teach speed-reading, but that employment lasted only a short while. In the meantime, she earned a master’s degree in special education. Jane thought she would stay at home to care for her daughter while her husband worked, but, unfortunately, his industry began to face severe challenges and he was laid off. Jane entered the job market again in search of a full-time job. She ultimately landed a position as a middle school special education consultant.

Jane is a go-getter and a natural leader, but she says it was still “shocking” that she was quickly promoted and ended up running the district’s special education department. She was enroute to get her doctorate and pursue a K-12 administrative career, but she also kept thinking about ECC and frequently perused the job postings there. One of the “frustrating” aspects of

working in K-12, she explained, was that “you have parents suddenly in the loop” and there are “so many other issues to deal with” as a result. She did not have to contend with those issues while she was teaching in the prison system—one reason being that “students loved to come to school because they got out of their cell.” Therefore, Jane knew she much preferred having more autonomy than K-12 jobs could afford.

When a full-time position teaching developmental writing opened up at ECC, she enthusiastically applied. “It’s what I wanted,” she said. She had been teaching and working with at-risk youth for her entire career up to that point; therefore, she knew she was a good fit. She beat out 200 other people for the job. “Every time I drive onto campus,” she says, “I still get the chills. It’s what I love to do.” Eventually she sees herself taking on administrative leadership positions, “even the opportunity to seek a position as a college president,” she says.

**Robin.** Robin, a married African American female, has taught at ECC for almost 30 years, the longest amount of time spent at ECC of all participants in this study. She has strong family connections to the college. Her mother taught English as a Second Language (ESL) at ECC, her husband taught biology part-time for a brief time, and all three of her children worked at ECC in some capacity as well. While in college, she initially thought she might want to be a doctor and was premed for three years before she got her bachelor’s degree in English. She and her husband started a family when her husband attended graduate school at Northern University (NU) located in the same town as ECC. Over the years, she worked a variety of jobs, including running a daycare center, being a head resident of dorms alongside her husband, and teaching freshman composition while she was pursuing a master’s degree in English at NU.

Robin also was enrolled in a unique Doctor of Arts program for teachers of English at NU. It was intended to prepare community college faculty, and one of the chief architects of the



program was an ECC board member. Robin did her practicum at ECC. Although she taught several composition classes, she also always taught developmental English. “That was my love,” she admits. Before she finished her dissertation, she was offered a full-time job teaching English at ECC—she took it and put her dissertation aside. That was almost thirty years ago. Since then, she has served in several different roles at the college, including department chair and union president, but she says she was always most fulfilled by being a teacher. “I’m a teacher. That’s the best thing in the world,” she said. At the time of our interview, Robin was considering retirement. She moved to a part-time teaching schedule and helped out at the Writing Center from time to time. Toward the end of our interview, Robin stated clearly “My mission is to give students a chance in education—second, third, first, whatever—and to make it more real than it has been in the past.”

### **Part-Time English Faculty**

**Jon.** As a college student, Jon attended community college and then transferred to a state university where he majored in English. Now a married white male in his mid 60s, he has been a writer and editor for the last forty years, including ten years as a senior editor of an international academic quarterly. He also has worked as a journalist and book editor. For the past thirteen years, Jon has taught at ECC as a part-time faculty member in the English department. He picked up another part-time position at the nearest urban community college approximately ten years ago. Jon usually teaches the gateway composition courses at both of the community colleges where he works.

Jon had not really considered teaching at a community college until he met Robin, who encouraged him to teach a class at ECC. Initially he declined but then “thought better of it,” went back to her, and accepted a part-time position. “As soon as I walked in the classroom, I realized

that I loved the interaction with the students,” he said. “I loved teaching.” Because he preferred to teach full-time, he pursued a master’s degree in teaching writing. Since then, he has earned another master’s degree in communication studies, with a focus on nonverbal communication. Jon found that in learning the different ways people communicate, he came “a little closer to understanding who [his students] were, what they were working with, and how I might help them.” Part of his career goal is to develop students “into competent lifelong writers.”

Jon also aspires to change the field of education. To this end, he is working towards his Ph.D. in higher education administration through a well-known online university. He feels one must “be a Ph.D. before anybody will listen to you,” and his goal is to change education in order to create “resilient students and educational institutions.” He is particularly “disgusted” with No Child Left Behind—“it’s destroying teachers and students,” he says—and wants to change it. For his dissertation, he is conducting a critical ethnography study that focuses on an urban community college challenged by very low student retention rates. He hopes his research can provide insight into the way in which the college can better educate and support its students. He also hopes his dissertation might initiate “transformational change of the entire institution.”

**Brian.** Brian’s first experience with community colleges was as a dual enrolled student while in high school. “I always had a great fondness for community college,” he says. Both as a student and now as an English part-time faculty member, Brian finds it “really astounding” to be in a classroom with such different perspectives and different personalities. “I’ve often thought in what other room do you have this kind of collection. I don’t know. I think it’s unmatched. The New York City subway? Maybe. But then they’re not talking to each other. So this is what’s so amazing in the community college classroom.”

Brian, a married white male with two young children, is very eager to find a full-time faculty position. He and his wife moved to Hamilton when his wife was accepted into a doctoral program at NU. “As much as I wanted a full-time job, this was the best I could do. But I was still happy to be where I was,” he says. Over the past three years since he was hired, he has taught both developmental and college-level English classes at ECC. He has a variety of previous teaching experiences, including teaching as a graduate student instructor while working on his master of fine arts (MFA) degree in nonfiction writing, as an ESL tutor, and as an adjunct at a university (for two years) and another community college (for one semester) after he graduated with his MFA.

For a part-time faculty member, Brian has been involved in a great deal at the college in addition to teaching. He has done some academic advising and counseling, tutored at the Writing Center, contributed to the department blog, and led a workshop on how to write personal statements for scholarship opportunities. Encouraged by Tim, one of his mentors, Brian has intentionally sought out activities in which to get involved. “My motivation here is to be a full-time faculty member,” he explains. “I’m really kind of trying my hardest to develop a résumé to go on the market. It’s not an easy one.” Because of community colleges’ emphasis on teaching and students, Brian would prefer to find a full-time English faculty position at a community college rather than at a four-year college. He believes the ideal community college faculty member “sees service and teaching of paramount importance,” like he does.

**Lynn.** Ever since Lynn was fifteen years old, she knew she wanted to teach English. A white married female in her late twenties with a baby on the way, Lynn majored in English in college and then went on to get her masters in teaching (MAT) in secondary education. She “got very lucky,” she says, to get a teaching job right out of graduate school at a small Catholic girls’

school. After four years there, however, she and her husband were ready to move closer to home, so they moved to Hamilton where Lynn's parents still live. She applied for teaching jobs and picked up a couple of other jobs in the meantime, including working as an ACT/SAT tutor and as a barista at a coffee shop. It was her mom who encouraged Lynn to consider postsecondary teaching jobs, including jobs at ECC, but Lynn thought it would be a "long shot" because her master's was in teaching, not English. "I sort of thought [teaching at a college] was out of my league," she said. However, she "crossed [her] fingers" and applied for a part-time English faculty position at ECC. "Very shortly thereafter," she got a call from ECC's English department chair who scheduled an interview with her. Lynn explains, "I guess I just had a really great interview because while I was talking with her, we both got excited. She asked me about why I liked to be an English teacher. I could talk to you about that for hours... It was really exciting." She was hired on the spot.

Her first class was Comp 1. She has since taught argumentative writing and African American literature. In addition to the barista and tutor jobs, she juggles another part-time English instructor job at a nearby private four-year college. In terms of her career goal, Lynn states, "I would like to keep teaching English in a variety of settings. I like both secondary and community college [settings]. Overall, I want to feel as though I am making an impact on my students."

**Sharita.** Of the six English part-time faculty in this study, Sharita is the only one who is not hoping for a full-time position. She currently has a full-time job as a medical case manager and works with people living with HIV or AIDS. In that role, she does a great deal of community education and presentations. Before she started teaching at ECC, many people told her that she would be a great teacher. A family member who teaches at two small colleges suggested she

look into teaching part-time. Sharita looked on ECC's website and saw that they were seeking English instructors. Her undergraduate degree was in English and literature and writing and rhetoric, so she applied and landed an interview. "It was just a really laidback conversation and interview process," Sharita explained. Cindy, the department chair, interviewed her and told her, "You're interesting. We enjoy interesting people at ECC, so welcome aboard."

Sharita, an African American married female in her late twenties, has taught at ECC for the past two years. Thus far, she has taught only developmental English courses, both the lowest level and the level just below Comp 1, the English gateway course. She notes that, although the content of her classes is writing and English, she teaches her students "college skills" and the "basics of professional and college life" as much as she teaches them how to read and write. Her only other teaching experience was in early childhood education at a preschool while she was in graduate school. (She earned a master's degree (MDiv) in practical theology.) She states that her career goal is "to continue providing education in the community college setting and through community outreach."

**Sam.** Sam has had a rich career in media and creative development for a variety of industries, including the auto and bank industries. He earned his undergraduate degree in English and American language and literature while attending college in Europe, where he grew up. His master's degrees are in French language and literature as well as in communications (specifically film and television production), both earned at NU.

A white married male in his sixties, Sam has a total of nine years of teaching experience. In the past, he has taught in middle and high schools in the United States and as a graduate student instructor while at NU. For the past two years, he taught English part-time at ECC and part-time at a nearby private four-year college. He has taught technical writing and composition,

both college-level courses. Although he still does some freelance project management and creative development work, he would prefer to teach full-time. His career goal is to continue teaching English courses.

Very outgoing, friendly, and approachable, Sam has lived in Hamilton for nearly thirty years and has always had a good impression of ECC. Those impressions have only become more positive since he has been teaching there. He mentioned, “It’s really a well-run place and well run by people who have thoughts and concerns, and who are friendly.”

**Alison.** Alison graduated with the highest distinction from NU, where she majored in linguistics. Soon afterward, she became a professional ESL tutor for companies and community- and school-based organizations. “When I think about it,” she says, “I probably made more an hour then [as an ESL tutor right out of college] than I do now [as a part-time faculty member with years of teaching experience].” She also taught remedial reading classes while she pursued her M.A. degree in TESOL. Since then, she has worked as an ESL teacher or program coordinator in a variety of capacities, including when she started her own private ESL tutoring enterprise. However, business was slow. “I wasn’t getting a lot of money,” she said. Instead, she “was doing a lot of driving.” Without a secondary teaching degree, the options available to her were limited; she is not certified to teach public school in the state. Therefore, she applied to teach part-time at ECC with hopes of getting “some decent work.”

Alison thinks she was hired at the last minute to teach an online Comp 1 class because she had some online experience—she is certified to score the online version of TESOL. In addition to the online Comp 1 course, she has taught Comp 2, developmental writing, and ESL writing. For the developmental writing classes she taught, she received very harsh student feedback and was almost not hired to teach again. She pleaded her case and got a second chance.

Her favorite course to teach is one she helped to redesign: a blended online/on-campus version of Comp 2.

Alison, a white married mother of two, is a very devoted Christian. At ECC, she is part of a prayer group of Christian faculty that prays for the campus and the students. She makes a point not to tell her students that she is religious and usually does not wear a cross when she's teaching. She is more comfortable keeping her religion out of the classroom, mainly because, as she puts it, "I don't want to be judged." She explains, "If you're on a community college campus—on any [public college] campus—if you are more or less politically conservative and you think homosexuality is immoral, you're a bigot. You'll be treated as such... But I'm not a bigot. But that's what you get."

Alison cares very much about the students she teaches. As part of her teaching philosophy, she writes, "In a sense, a teacher earns the right to teach by building a relationship with the students." Despite her love for teaching, she is contemplating a career move to become a nurse and was taking classes towards a degree in nursing at the time of the interview. At this point in her life, Alison's career goal is pretty straightforward: "I just want a full-time job that pays reasonably and has benefits," she says. She is "somewhat beyond caring about the job itself," but she admits she would prefer teaching, especially teaching ESL.

### **Full-Time Math Faculty**

**Justin.** At the time of our interview, Justin, who is white, married, and in his mid-30s, had been teaching math at a community college for a total of seven years, all at ECC. He was first hired part-time, but then three years later, a faculty position opened up that was exclusively focused on teaching developmental math, a position that was perfect for him. Justin is "really passionate" about teaching developmental students. From what he has been told and from what

he can tell, there are not many people like him who are interested in teaching developmental math at the postsecondary level. For Justin, though, teaching and working with developmental students is what he wants to do for the rest of his career. Encouraged by colleagues in his department, he applied for the position, got an interview, and was selected for the job. “This is not a kind of stepping-stone on the way to somewhere else,” he explains. “This *is* the somewhere else.”

Justin has strong connections to ECC: he was a student there, twice. His first experience was right after high school. He admits he was not a model student. “In about a year and a half or so, I managed to accumulate ten credits that I don’t really remember,” he explains. He “failed math in creative ways” and ultimately dropped out. He worked odd jobs and became very adept at building and working on computers. He decided to go back to school to get a one-year computer hardware certificate at ECC. That’s when “math reared its ugly head again,” but this time, he lucked out when he landed in Dr. Abbott’s class. Dr. Abbott made math fun and interesting, and Justin got an A. So Justin kept taking math and doing well. When he reached calculus, he landed in Mr. Everett’s class. Mr. Everett was “a wonderful, wonderful teacher” who showed Justin that “you can just be a damn good lecturer and a really amazing human being and be a great teacher.”

It was after taking calculus with Mr. Everett that Justin decided he wanted to be a teacher. He initially thought he would teach high school, but after tutoring at ECC and then getting hired as a part-time faculty member there, he realized ECC was where he belonged. “I’ve always loved the college,” he said. Both of his parents dropped out of high school but worked hard and ultimately got their degrees at ECC. “I’ve always seen this place as kind of like the land of



opportunity,” he said. He was interested in working at ECC “because it was home, the place where second chances are born.”

Justin loves his job. As he put it, if he were allowed to write his dream job description, it would be exactly what he is doing: teaching developmental math at ECC. Asked what his career goal is, he responded: “I’m living my career goal: to help those who struggle with mathematics successfully learn the math they need to both reach their educational goals and acquire the tools [and] skills they need to be more productive members of their communities.”

**Kim.** Initially a middle and high school teacher, Kim has been teaching math at ECC for a total of 16 years. A white female with two kids at home, she first considered teaching at a community college when some of her colleagues at the high school where she was teaching told her they were teaching part-time at ECC in the evenings. They really enjoyed it and encouraged her to seek a part-time position there. After calling the department chair about the possibility, Kim was hired to teach an algebra class the very next semester.

She really enjoyed it—and still enjoys teaching at a community college—for many reasons. She explains, “It’s just fun to teach where I don’t have to write passes and call parents” and do other things that come with the “craziness” of teaching at a high school. She initially viewed the opportunity to teach at a community college as a chance “to just work on [her] teaching,” but she has since fully embraced it as her career. She has been teaching full-time at ECC for eleven years and has been the chair of the math department for the past seven years. She has served on numerous committees, spearheaded an overhaul of the math curriculum, created multiple new classes, trained and supported several dozen faculty members, attended and presented at many conferences, and more. Above all, though, is her dedication to the people she

teaches. As she puts it simply and succinctly, her career goal is “to make a difference in the lives of students.”

**Laura.** Laura’s professional background is similar to Kim’s. White, married with two older children, and in her 40s, Laura has been teaching for more than twenty years. For the first thirteen years, she taught middle school math—first at an alternative school and then at two different middle schools. She taught mostly pre-algebra and algebra. Ultimately, “a complete accident” brought her to teach at ECC. She was helping her husband, an English professor, search through job postings ten years ago. She discovered that ECC was seeking a full-time math instructor when she was looking for potential opportunities for him. The position “sounded interesting,” and she applied. Soon afterward, she interviewed and got the job. Laura admits, “I think I didn’t even know how good I was going to have it, to be honest with you.” Like Kim, she was “tired of dealing with parents” as a secondary school teacher. She had no experience and “knew nothing” about community colleges before she started teaching at ECC. “It’s funny,” she says, “because after my interview, I was so excited, I just wept. I wept in my car.” She loved the “vibe” of the campus and liked everyone she met throughout the interview process. Although her entrée into teaching at a community college was an “accident,” as she puts it, she is thrilled because “it’s a great place to work.”

At ECC, Laura teaches statistics and a class called “Applied Practical Math,” which she designed herself. After seeing that algebra was a “stumbling block for so many students” and recognizing the need to revamp ECC’s business math course that was based on “a horrible textbook from the 50s,” Laura saw a need for a class that taught practical math skills, including interest payments, Venn diagrams, and basic statistics like percentiles and determining the mean, median, and mode. “It’s an anomaly,” she says of the course, “because it does not require them

to take algebra before they get to a college-level class.” It was a lot of work to get the course up and running, but it was worth it. When asked if she has considered taking on more of an administrator role, Laura replied, “Definitely not, no kind of administration for me. No, no.” She loves to teach—“Best part of my day is the teaching,” she says. Although she came upon her career at ECC on a whim, she “never plan[s] to leave” until she retires.

### **Part-Time Math Faculty**

**Kathy.** A white, married female in her 50s, Kathy has taught most of her life. Over the past thirty years, she has taught full-time at two high schools and part-time at two community colleges. The past six years, she has taught mostly developmental math classes at ECC. Kathy really enjoys teaching developmental math and working with developmental students. When she first began her teaching career, she worked with students at an alternative high school. As she puts it, she “came up through teaching with the ‘at-risk’ population.”

Kathy is also a private tutor for middle and high school students who seek one-on-one help with math. She was initially drawn to teach part-time at a community college because of the flexibility it afforded; she taught in the evenings while her husband was at home looking after their two children. She prefers teaching part-time as opposed to full-time. Her husband’s salary and benefits support the family, and teaching part-time allows her to continue to tutor. She typically tutors 20 students a week, which equates to about five hours a day. She usually teaches her classes at ECC in the morning and holds her tutoring sessions in the afternoons and evenings.

Kathy basically teaches math all day, every day, Monday to Friday. It is no surprise then that she has “always loved math,” but she says the way she teaches math is not just about knowing and teaching the content. Her developmental classes, in particular, are more about the students and their needs—everything from improving their study skills and motivation to dealing

with issues outside of school, including money and family troubles as well as homelessness. Ultimately, Kathy's goal "is to bring down the anxiety and get students to love math—or at least like it, instead of hate it."

**Dan.** A white male in his 40s who is married with two children, Dan has taught math part-time at ECC for the past twelve years. For the past few years, he also has taught part-time at another community college and at a private four-year college. Dan is a self-described "road scholar," someone who juggles multiple part-time faculty jobs and, therefore, has to drive to and from different institutions in order to piece together enough take-home pay to support himself and his family. It is no surprise then that Dan, like most road scholars, would very much like to be hired full-time. He would like to earn a higher salary, be eligible for benefits, and not have to drive to and from different institutions all week long. Dan also wants to be a full-time instructor because he loves teaching and wants to make it his career.

Dan had a unique opportunity three years before our interview took place. After a full-time colleague had to take medical leave for an entire academic year, Dan was hired as a temporary full-time faculty member to replace him. This experience made it all the more apparent to him that a full-time teaching job was what he truly wants. However, without a master's degree, he was unqualified and could not be hired for the permanent full-time position. To achieve his goal of getting a full-time position, he is currently pursuing a master's degree in math education via an online university.

Unlike Kathy, Dan has not been teaching most of his life. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in engineering from the state flagship university, Dan worked as an engineer in the auto industry for ten years. He ran a number of improvement workshops at companies during that time, so he was "in front of people kind of teaching anyway" and realized that teaching "was

quite natural to [him]” and was something he really enjoyed. After being let go a couple of times during company downsizes and feeling somewhat burnt out, he considered a career change. One day he “just came in [to ECC’s math department] and applied and said, ‘Hey, I can teach math.’” While working towards his engineering degree, he had accrued more than enough credits in math to be qualified to teach part-time. Dan was basically hired on the spot.

Dan has taught both developmental math and a variety of college-level math courses, including math for elementary teachers and calculus. He enjoys teaching a variety of classes—“it keeps you fresh,” he says—although he admits teaching the developmental classes can be difficult. “After a while of teaching the developmental ed [courses], you just kinda go, ‘Oh, my gosh, I feel so weighted down.’” Dan explains “the frustration level kicks in sometimes where you’re either trying to help them get it, and they don’t, but they’re not helping themselves. It can weigh on you.”

**Sarah.** Like Kathy, Sarah is a white, married female in her 50s who prefers teaching part-time. Like Dan, Sarah is an engineer by training and has many years of working experience in that field. Although her education and career background is in engineering, she says she always wanted to be a teacher. Both her father and mother were teachers—her father was a professor of education at the state flagship university and her mother taught part-time at a community college in another part of the state. When she was considering what to major in in college, Sarah’s father advised her to pursue a career other than teaching because he told her she could always get a teaching certificate or teach community college with a master’s degree. So, that is what she did. Instead of going to college to become a teacher, she got her bachelor’s degree (and later a master’s degree) in mechanical engineering.

Sarah enjoyed her work as an engineer, but when she started a family (she has two teenage children), she wanted to work part-time. She began to consider teaching part-time at ECC when a friend told her that he was teaching part-time in ECC's English department and really enjoyed it. Sarah "made it [her] goal" to teach math part-time at ECC. At the time of the interview, she had taught at ECC for three years. She also has experience teaching math part-time at another community college and at a four-year university.

Sarah has taught developmental math (pre-algebra) in the past, but now she mainly teaches an introductory college-level math course. She found that teaching pre-algebra was "really difficult" mostly because the students in her classes varied in terms of skill levels. Some students were bored because they knew the material already or learned it quickly, and some students could not multiply a fraction. "That was tough," Sarah explained, "because you had one [student who was] bored and the other complaining [and] somebody breaking down from anxiety," all at once and all in one class.

All in all, teaching math part-time is something Sarah enjoys. As a bonus, it allows her to be home when her kids get home from school. In terms of her career goal, Sarah says, "When my kids are more independent, my goal is to work full-time [as an engineer] and use teaching part-time as supplemental income." She finds fulfillment in teaching at a community college in particular. "This community college is not exclusive," she explains. "Anybody can come, and people sometimes need second, third, and fourth chances until they can get it together and then they can get through. We [community college faculty] are here to serve the community—not self-serve, but outward."

For a single table summarizing participants' backgrounds, see Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2: Participant backgrounds

Name	Dept, FT/PT	Sex	Race	Age	Total yrs teaching <sup>i</sup>	Years at ECC (PT/FT breakdown)
Jane	English FT	Female	White	late 30s	15	9 (1 yr PT, 8 yrs FT)
Tim	English FT	Male	White	early 50s	30	20 (10 yrs PT, 10 yrs FT)
Robin	English FT	Female	African American	mid 60s	30	30 (2.5 yrs PT, 27.5 yrs FT)
Alison	English PT*	Female	White	mid 40s	25	4 years PT
Brian	English PT*	Male	White	mid 30s	8	3.5 years PT
Jon	English PT*	Male	White	mid 60s	13	13 years PT
Lynn	English PT*	Female	White	late 20s	5	1 year PT
Sam	English PT*	Male	White	mid 60s	9	2.5 years PT
Sharita	English PT	Female	African American	late 20s	6	2 years PT
Justin	Math FT	Male	White	mid 30s	7	7 (3 yrs PT, 4 yrs FT)
Kim	Math FT	Female	White	mid 40s	20	16 (5 yrs PT, 11 yrs FT)
Laura	Math FT	Female	White	mid 40s	23	10 years FT
Sarah	Math PT	Female	White	mid 50s	3.5	3 years PT
Kathy	Math PT	Female	White	early 50s	29	6 years PT
Dan	Math PT*	Male	White	early 40s	12	12 (1 yr temporary FT, 11 yrs PT)

\* part-time faculty member who prefers full-time position

<sup>i</sup> Total years teaching includes all experience teaching, including at institutions other than community colleges.

FT = full-time

PT = part-time

This chapter presented the multilayered contexts that surround this dissertation. The next three chapters represent three distinct empirical studies that investigate the ways in which participants describe their community college faculty role identities.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **English and Math Community College Faculty Identities**

**Abstract:** Guided by structural symbolic interactionism and identity control theory (Burke, 1980; Burke & Stets, 2009), this study examined the ways in which English and math faculty at a community college in the United States described their faculty role identities. Participants described four common and meaningful components of what it means to be a community college faculty member: (1) being a passionate and expert teacher, (2) providing students with the support they need or connecting students to the support services they need, (3) caring about students, and (4) serving their communities. Differences that emerged between English and math faculty, full-time and part-time faculty, and faculty who primarily teach college level versus developmental level courses also are discussed.



Community college faculty are responsible for educating nearly half of all undergraduates in the United States (Horn et al., 2006). These students come from extremely diverse race, age, and socioeconomic backgrounds (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010). Compared to four-year college students, community college students are more likely to work off-campus and be responsible for caring for children and/or older relatives (Horn et al., 2006). They also typically do not reside in on-campus residence halls or participate in many campus life or student activities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Epstein, 2007), all of which help to provide social and extracurricular engagement for many four-year college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Because of these circumstances, community college students chiefly interact with their instructors above all others at their colleges. Indeed, community college faculty have the potential to strongly influence the higher education experiences (and, therefore, the life trajectories) of their students (Rose, 2012).

Despite the important role they play on campuses across the country, community college faculty generally have been neglected by researchers, administrators, and our nation's education leaders. The resulting dearth of knowledge is a concern because it ultimately limits the ways in which we can improve student outcomes. We know from decades of education research that when it comes to student learning and outcomes, teachers are more influential than any other aspect of schooling, including services, facilities, or leadership (Gates Foundation, 2010; RAND Corporation, 2012). Consistently, across several studies on community college students, student-faculty interactions are associated with student success, including academic integration, student retention, and degree and certification completion (Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Deil-Amen, 2011; McClenney & Marti, 2006). As Price and Tovar (2014) found, community college faculty “serve

as vehicles for imparting important information to students [and increasing] their comfort in college,” ultimately leading to improved student outcomes (p. 5).

As a way to address this knowledge gap, this study examines the professional identities of community college faculty. A focus on professional identities is important because, as teacher scholar Danielewicz (2001) explains, being a teacher requires “engagement with identity” (p. 3). She studies the way teachers conceive of themselves because “teaching is a state of being, not merely ways of acting or behaving” (Danielewicz 2001, p. 3). Furthermore, the way in which individuals view their professional identities influences how they interpret, judge, behave, and perform in their professional roles and situations (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006; Weick, 1995). In turn, an examination of the professional identities of community college faculty also can help to identify effective ways to support and encourage the work that they do (Townsend & Twombly, 2007; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998).

Guided by identity theory concepts (Burke & Stets, 2009; McCall & Simmons, 1978), this qualitative study examines the ways in which community faculty members describe their faculty identities. In the sections that follow, I briefly review the literature on community college faculty and explain the conceptual frameworks that undergird this research. Following a description of the data and methods used, I present a summary of findings. I conclude with a discussion of research and practice implications that this study suggests.

### **Literature Review**

The current corpus of literature on community college faculty professional identities is thin. The primary source of information on the identities of community college faculty (Cohen & Brawer, 1972) was written more than forty years ago when the missions and institutional identities of community colleges (as well as the characteristics and professional identities of their

faculty) were very different from today (Bailey & Morest, 2004). For example, research has documented the growing number of institutional missions adopted by community colleges since the 1970s, including developmental education, adult basic education, customized training for companies and industry, noncredit workforce and community development instruction, and small business development, to name a few (Bailey & Averianova, 1998; Bailey & Morest, 2004; K.J. Dougherty, 1994). Given this trend, it seems likely that the community college faculty members of today hold more and more complicated roles than they held in the past.

Other scholarship that mentions the professional identities of community college faculty has focused on whether community college teaching is a profession (Outcalt, 2002; Palmer, 1992) and the ways in which neoliberal ideologies have affected community college faculty (Levin et al., 2006). While important, this research does not investigate the complex concept of “identity” in depth. Questions such as “How do community college faculty view their faculty identities?” and “What does it mean to be a community college faculty member?” remain unanswered. Additionally, the current corpus of literature on community college faculty has tended to focus on full-time faculty (e.g., Fugate & Amey, 2000), even though, part-time faculty now represent 70 percent of community college instructors (AFT Higher Education, 2009).

Studies that have attempted to investigate the perspectives of faculty at community colleges have relied predominantly on national surveys, such as the (now defunct) Department of Education’s National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) questionnaire (see Kim, Twombly, & Wolf-Wendel, 2008; Valadez & Antony, 2001). While informative, these surveys fail to capture the voices of community college faculty themselves. Without qualitative research that captures community college faculty discourse and perspectives directly, quantitative survey-

based research may be based on erroneous assumptions about what it means to be a community college faculty member.

Moreover, the literature that is specific to the roles and work of community college faculty is minimal and mostly descriptive. For example, in their ASHE Higher Education Report, Townsend and Twombly (2007) describe the expectations of full-time faculty at community colleges using three broad categories: teaching, research/scholarship, and service. They have argued that more research is needed on community college faculty, particularly with regard to their roles in the teaching and learning process (Townsend & Twombly, 2007; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). In response to their call for more empirical investigations on this topic, my study asks community college faculty to reflect on and describe their faculty identities in terms of what it means, to them, to be a community college faculty member.

### **Identity Theory**

This study aligns with the structural symbolic interactionist perspective and defines identity as “what it means to be who one is” (Stryker, 1980, p. 1). This perspective views an identity as a set of meanings applied to the self in social roles and situations (Cast, 2003). With roots going back to George Herbert Mead (1934), identity theory has grown and evolved over the years to become a strong framework for studying and understanding the world we live in by focusing on, among other things, individuals’ interpretations of themselves in the context in which they live (Burke & Stets, 2009).

### **Role Identities**

This study focuses particularly on the concept of *role identities* (Burke, 1980; McCall & Simmons, 1978), as opposed to social identities or personal identities, the two other types of identities recognized by identity theorists. Before I explain role identities, it is important to

clarify the distinctions between social and person identities. A social identity is based on a person's identification with a social group, which is defined as a set of individuals who share the view that they are members of the same social category (Burke & Stets, 2009; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Social identities may emerge, for example, from joining a fraternity or sorority, becoming a union member, or being active in a professional organization. Person identities are based on the qualities or characteristics that individuals on their own internalize, such as how kind, considerate, or moral they are (Stets & Carter, 2006).

Unlike social identities or person identities, role identities are derived from the roles that one plays, such as mother, steelworker, friend, or teacher. They are the internalized meanings of a role that a person applies to him or herself (Burke & Stets, 2009), and they are learned from shared cultural knowledge, our own personal experiences, and negotiating meanings through our interactions with role partners (Burke, 2003). Identity theorists focus much on role identities because they view roles as providing structure and meaning to selves and social situations (Burke & Stets, 2009). In addition, roles are associated with certain expectations that help guide people's attitudes and behavior (Burke & Stets, 2009).

### **Identity Control Model**

Building on these concepts and Stryker's (1980) work, Burke and his colleagues developed identity control theory (ICT) (Burke, 1980, 1991; Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009; Cast, 2003). In the spirit of Mead, ICT defines the concept of "meaning" as a response that a person has to a stimulus. For example, being a student (the stimulus) brings forth a set of meanings (or responses) for an individual who claims a student identity. In turn, these responses define for a person what it means to be a student, such as being academic, regularly attending class, and achieving good grades (Reitzes & Burke, 1980). ICT argues that "the

meaning of one's identity has implications for how one will behave, and one's behavior confirms the meanings in one's identity" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 49). Per ICT, each identity is viewed as a system whereby identity and behavior are linked and a feedback loop is established.

This loop has four main interconnected components: (1) the identity standard, (2) perceptual input, (3) a comparator, and (4) behavioral output (Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009). The *identity standard* is the defining set of meanings of a specific identity for a person. It represents the ideal image of what it means to be who one is in a situation. For example, some may consider the identity standard of a college student as being academically involved, intellectual, and hardworking (see Reitzes & Burke, 1980). Indeed, each identity standard may contain several meanings (Burke & Stets, 2009). As further discussion of the feedback loop will reveal, per ICT, people behave so as to keep their perceived self-relevant meanings aligned with the self-meanings of their identity standard (Burke, 2006).

Perceptions are central to identity because they are the *inputs* to identities. Ultimately, it is our perceptions—of things, people, our environment, and beyond—that we are trying to control. As Burke and Stets (2009) explain, we often think of ourselves as trying to control our environment, trying to manipulate objects, trying to interact with others; but in the end, it is only our perceptions that we have. As they state, “our perceptions are our only source of information about what is happening around us” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 64). Identity inputs (or perceptions) include how one sees oneself and the perceived feedback from others, referred to as “reflected appraisals” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 50). For example, for a college student, identity inputs may include self-perceptions and reflected appraisals that suggest he or she is smart (Reitzes & Burke, 1980).

Within the identity control model, individuals compare perceptions with the identity standard. They ultimately aim to control the perceptions of identity-relevant meanings to make them congruent with the set of meanings in the identity standard (Burke & Stets, 2009). This process is called identity verification and involves a *comparator* that functions to compare and contrast the perceived identity-relevant meanings with the meanings in the identity standard. When these meanings are congruent, a person's identity is verified; when these meanings are different, an "error signal" is produced and the person's identity is not verified (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 66). Referencing again the college student example, let us say that an individual, Tom, is a college student and, to him, the college student identity standard is being smart. When he perceives that others perceive him as smart, his college student identity is verified because his perceptions (i.e., identity inputs) match his identity standard. However, if he encounters perceptions that suggest he is not smart, an error signal is produced, leading to negative emotions, such as feeling stressed, angry, or unhappy (Stets, 2005; Zanna & Cooper, 1976), and his identity as a college student is not verified because his perceptions were not in accord with the identity standard.

This error signal ultimately affects a person's behavior, or identity *output*. Just as perceptions (or identity inputs) come from the situation or environment, behaviors or (identity outputs) are produced in the situation or environment. To help explain the identity feedback loop, Burke and Stets (2009) have used a scale relative to attributes to explain how the identity process works. Let us say that Tom's college student identity standard of being smart is at a level of 4. If an instructor asks Tom a question in class, and Tom gets it completely wrong, the situation may lead Tom to experience self-perceptions and reflected appraisals that suggest he is less smart (only at a level of 2) than his identity standard. This produces an error signal (-2 levels) and his

college student identity is not verified. Tim feels badly about this result, which motivates him to change his behavior, perhaps by trying to answer another question correctly, which could lead him to new identity inputs (i.e., perceptions) that suggest he is smart at a level of 4 once again, thus leading to no error signal and matching his identity standard again.

Within the ICT model, the goal is always to try to match the perception to the standard. To make clear, it is the perceived meanings or symbolic value of the behavior that are important according to the model, not the actual behavior itself (Burke, 2006). Stets and Burke (2003) succinctly summarized the model in the following way: “The system works by modifying outputs (behavior) to the social situation in attempts to change the input [e.g., reflected appraisals from others] to match the identity standard” (p. 137). Again, central to the ICT feedback loop is that people behave so as to keep their perceived self-relevant meanings aligned with the self-meanings of their identity standard (Burke, 2006).

### **Emotions and Identity**

The error signal that results from any discrepancy between the identity inputs and identity standard leads to an individual experiencing negative emotions, including depression (Burke & Reitzes, 1991), hostility (Cast & Burke, 2002), and stress, anger, or unhappiness (Stets, 2005; Zanna & Cooper, 1976). Conversely, the absence of an error signal—indicating that the identity inputs and identity standard are in accordance—will lead to positive emotions, such as satisfaction, happiness, and self-esteem (Burke & Stets, 2009; Cast & Burke, 2002; Stets, 2005). Stryker (1987) has argued that identities that generate positive emotions are more likely to be played out more frequently, and identities that lead to error signals and negative emotions are less likely to be played out.



Similarly, as Colbeck (2008) explains, when two or more identities with contrasting meanings and expectations are activated at the same time, an individual is likely to experience negative emotions, such as stress. Research also shows that having multiple identities that are congruent can be beneficial and lead to positive effects. For example, according to Marks (1977), individuals who are highly committed to several role identities may gain, rather than lose, energy (in the form of becoming more loyal and emotionally or occupationally involved) as they engage in activities related to two or more of their identities. In summary, identity theorists agree that negative emotions result from not meeting the expectations of one's identity or identities and that positive emotions result when identity expectations are met (Stets & Burke, 2003).

### **Identity Prominence and Salience**

As far back as James (1890), researchers are in agreement that people take on many identities over the course of their lives and can activate multiple identities at once (Burke & Stets, 2009). For example, in a classroom, Maria may activate her social identities as a woman and as a Latina, her role identities as a student and friend, and her person identities as considerate and curious. Similarly, individuals can attribute multiple meanings to their identities. For example, Maria may attribute multiple meanings to her student role identity, such as being hard working, studious, and clever.

Rarely, however, are multiple identities or identity meanings equally important to an individual. Depending on the individual and the context, some identities and identity meanings are more important than others. For instance, when interacting with her instructor, Maria may wish to be perceived as hard working more than she may wish to be perceived as clever. Using identity theory terminology, individuals rank certain identities and identity meanings higher on a prominence or salience hierarchy (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1968).

For this study, I use the concepts *identity prominence* and *identity salience* to explore how participants viewed and ranked their faculty identity meanings. These concepts are highly correlated and are often conflated; therefore, it is important to distinguish them from each other (Morris, 2013; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). In short, identity salience is based on probable behavior, while identity prominence is based on “the internalized importance of an identity” to an individual (Stets & Serpe, 2013). More specifically, identity salience is defined as the probability that one will enact a specific identity across situations (Stets & Serpe, 2013; Stryker, 1968). As such, identity salience is a behavioral indicator that represents an individual choosing to enact an identity (Stets & Serpe, 2013). For identity prominence, if one identity is more prominent to a person than another identity, then verification of that identity is more important than verification of the other. As Stets and Serpe (2013) explain, an identity ranking based on prominence characterizes the desires and values of an individual, and how they want others to see them.

In many instances, identity salience and identity prominence strongly overlap and correlate with another, whereby identities that rank high in terms of salience also rank high in terms of prominence (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). However, in some instances, identity salience and identity prominence work independently. In their analysis of the identities of college students, Stryker and Serpe (1994) found that the athletic/recreational and extracurricular role identities associated with being a college student were both salient and prominent, but the academic and friendship/personal involvement role identities were prominent but not salient, showing the independence of these concepts. This means that college students in their study responded that being academic and associated as a friend were important to how they thought of themselves, but not necessarily the first identities they would choose to enact across contexts. For this study, I use the concepts of identity salience and identity prominence to reveal the extent to which the

participants in this study similarly and differently rank the meanings that community college faculty ascribe to their faculty role identities.

In summary, this study is framed using identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) and asks: What does it mean to be a community college faculty member? More specifically, I examine the multiple meanings that community college faculty attribute to the community college faculty member identity standard. I also examine the way in which community college faculty describe situations when they felt they met their view of the community college faculty identity standard, and when they felt they fell short, paying particular attention to the emotional consequences that they describe and their resulting behavioral outputs. Finally, as a way to explore the different ways that participants rank the identity meanings they associate with being a community college faculty member, I examine how participants rank their faculty identity meanings in terms of salience and prominence.

### **Data and Methods**

This study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with the same fifteen community college faculty described in detail in Chapter 2. Snapshots of the participants' backgrounds are provided in Table 2.2 located in Chapter 2. At the time interviews were conducted, these faculty members all taught at Eastern Community College (ECC), the same comprehensive community college also described in detail in Chapter 2.<sup>3</sup> This section provides methodological details that are specific to this study of my dissertation. Refer to Chapter 2 for complete methodological details.

Using a grounded theory methodological technique (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and Nvivo qualitative research software, I analyzed and coded each transcript for recurrent themes, paying particular attention to the ways faculty described their faculty identities. I created

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<sup>3</sup> All names, including participant and institution names, are pseudonyms.

open codes based on what participants said, putting aside any preconceived categories of analysis. After analyzing all transcripts in this manner, I used focused codes (Charmaz, 2006), also known as axial codes (Corbin & Strass, 2008), to orient the major themes that I discuss here. Selective codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) emerged through further analysis and interaction with the theoretical concepts of role identity meanings, identity standard, identity verification, and identity salience and prominence (Burke, 2007; Burke & Stets, 2009; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stets & Serpe, 2013).

I used the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to identify similarities and differences within codes across the sample. This led me to pay particular attention to the similarities and differences between full-time and part-time faculty, English and math faculty, and faculty who teach mostly developmental classes versus faculty who teach mostly college-level classes. In the spirit of theory triangulation, I revisited different theories and literature, including work by Burke and Stets (2009), McCall and Simmons (1978), and Stets and Serpe (2013) to test whether these theories helped to explain and shed light on the data. I also sketched several diagrams and tables to aid in organizing my findings and reveal connections and distinctions across the sample.

## **Findings**

This section first details the common themes that emerged across all participants in how they described the community college faculty identity standard (Burke, 2007). Then, noteworthy differences are described that emerged between English and math faculty, faculty who taught predominantly developmental courses versus college-level courses, and full-time and part-time faculty in the ways in which they described the meanings they attribute to their faculty identities. Throughout this section, the way participants describe times when they felt their faculty

identities were and were not verified—and the way they described their resulting behavior—are presented.

### **Common Themes across Participants**

When asked to describe the ideal community college faculty member—that is, their professional identity standard—participants gave very consistent answers. Over all, they described ascribing four core meanings to the community college faculty identity standard. In summary, the ideal community college faculty member (1) is a passionate and expert teacher; (2) understands that community college students sometimes face difficult life circumstances and provides the support or connects them with support services they need; (3) cares about their students; and (4) serves their local community.

**Passionate and expert teacher.** Although community college faculty positions do not require official teacher certification the way that public K-12 teaching positions do, participants made clear that the ideal community college faculty member would be well versed in, as Jane put it, in the “craft of teaching.” To Jane, it is important that community college faculty “seek continued support for the craft of teaching, and understand that [teaching] *is* a craft.” Jon expanded on this when he stated, “I think you have to be more than just a perfunctory instructor. You really need to have a certain amount of wisdom, a certain breadth of preparation, a commitment to research in what you do on a continuous basis.” To participants, the professional identity standard towards which they aspire as community college faculty includes being a master teacher who has deep pedagogical skills, is committed to self-improvement, holds their students to the highest standards, and recognizes the importance of adjusting their teaching approaches based on their students’ needs.

However, being a master teacher is not enough. Many participants explicitly described the ideal community college faculty member as having a “passion” for teaching. Robin, who has served on several hiring committees over the course of her career of more than thirty years explained, “I’m looking for the spirit. I’m looking for the passion. . . . I don’t think [academic background] is nearly as important as the passion. . . . They have to want to be teachers—not something else.” Faculty on the tenure track at master’s and doctorate-granting colleges and universities are very much defined by their research and are motivated to “publish or perish” and “get grants or perish” (Vannini, 2006), but participants in this study made clear that the ideal community college faculty member is defined by his/her teaching and continually is motivated to be a better teacher.

While being a “content expert” also was frequently cited as an important characteristic of community college faculty—whether in math or English/composition—participants talked much more about the importance of being someone who is passionate about teaching students. Laura explained, “You have to know your subject matter, but don’t think that knowing your subject matter is going to get you very far. . . . [you have to] know how to get it to students.” To participants, fulfilling this element of the community college faculty identity standard does not require incorporating the latest technology in your classroom, having the fanciest lecture slides, or experimenting with different pedagogical methods. To them, being a good teacher means making the material relevant to students, making learning fun while also pushing students to work hard by having high expectations of them, and being friendly, approachable, and positive in the classroom and whenever interacting with students.

Data indicate that participants received positive feedback from students (reflected appraisals) when they enacted their faculty identities in these ways. For example, Brian

explained that “what makes the whole thing [of being a faculty member] worthwhile” is when students tell him “I have always hated writing, but now I see it as something that not only I can do, but I actually enjoy it. It’s something I can actually find enjoyment in.” As a result, Brian continues to teach with an emphasis on making learning to write enjoyable and fun. Dan, who teaches college-level math part-time, explained that he loves being a faculty member because he loves seeing his students “get it”—that is, understand whatever concept he is trying to teach them—and “the proverbial light bulb... comes on.” He explains, “You can see it on people’s faces when they get it,” which he describes as an intrinsic reward that comes with being a teacher. Despite the challenges of juggling multiple part-time faculty jobs and receiving a fraction of the salary that a full-time faculty member earns (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001; Gappa & Leslie, 1993), Dan continues to teach because he finds it fulfilling. In other words, he feels fulfilled when his faculty identity is verified in these ways.

Indeed, over all, participants expressed feeling positive emotions, such as “happy” and “having fun,” while in the classroom teaching. Sharita described feeling “excited” and “elated” about teaching her students and “being that person” who can help them “get” the material. Jane used a strong positive image to describe how she feels when she is teaching: “I like feeling like a rock star teaching English. I know it’s weird, but that’s the only think I can really equate it to.” Despite the demands and challenges they face as community college instructors, including high teaching loads and diversity of student backgrounds and preparedness (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), participants clearly ranked being a passionate, expert teacher very high in terms of identity salience and identity prominence. As Jon described it, “My primary role is teacher. Whatever else, it’s got to be subordinate to that.” participants described how being a passionate and expert

teacher was very important to how they viewed themselves (prominence) and that it was the most frequent element of their faculty identities that they would enact across contexts (salience).

However, participants also described times when they perceived reflected appraisals that did not match the meanings they ascribed to the community college faculty identity standard, leading to times when their faculty identities as passionate, expert teachers were not verified. For example, one semester, Lynn was teaching a literature class that she explained “negatively impacted [her] faculty identity” because she perceived her students were not becoming better writers or enjoying the class the way she wished. She explained that from her students, “I get a lot of surface touching on the literature, not digging deeper, not being as analytical as I’d like.” She said the experience “made [her] feel that [she] wasn’t effective” as a teacher, indicative of negative emotions that accompany an error signal when an identity is not verified. As a result, and as ICT would predict, Lynn adjusted her behavior by brainstorming different ways to engage her students by asking herself, “How am I going to get them to dig deeper? How am I going to get them away from the surface type of analysis that many of them are used to?”

There were other instances when participants described perceiving reflected appraisals that did not match this element of the community college faculty identity standard. For example, Sarah described having a “heckler” in her class and students who were only interested in receiving their financial aid and then would stop going to class, in effect dismissing her identity as a passionate, expert teacher. Similarly, other faculty described having students who could be very disrespectful, dismissive, and entitled. Interestingly, faculty described adjusting their behavior in similar ways in these situations. They would refocus their efforts on students who were interested in learning and who were respectful and tried hard in their classes, thereby



receiving reflected appraisals that brought their faculty identity meanings back in line with their view of the faculty identity standard.

**Student support.** To participants, the ideal community college faculty member recognizes the needs of students outside the classroom, which are sometimes dire, and tries to help students address those needs. Each participant described having students who were in need of help because of a range of difficult life circumstances, including becoming homeless, falling terminally ill, having been sexually assaulted, getting arrested or being on probation, dealing with an abusive partner or ex-partner, struggling with an addiction, suffering from mental illness, and more. Although the participants in this study (and community college faculty in general) are not trained to handle those types of needs, faculty described how students often turned to them and relied on them for help. Four participants explicitly talked about performing “social work” as part of what they do as community college faculty, and the others, while not explicitly, talked about how they would try to connect students who were facing hardships to support services on ECC’s campus or in the community. Lynn explained:

I had a student come to me with an unexpected pregnancy last fall – and it’s almost like you’re the clearinghouse. “Oh, this is your problem. Who can I help you connect with that you might not necessarily know to go to counseling or that we have these financial services here. Or you might not know that we have childcare. So these things are available. Yes, I’ve listed them in my syllabus, but really this is what I can help you with.”

Like Lynn, participants in this study often described their students as not being aware about services available to them. Most of their students are like most community college students—they drive to campus to attend class and then leave (Krause, 2007; Kubala & Borglum, 2000).

Their students have limited familiarity with their college outside of the classroom and outside their interactions with their faculty members. Lynn explains:

[Most students] are here part-time, and they don't have an RA [resident advisor]. They're not with a study group all the time or something like that. We [their instructors] may be the person who sees them the most consistently... And you might become the person that that student trusts.

Because they viewed that students relied on them in this way, participants believed informing students about support services and connecting students to services as needed were an important part of what it means to be a community college faculty member (identity salience) and were behaviors that they performed frequently across contexts (identity salience).

Justin, too, felt his students relied on him for support. He described being particularly in tune with his students' needs and, therefore, claimed that the most important part of his faculty identity was supporting his students in any way possible, both inside and outside the classroom.

As he put it:

If [my students] need a counselor, that's what I am. If they need an advocate within the system, then that's what I am. In the classroom, often what they need is a really good teacher, and so that's what I am. But that's not all they need. I have students that don't know how to get access to the resources that they need. So, to me, that's all part of it. Sometimes being a student they do need an advocate, someone who can help them voice what it is that they need, whether that's for [getting help if a student has a learning disability] or counseling, or the Student Resources Center or the ECC Foundation when they need funds.

For Justin, informing students about support services available to them is only part of what he strives to do to support his students. He goes further and aims to personally provide that support to his students or advocate on their behalf to make sure they get the help they need.

Of all four elements of the community college faculty identity standard, participants talked about this element as being the most challenging to match their view of the identity standard. The degree and quantity of their students' needs were often too much for them to handle. Robin shared a story that summarizes this struggle. Like most community college faculty teaching developmental classes at ECC, she always had at least two or three (although often more) students stop attending class over the course of the semester. One semester, she decided she was not going to allow any of her students in one of her developmental English classes to drop the course. She told them the first day: "You let me know. If you disappear, I will find you. If you need something, you let me know. We'll get you to school. You have to finish this class. There's no alternative." Given that ECC's withdrawal rate from developmental courses averaging 20 students was roughly 25 percent, this was quite a challenging goal, but she said, "I would do whatever it took." Soon into the semester, she realized just how challenging it would be. She explained what she had to do:

I had to drive students to class. I had to go pick them up. I had to loan them money. I had to do a lot of counseling. I had to fix one girl's foot. She had an artificial foot, and it broke. Fortunately, it broke in [a] building [that] used to have a shop on the first floor. I went to the shop and said "I have a student with a broken foot," and they came up and fixed her foot. She would have had to wait six weeks for a service to pitch in, and she would have lost [i.e., dropped] the class... I had to find tires. I couldn't afford to buy my student tires, but I went to all these

different places for them to say “This student needs tires on his car because he can’t get to school.”

That semester, Robin was a taxi driver, a banker, a counselor, a health care worker (which involved being a creative problem solver), an advocate, and a social worker—all in addition to being an instructor of English. Despite this intense effort, unfortunately, one student did stop attending class and disappeared. Robin described her emotions at this time as feeling devastated. As she put it, she “*lost* one student that semester” (emphasis added).

Indeed, taking on all these responsibilities was a challenge for Robin both professionally and personally. “I think my [own] children starved,” she said. “It was a fulltime social, counseling, financial kind of thing.” She was unable to make the same commitment again. “Just one semester for one class,” she said. “I couldn’t have kept it up. I was exhausted.” As ICT would predict (Burke & Stets, 2009), the error signal described above (feeling devastated when she could not retain every student in that class and feeling guilty that she neglected her own children) ultimately affected Robin’s behavior. She no longer strived so hard to retain every student in her classes. After investing so much time, energy, money, and sense of self in attempt to retain every student in that class—and still “losing” a student—Robin modified her view of the community college faculty identity standard and, thereby, modified her expectations of herself as a community college faculty member.

Robin described feeling conflicted about her decision to no longer hold herself to the same standard again. Although she found support among her faculty and staff colleagues at the college, she lamented, “I was the only one that knew that that student needed tires or that so-and-so needed to be picked up.” This statement illustrates the importance of the relationship between community college faculty and their students, as per participants in this study. Because

community college students commute to campus and often have multiple competing commitments in terms of work and family (Horn et al., 2006), oftentimes their instructors are the individuals at their college whom they may know and interact with the most. As a result, community college faculty, like Robin, may be the only people on their campuses who know what their students need in order to be successful.

**Care about students.** Related to supporting their students, participants also described the importance of genuinely caring about their students. While supporting students involves taking action (either directly supporting students or connecting students to the support services they need), caring about students is more affective and does not necessarily involve taking action. To nearly all participants, genuinely caring about students was key to how they viewed the community college faculty identity standard. Tim explained, “I think number one is getting students to trust you, which is really one of the most important things to get them to do anything. They have to somehow feel that you care about them. You don’t have to like them. Care about them.” Tim’s mention that getting his students to trust him was his first “number one” goal indicates that he ranks caring about students high in terms of identity salience. Jon emphasized that he is not a “friend” or “buddy” to his students but he genuinely cares about them and their learning. He even used the term “loving” to describe the connection that an ideal community college faculty member has to his/her students. He stated: “I think you have to have a loving connection with the students – not that you’re their buddy, but that you do care about them, and you’re willing to go through what you have to do to develop competence.”

Participants described caring about their students in a variety of other ways in order to make their faculty identities congruent with their faculty identity standard. Nearly every participant explicitly mentioned that they aimed to get to know their students and connect with

them on a personal level. They also were understanding and flexible when hardships arose and deadlines had to be adjusted. They mentioned being good listeners to students when students confided in them about difficulties with which they were struggling. Faculty also strived to make their classrooms “comfortable and safe” places. They attempted to make sure their students felt welcome and part of a community. These are all examples of identity outputs that led to positive reflected appraisals (inputs) that reinforced these behavioral outputs.

Addressing many of these points, Jane talked a great deal about the importance of making a connection with her students and making them feel like they “are a part of something” while in college:

Most of the students who struggle... have this feeling of not being connected.

They don't feel that important... People want to feel like they're part of something – like they're respected, that whatever they have to say matters in some way. And if that's not happening... then it's going to continue to be a struggle...

You have to build every little step. You have to make them feel comfortable and safe... You absolutely need to make certain that you get them into the system so that they feel like they're a part of it, and they become invested.

Most participants in this study would agree with Jane—caring about students and making them feel connected and part of a community is key to building the foundation necessary for their success. Although community college faculty are trained and hired as content experts in their respective fields, they view themselves as much more than just content experts. This is just one example illustrating that phenomenon.

Justin reflected on the importance of caring for students and determined that “you can teach folks how to teach... but you can't teach someone how to care about the students that they

teach... I think that's just something that... you learn all throughout your life.” He revealed that he learned about the importance of caring about students through teachers he had in the past. His English teacher in high school was one such teacher. He explained, “I may not have graduated high school if it wasn't for that guy's tenacious caring. Caring about you when you didn't care about yourself kind of thing. I mean, serious tenacity.” Once again, Justin reveals that he strives towards a very high faculty identity standard. To him, it is not enough to care for his students; he aims to *tenaciously* care about them.

To Justin, tenaciously caring about his students involves more than just affection; it involves being accessible to them whenever possible. Justin explains:

What I do is what I call relationship-based teaching. The thing that I do that I don't think a lot of folks do is make myself both physically and emotionally accessible to my students as often as humanly possible. Basically, I tell my students that as long as I'm not sleeping, I am accessible to you. To me, that is the important part – that they really grow to believe that they have an ally.

Justin makes clear here the very personal aspect of his teaching. He is not just physically accessible to his students—that is, making himself available to consult with face-to-face during office hours (or other times he is on campus) or over the phone during the evenings—he makes himself *emotionally* accessible to his students as well. These excerpts make clear that Justin ranks caring about his students very high in terms of identity prominence and identity salience. Caring for his students is personally very important to Justin (identity prominence); he desires his students to feel cared about and “really grow to believe” that he is their ally. He also behaves in extraordinary ways to enact this element of his faculty identity across contexts (identity salience).

Justin shared a story that further revealed how caring for his students is an essential element of his faculty identity. One of his developmental math students confided in him that she was in a forced, abusive marriage in her country of origin in southeast Asia, and that her family had told her that “she’s too ugly to do things” and “too stupid to go to school.” According to Justin, she was “an incredibly good student” but, due to these difficult life circumstances, completely lacked confidence in herself. Even though she was no longer in one of his classes at the time of our interview, he mentioned he still regularly set aside time to meet with her and tutor her. During these sessions, Justin said that, at most, 25 percent of the time was devoted to working on math problems, and at least 75 percent of his efforts were focused on “providing [her] emotional support” by saying, for example, “You *do* know how to do this; you *are* good enough to be participating in school.” They converse over email quite a bit as well, and, while she vents to him about the stress she is under, he keeps telling her, “You can do it. You’ve done it before and you can do this, too.” Caring for his students by instilling confidence in them is both prominent and salient to his faculty identity.

However, Justin admits “it’s not like it’s all give;” he benefits a great deal from tenaciously caring for his students. “Your students do well, and that really builds you up,” he says. Watching this particular student go from someone who was not confident in pre-algebra, to getting ready to take pre-calculus is, as he put it, “amazing.” Justin continued, “How often can you put in an immense amount of energy and see that sort of return on your investment? It’s incredible.” Justin got a little emotional talking about how he attends graduation each and every year. He stated:

I go to graduation every year in May, and I see students who never thought that they would graduate. They never dreamed of being in school the first semester I



saw them. And here, they've got this gown on and this funny-looking hat that's not very comfortable, and the pride just emanating from them. And watching their family members cry because no one's ever graduated from college before in their family. That is...it's amazing. It's just beautiful.

Generating these types of positive emotions, including strong personal and professional fulfillment as well as pride in his students and himself, are indicative of identity verification—the meanings of Justin's faculty identity and the meanings held in his perception of the faculty identity standard were congruent (Burke and Stets, 1999; Cast and Burke, 2002). As ICT explains, Justin receives positive identity inputs when he tenaciously cares for his students and his students do well, which “really builds [him] up.” Being perceived as a tenaciously caring teacher (by himself and others) compares positively to his view of the community college faculty identity standard. Because his faculty identity is verified, his identity output is to continue to care for his students in this way, leading to further positive reflected appraisals of what he does and who he is as a community college faculty member.

However, it is important to note that not every community college faculty member—and not every participant in this study—believes it is his or her job to “tenaciously” care about students the way Justin aims to do. As Laura, a full-time math faculty member, put it, “It's not my particular forte to [say to students]... ‘I'm sorry things are going badly for you.’ I'm definitely not a counselor. I'm here for the math.” At the same time, Laura also talked about how she engages with students about their career plans and tries to encourage students who show promise but lack confidence. She would tell them: “Look at your work. I would hire this work, this is great... You might think about making sure you get a four-year degree, because it looks to me like you have it.” So, while Laura made clear she did not want to be a counselor to her

students, she mentioned how she still connected with and encouraged her students when it came to their academics and career paths, which arguably is another way of caring about students.

Sarah, a part-time math faculty member, also does not view herself as a counselor to students. In fact she described feeling uncomfortable when students shared with her their personal matters. When she perceived that students were expecting her to act like a counselor, she changed her behavior by telling her students that it is “inappropriate” for them to tell her their personal issues. She would tell them: “I don’t need to know why you’re not class or why you couldn’t get your assignment done... I don’t even want to read an email about what happened in someone’s life personally because it in no way affects their grade or the classroom.” When students have come to her with personal problems, she directs them to counseling. “If they need that kind of counseling, they should go to counseling,” she says. Like Laura, Sarah focuses her time and energy on teaching math—that is why she was hired; that is what she is “paid to do.”

Yet, Sarah also talked about how she sees herself as a “gardener, cultivating and encouraging students from diverse backgrounds.” While she does not engage with her students’ personal issues, she still cares very much about their academic success: she teaches them math to the best of her ability and encourages them to do well. In this sense, Sarah, too, cares about her students even though she prefers to keep personal matters outside the classroom.

Robin, in her experience as a community college faculty member for more than three decades, explained how some faculty want to make a personal connection with their students—and view that connection as central to their faculty identity—while others do not. She called these two types of teachers “mommy teachers” and “daddy teachers.”<sup>4</sup> Daddy teachers, she

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<sup>4</sup> The terms “mommy teacher” and “daddy teacher” clearly touch on the issue of gender roles, but discussing the genderization inherent in this comment is outside the scope of this chapter.

explained, focus on being an instructor and tend to not engage with students outside of their class material. “It’s not that [a “daddy teacher”] doesn’t care,” she explained. Instead, these faculty (like Laura and Sarah) view their faculty identity as instructors first and foremost. Robin, on the other hand, considers herself a “mommy teacher,” and says “my job is to make you feel good and do better and nurture you.” All the faculty in this study, even Laura and Sarah who made clear they were not counselors, talked about how they care about their students in one way or another. However, like Robin, most faculty in this study talked about caring, even “tenaciously caring,” for their students—personally as well as academically.

**Serve the community.** Many participants described the importance of serving their communities when they talked about their faculty identities and how they viewed the ideal community college faculty member. Six participants, both full-time and part-time faculty members and both English and math faculty, explicitly mentioned that serving their community was a key component of their faculty identities. The other participants also talked about the importance of their community, just more indirectly. Overall, serving the community was a very strong theme that emerged from the data.

For example, after Sarah described her faculty identity as a gardener, she explicitly talked about how she views herself as serving the community. She explained:

This community college is not exclusive. Anybody can come, and people need sometimes second, third, and fourth chances until they can get it together, and then they can get through. We [community college faculty] are here to serve the community – not self-serve, but outward.

Like a gardener does with his/her assorted plants and flowers, Sarah described how she cultivates and encourages students from diverse backgrounds, and how this has become an integral part of

how she views herself as a community college faculty member. Her use of “we” to refer to community college faculty suggests she views herself as part of a professional group with a common mission and common values, including to serve the community. This excerpt shows the connection that Sarah makes between her teaching and community-serving identities: By teaching at a local open-access college and teaching students from across the community, she views her teaching as directly benefiting the community in which she lives.

Alison, too, expressed how serving her community was a significant part of her faculty identity. When asked what it means to be a community college faculty member, Alison stated that it means “I’m part of the community. It’s a community in which the opportunities both for personal growth and for helping others grow are almost boundless.” Interestingly, both Sarah and Alison used similar metaphorical language to describe what it means to be a community college faculty member. Sarah compared herself to a gardener that “cultivates” student growth and, above, Alison describes how she is part of a community where she can grow and help others grow as well. (See Chapter 4 for a deeper analysis of the metaphorical language used by participants to describe their faculty identities.) In this way, community college faculty in this study viewed facilitating growth and development of their students and communities as integral to their faculty identities.

Jon used almost identical language to Alison in the ways in which he described his faculty identity. When discussing the complexity of how he views the ideal community college faculty member, he stated, “You’re all *part of the community* [students and faculty alike]. You walk in the classroom door, it’s not like you leave everything behind. You’re dealing with students within the context of their lives” (emphasis added). Being “part of the community” as a community college faculty member is not a choice for Jon; it comes with the job.

Being part of a community and serving his community are extremely strong influences on Justin's faculty identity as well. When Justin talked about how he is both "physically and emotionally accessible" to his students, he explained that he is this way because "I really care about my community and so my students are part of my community." Like Sarah, he explained that he places such importance on serving his community because he is invested in his community and really cares about it. He stated, as a community college faculty member, "you are directly enhancing your community. It's not selfless. I don't do it for selfless reasons. I do it because I want my community to be better. I want to live in a place that I'm proud to live in." As discussed in earlier sections, Justin gets great personal fulfillment from teaching his students and helping them succeed academically, but he also invests so much time and energy teaching, supporting, and caring for his students because it directly translates to serving and bettering his community.

Kim seems to agree with Justin. "To be a community college faculty member," she explains, "you need to be engaged in the whole process of these students becoming responsible community members." She added that community college faculty need to focus on more than just teaching their content because they are also helping students to develop into "good thinkers, savvy customers, literate, numerically literate people who can function in society." In summary, she states, that the "big picture" of what community college faculty do is "to serve the community." Indeed, serving the community was a strong theme that resonated across all participants in this study.

It is clear from these excerpts that these participants ranked serving the community high in terms of their identity prominence hierarchy. After reflection, they described how serving their communities was important to how they thought of themselves. However, in terms of identity

salience, data suggest that serving their communities is not the first identity they would choose to enact across most contexts. In general, teaching, supporting students, and caring about students (in that order) ranked higher in terms of identity salience than serving their communities.

### **Themes Specific to Faculty Types**

While teaching students, supporting students, caring for students, and serving the community were all common elements of the community college faculty identity standard expressed by participants, some noteworthy differences emerged specific to faculty types. This section describes those differences.

**Departmental differences.** In general, English and math faculty had different ways of describing how they care about their students. As discussed earlier, Laura and Sarah, both math faculty members, made clear they were not counselors and preferred not to engage with their students about their personal issues. Sarah explained that she does not need to know about the difficult life circumstances that may have prevented a student from completing an assignment on time because “for math, there’s no [gray area], it’s right or it’s wrong.” Laura also admitted that she doesn’t often hear about her students’ personal lives because she’s a math faculty member. As she put it, “I’m not teaching creative writing,” and, thus, she doesn’t hear too often about her students’ personal struggles. As will be discussed later, it is also important to note that both Laura and Sarah have predominantly taught college-level math, not developmental math.

The English faculty members, however, heard directly and frequently from students about their personal struggles, including and especially through required writing assignments. To persuade his students to do more writing practice outside of class, Jon has his students write journal entries over the course of the semester. Students shared with him a variety of intensely personal issues through their journals. For example, he learned that one of his students was

“really badly abused” by a former partner and “ended up stabbing” him. He talked about the challenges that come with teaching writing to students from difficult and disadvantaged backgrounds. “It’s a lot of effort to be going over all these papers all the time and dealing with it,” that is, trying to be empathetic and nonjudgmental about students’ life circumstances, while also being a writing instructor whose job it is to critique and judge a piece of writing.

Alison also struggled with this challenge. Through students’ essays, Alison found out that some of her students had been raped; had been sexually abused as children; had alcoholic, absent, and abusive parents; had been to jail; found themselves homeless and living out of their cars; not to mention other challenging life struggles. She reflected on how difficult navigating being both caring and empathetic on the one hand and being an effective writing instructor on the other:

Here, you have a writing assessment, and they tell about an experience that there is no way you can judge. You can’t judge the writing when they’re telling this kind of a story. I see that this writing level is not up to par for this class, but I can’t rip through this writing.

Alison wants to be caring and supportive of her students and she also wants to be a good writing instructor and improve her students’ writing, but when students share such personal information about themselves, it is very difficult to perform both well. As Alison explains it, “You’re frozen by the devastation of this person’s experience.” She finds herself struggling to teach her students and care about her students at the same time, two integral ways that she defines her faculty identity and the community college faculty identity standard.

In this situation where she finds herself “frozen” by the devastation of her students’ life circumstances, the meanings of her faculty identity are incongruent with the meanings held in the

community college faculty identity standard. The experience makes it difficult for her to enact her teacher identity, including grading her students writing, thereby preventing her from verifying her faculty identity. As a result, she experiences an error signal and, in turn, feels stress, concern, and anxiety about it (Stets, 2005; Zanna & Cooper, 1976).

Consequently, as identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) would predict, Allison modified her behavior in attempt to make her faculty identity more congruent with the identity standard. She revealed that she now clearly states to her students that they should not write about personal issues for their class assignments. Even for suggested topics that are not intended to be personal or elicit much emotion, Alison tells her students not to write about something that is “so emotional” to the extent that they find themselves “pouring emotions into it” instead of thinking about how best to write it. This behavioral output helps Allison control student perceptions and expectations of her, mitigating the chances that a student would reveal something so personal that she would not be able to teach her students and care about her students at the same time. This action increases the chances that the meanings of her faculty identity will match the meanings of the identity standard, thus leading to identity verification.

As Jon explains, however, there is “an intimacy that develops” between himself and his students when students write about their life struggles, and this intimacy enables and empowers him to “have a chance to make real change and to get people to develop real confidence.” He cares deeply about his students and his community, so making this connection with students—despite the identity conflict that can sometimes result—makes it all “worth it” to him. It is worth it because, for him, these multiple meanings of his faculty identity (caring about his students, supporting his students, and teaching his students) can also act in concert and be congruent—not just be in conflict (Colbeck, 2008). This multiple identity congruence leads to this “intimacy”



that Jon describes and has positive effects. He becomes more loyal to his students and more emotionally and occupationally committed to his profession as a community college faculty member, just as Marks (1977) would predict.

How can a community college writing instructor attempt to ensure these multiple identity meanings work in concert rather than opposition? Brian explained what he does to compartmentalize the multiple meanings he attributes to his faculty role identity:

I really, really emphasize how much I appreciate them [i.e., his students] taking this risk of showing an instructor this kind of material. Then I recognize how difficult it must have been to even write this down, and then turn it in.

Brian first enacts the part of his faculty identity that is focused on caring and supporting his students. He puts his writing instructor identity on hold until he communicates with his student person-to-person, as opposed to faculty-to-student, letting them know he appreciates them and respects them for sharing with him some of what they might be struggling with in life. With this empathy expressed and understanding reached, he then feels ready to enact his writing instructor identity and view the piece of writing from a more objective faculty stance. Still, sometimes this strategy does not work. Brian admits, “maybe I can be better trained in what to do.” Like most community college faculty—and certainly most part-time community college faculty —Brian was hired for his expertise in his subject area, not for awareness on how to handle situations when students reveal tragic circumstances that are affecting their lives. Throughout his interview, Brian talked about his wishes for more professional development in these areas. The implications section of this chapter discusses this and other beneficial professional development opportunities that this study illuminates.

**Academic level differences.** With regard to the ways they talked about their faculty identities, interesting differences emerged between faculty who taught mostly developmental courses and faculty who taught mostly college-level courses. Indeed, despite teaching a completely different subject matter, faculty who taught developmental English and developmental math viewed their faculty identities in very similar ways.

First, the faculty interviewed for this study who taught mostly developmental classes (and in some cases, exclusively developmental classes) universally agreed that a primary focus of their job was to instill confidence in their students. Justin explained that his students have to enroll in his class—the lowest level math offered at ECC—because they struggled throughout their K-12 education experience and, therefore, “bring thirteen years of failure with them.” Because of this, he strongly believes that, as their faculty member, he needs to convince them that they *can* be successful. “If you can’t convince them that they can do it, then it’s kind of over.” That is, students will not even try to be successful in his class—and just accept failure like they have experienced in the past—if they do not have the confidence that they can do well. As students who have experienced persistent academic failure in the past, they typically have few sources of academic encouragement. As a community college faculty member who teaches developmental math, Justin sees himself as having to be a very important source of encouragement and confidence in his students’ lives. Kathy does as well. For developmental courses, she explained, “it’s not just about content... it’s motivation.” In other words, content is not as critical as encouraging, supporting, and motivating students so they can build the confidence they need and truly believe they can succeed.

Sharita, who teaches developmental writing, would agree as well. She, too, is always trying to give her students confidence. “I think developmental English... is really different,” she

said. “You are trying to give them the basic mechanics, but you’re also trying to give them confidence in writing.” She admits that she sometimes gives her students more positive feedback on their writing than she otherwise would because “if you are just very harsh on them in your grading, they are not going to want to put forth the effort. They’re just not.” She, like Jane and Robin, wants her students to be better writers, and to be better writers, they need encouragement and confidence, two things she believes she can and should provide as their faculty member. Although they teach developmental math, Justin and Kathy also aim for their students to be better—better at math—and to be better at math, they, too, need encouragement and confidence, two things they believe they can and should provide as their faculty members as well.

Encouraging students and helping to build their confidence in this way falls under the third component of the community college faculty identity standard described above—caring about students. To be sure, faculty who taught mostly developmental courses talked about the importance of this component of their faculty identities in greater depth than faculty who taught only college-level courses (identity prominence) and also shared examples of how they frequently chose to enact the caring component of their faculty identities (identity salience). This suggests that caring about students has a higher level of identity prominence and identity salience for faculty who teach mostly developmental courses than faculty who teach mostly college-level courses. As Burke and Stets (2009) explain, if more than one identity is activated in a situation, the identity with the higher level of prominence will guide behavior more than an identity with a lower level of prominence. Indeed, as the quotes above reveal, faculty who taught developmental courses prioritized caring for their students and instilling confidence in them.

Another common way faculty who taught mostly developmental courses described their faculty identities was how they emphasized, as part of the teaching component of their identities,

the importance of teaching “soft skills” or “college skills” to their students and viewed it as part of their job. Kathy tells her students upfront that her class focuses on how to be a college student just as much—if not more—than how to do math. She tells them:

You have had this math before. It just didn’t work for you when you had it before.

You can’t do it the same way and expect different results, so what are the other ways that you’re going to do that?

Especially since she found that so many of her students feared math, she realized her classes “had to be more about the study skills and the enthusiasm [i.e., making learning fun] than it did about the math.” Even though she’s an English faculty member, Sharita talked about the importance of teaching study skills in very similar ways. She explains: “The class material is, of course, always writing and English and all that fun stuff, but my class is really... very basic college skills.” The types of skills Sharita teaches her students include how to manage time, how to take notes in class, how to study outside of class, what office hours are and why they are important, how to check email, and how to respond to an email in a professional manner. Sharita describes these as “the basic skills necessary to be successful in school and professional life.” According to the faculty interviewed for this study, one reason students place into developmental level classes is because they lack these types of soft skills that are so necessary to be successful students. This is supported by research as well (Karp, 2011). Because of this, developmental faculty realize that they have to prioritize teaching their students these type of soft skills over teaching them the course content. Justin put it bluntly: “I’m a developmental math teacher. The math is secondary. You are teaching them how to be students.” Knowing that a lack of college skills was a big barrier to success for their students, these developmental faculty members took it

upon themselves to educate their students about how to be a good student even though it was outside the scope of their subject matter.

Some faculty who taught mostly college-level courses (or at least preferred to teach college-level courses) described incidences when teaching developmental courses led to negative emotions and experiencing a mismatch between their faculty identities and their view of the community college faculty identity standard. For example, Dan explained:

After a while of teaching the developmental ed [courses], you just kinda go, “Oh, my gosh. I feel so weighted down sometimes.” Because the frustration level kicks in sometimes where you’re either trying to help them get it, and they don’t, but they’re not helping themselves [either]. It can weigh on you. Once you get to a higher level [of math], then you feel like, “Oh, I’ve got this ability,” which certainly helps.

Here, Dan describes how he has faced difficulty verifying his faculty identity when teaching developmental courses. The identity inputs he received and perceived did not always match the the set of meanings in the community college faculty identity standard, leading to negative emotions such as the frustration he describes above. Instead of feeling like an enthusiastic and passionate teacher, after some time teaching developmental courses, Dan felt “weighed down.” Instead, Dan prefers teaching college-level courses (and therefore, college-level students) because he has experienced identity inputs (perceptions) that he *is* a good teacher; as he put it, “I’ve got this ability.” This action—teaching college-level courses instead of developmental courses—brings his view of the meanings of his faculty identity back to being congruent with the community college faculty identity standard, and his faculty identity is verified again.

**Employment status differences.** One of the more important and noteworthy findings from this study is that the full-time and part-time faculty talked about their faculty identities in strikingly similar ways, despite their very different employment statuses. Indeed, both part-time and full-time faculty talked about the importance of being a passionate and expert teacher, providing support or connecting students to support services they need, caring about students, and serving their communities. Yet, some differences did emerge from the data that are important to note. These employment status differences are described in this section.

**Full-time faculty.** Not surprisingly, full-time faculty talked a great deal more than part-time faculty about taking on more administrative duties and serving the college as part of their faculty identities. Jane served on the college’s Achieving the Dream<sup>5</sup> team (as did Justin) and formed the college’s developmental task force. She also organized ECC’s faculty in-service days for the college and considered herself one of the three main faculty “in charge” of the English department (along with Tim and the department chair) to whom other English faculty can go for guidance or help. Jane finds fulfillment in these leadership roles. Being a leader is a strong part of her faculty identity—so much so that she sees herself embracing more of an administrator identity in the future. She explains, “Although I love being in the classroom, my natural abilities to organize and lead will likely guide me toward administrative roles, even the opportunity to seek a position as a college president.”

Kim, too, has taken on a variety of leadership roles at ECC. As chair of the math department, she sees herself as a “liaison” to students, to other teachers, to administrators, and to support staff—“to really every facet of the college.” She aims to keep everyone up to date and “in the loop.” She also serves on a variety of committees. “I always get into an institution and get

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<sup>5</sup> Achieving the Dream is a national organization that supports community colleges as they design and implement data-driven student success initiatives.

hyper involved,” she explains. She has served on “tons” of hiring committees, as well as the assessment committee, the faculty professional development committee, and accreditation committees. When asked why she takes on so many leadership roles, Kim said, “I don’t know. It’s just my personality. I like to be involved in the institution.” Like Jane, Kim experiences positive emotions when enacting this faculty leader part of her faculty identity.

Tim also viewed being a resource and a mentor for part-time faculty as an important part of his job and his faculty identity. As part of what he calls “informal mentoring,” Tim shares with his part-time colleagues sample syllabi and gives them advice about positioning themselves for a full-time job, if that is what they are seeking. Just like he does for students who share with him their worries, Tim listens to his part-time faculty colleagues, encourages them, and gives them advice. According to Tim, who taught part-time for ten years before being hired full-time, the more connections part-time faculty have, the better; and he views helping part-time faculty make more connections as part of his job and his faculty identity.

When asked about what, if anything, negatively affects their view of their professional identity, full-time faculty in this study talked about colleagues they know who “take the easy road” and “do nothing else beyond” teaching their classes. They generally expressed negative emotions when they described these types of colleagues. Jane articulated these frustrations particularly well. She remarked, “It’s frustrating sometimes when I just see the glazed over look or the lack of desire to really push and do something differently or even engage their students differently.” When asked about times she has felt stressed or angry in her faculty career, Jane answered that the only thing that really angers and upsets her is “incompetence with faculty” which she feels “put[s] the rest of us in positions to have to defend the name of ECC or the role”—i.e., the professional role of community college faculty in general. She continued, “It’s

really frustrating when somebody's allowed to persist in a position that I hold so dear." This finding suggests that a *professional* identity verification process may exist that involves an additional layer of verification than Burke and Stets' (2009) ICT model proposes. Could it be that some kind of professional identity discordance occurs if professionals perceive that certain colleagues of theirs do not aspire towards the same or similar professional identity standard, regardless of whether they view themselves as meeting their professional identity standard? This phenomenon is discussed in greater depth in the discussion section of this chapter.

***Part-time faculty.*** Overall, part-time faculty expressed more frustrations than full-time faculty about personally not being able to be the best faculty they can be. Of the four common elements of the community college faculty identity standard that this study has illuminated, the elements with which part-time faculty encountered the most challenges were effectively supporting students and caring about students.

Interestingly, the way in which many part-time faculty described feeling disconnected, overwhelmed, isolated, and exhausted from juggling multiple jobs is very similar to the way community college students might describe feeling as well. Like many community college students, part-time faculty lack connections with others. As Brian put it:

What is the part-time experience? It's funny because it's pretty similar to, I think, a lot of the students' experience. Come to campus, go to the classroom, do your thing, go home. That's it. No interaction with anybody else.

Lynn, too, has felt disconnected from others. She remarked:

I do have a feeling of being one of millions. I know this because if I were put into a room with all the other part-time faculty members, I would look and people and say, "I've never seen you before. Do you teach here?"



Alison agreed. “I know my students so much better than I know my colleagues,” she remarked. Being so isolated and disconnected from the rest of the college makes it difficult to know about the services available to students when students need extra support. Perhaps the biggest challenge is often not knowing the names of people who work in student services, from counseling to learning support to academic advising. As Sharita describes, the “least enjoyable part” of being a part-time faculty member for her is not being able to give “good referrals” to students in trouble or students just needing extra help. She explains, “I need to send you to a name, you know, because if you send them to [an office on campus], [students] won’t go.” According to Sharita, without a name, without an actual person to talk to, visiting a student services office can be “intimidating” to students. This lack of a connection to the campus and, more specifically, a lack of a connection to other people on campus make it very difficult for part-time faculty to verify their identities by adequately supporting their students and directing them to extra help their students often need.

Part-time faculty also described not fully being able to care about and connect with students because, as part-time employees, they lacked the time and space to do so. Dan had a unique perspective to share on this point because, after teaching part-time for six years at ECC, he was hired as a temporary full-time faculty member to replace someone who was on medical leave for an entire academic year. Because he lacked a master’s degree, he was unqualified to be hired for the permanent full-time position, so he went back to teaching part-time. In terms of the differences between being a full-time faculty member and a part-time faculty member, Dan found that having more time and space as a full-time faculty member was a critical benefit. He explained:

It was great [being a full-time faculty member that year]. Not only that I got my own office, but I knew that I could just be here [at the college]. And I didn't have to do the running around [between multiple part-time jobs].

Dan talked a great deal about how listening to students and being “there for them to help them” with everything from the course content to difficulties outside of class was an important part of being a community college faculty member and influential part of his personal faculty identity. Connecting with students this way was much easier as a full-time faculty member because he had more time to spend with students and because he had his own office on campus where he could meet with students—where “they can come and talk to you”—as well. He explained, “Yeah, as a full-timer, I had the time because I could just focus on here. I didn't teach anywhere else that year... I just was here.” As a full-time faculty member, he could finally focus—focus on his students and focus on his craft. This led to more opportunities to verify his faculty identity.

He also found that the year he was a full-time faculty member he could connect better with his colleagues as well as his students—which ultimately positively benefited his students. It was “nice” being a temporary full-timer that year because “when you're part-time faculty, it's hard to feel part of the school,” Dan explained. He enjoyed being surrounded by other math faculty in his office area. “The [department] chair was right there,” he explained, “and you can have easy conversations in your office” with colleagues on topics ranging from the curriculum to concerns about students to just about anything. (The benefits of collegial connections are discussed in more depth in Chapter 5.) The more professionally connected Dan felt and the more he felt part of ECC, the better he felt he was performing as a community college faculty member. As a full-time faculty member that year, he felt like he was a better teacher, better at supporting students, better at caring for students, and better at serving his community as a result.

Dan was not the only part-time faculty member in this study who expressed frustration with the lack of time available to be the best faculty member he/she could be. Lacking time to connect with and care for students was a challenge Sharita dealt with as well. She really wanted to do some part-time academic advising in addition to her teaching because she saw it as a great opportunity to learn more about ECC, meet some full-time academic advisors and counselors, and be able to better support her students whom she felt needed extra counseling support. She would finally be able to give “good referrals” and direct her students to an actual person, not just the impersonal and intimidating-sounding “Student Counseling Center.” However, she lamented that she just did not have the time to take on part-time advising in addition to her full-time job and part-time instructor job. In general, part-time faculty interviewed for this study felt unsure about being able to focus on their job and their students because of their part-time status.

The lack of a private space to meet with students was a real challenge for part-time faculty as well. Sharita explained that the communal space for part-time faculty is “not really conducive to that one-on-one meeting space that you kind of need for students.” Faculty expressed that it was awkward trying to work with and connect with a student who was struggling, academically or otherwise, in the communal space because other part-time faculty and other students could “overhear” conversations and were, therefore, privy to everything that was talked about. Because of this, Alison envied the full-time faculty for having a “private” office to meet with students, where it is easier to emotionally connect with students who might need that support. Recognizing the importance of having a private space to meet and connect with students, Sharita would often tell her students to visit her at her full-time job’s office. “I’ll just tell students, just come and see me at my other office because at least I know I can have a quiet space for us to meet.” As the quotes from part-time faculty reveal, the lack of time and

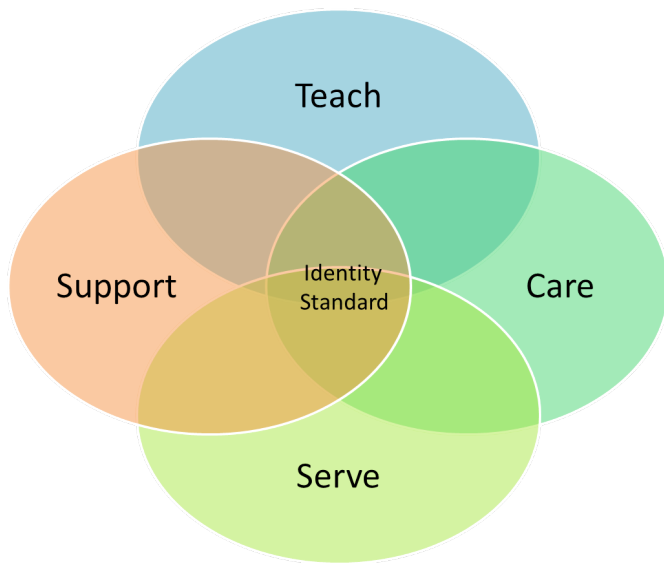
space they must deal with as part-time faculty make it difficult for them to perform their faculty identities to the standard they wish.

## Discussion

### What It Means to Be a Community College Faculty Member

To summarize the findings of this study, participants described four critical components of what it means to be a community college faculty member: (1) being a passionate and expert teacher, (2) providing students with the support they need or connecting students to the support services they need, (3) caring about students, and (4) serving their community. See Figure 3.1 below.

*Figure 3.1: Set of meanings that participants ascribed to the community college faculty identity standard*



What does it mean to be a community college faculty member? It means seeking “continued support for the craft of teaching,” being a “content expert,” and having a passion for teaching—as Robin put it, community college faculty “have to want to be teachers—not something else.” It also means recognizing the oftentimes difficult life circumstances that their

students face and either supporting students directly by helping them overcome those challenges or acting like a “social worker” and directing them to support services on campus or in the community. It means caring about their students and their academic success and, to some faculty, even “tenaciously caring” about them, listening to them, and being accessible to them beyond the classroom. It means appreciating the community college mission and recognizing the importance of serving and enhancing their communities by teaching their students important academic, professional, and life skills so they are successful in their class, in college, in work, and in society in general.

The community college faculty identity standard represents the overlap of these four common meanings that participants ascribe to their faculty identities. Each meaning is part of the whole. Although some participants weighed these meanings differently and placed them at differing levels of identity prominence (McCall & Simmons, 1978) and identity salience (Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Serpe, 1994), according to participants, the ideal community college faculty member represents and performs all four: teaching, supporting, caring, *and* serving.

### **Identity Verification**

When participants found themselves unable to perform any of these elements well, they experienced a variety of negative emotions suggesting that their faculty identity was not verified, just as identity control theory predicts (Burke, 2007). For example, Robin felt “devastated” when she “lost” one student, who dropped her class, the semester she tried to retain each and every student. As a result, she changed her behavior and no longer insisted that every student remain in her class through to the end of the semester. Allison felt “frozen by the devastation” of some of the personal essays she received from students. As a result, she changed her behavior and requested that students choose not to write on deeply personal or emotional topics anymore. Part-

time faculty especially felt they faced too many obstacles to verify their faculty identities when it came to having the connections, time, and space to support and care for their students to the degree they wished they could.

Faculty also experienced identity verification, which resulted in positive emotions. For example, Jason felt great personal and professional fulfillment when the hard work and “tenacious caring” he devoted to students led to their against-all-odds academic success. All participants expressed positive emotions—including feeling “happy” and even “elated”—when they described how they felt in the classroom, the place where they could focus on being a passionate teacher for their students. These positive emotions consequently led them to continue their behaviors that led to such identity verification.

### **Identity Rankings**

Findings also suggest that certain faculty groups ranked the meanings they ascribe to their faculty identities differently. For example, for developmental faculty, caring about students ranked higher in terms of identity prominence and identity salience compared to faculty who taught mostly college-level courses.

Furthermore, results show that faculty participants ranked these meanings differently in terms of identity salience and identity prominence. Being a passionate and expert teacher ranked high in terms of prominence and salience; however, serving their communities ranked high in terms of prominence (internalized meanings) but not salience (behavior across contexts). This affirms the claim that identity salience and identity prominence are highly correlated yet still distinct concepts (Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

## **Limitations**

Before discussing areas for future research and practice implications, it is important to detail the limitations of this study. This study interviewed a select group of community college faculty, namely faculty who taught English or math, including developmental and basic-level courses. Students in developmental courses are known to be students who come from disadvantaged socioeconomic and educational backgrounds (Complete College America, 2012; Horn et al., 2006). They often have different needs than students taking advanced Shakespeare or linear algebra and likely require more care and attention as a result. While supporting and caring for students were strong themes that resonated across the sample of this study, it is unknown to what extent faculty who teach more advanced courses would ascribe these same meanings to their faculty identities or their view of the community college faculty identity standard. Similarly, the findings on the importance that faculty placed on student support should not be generalized to apply across all community college faculty, some of whom may have never encountered students who experienced the difficult life circumstances that participants in this study encountered.

Data were collected from semi-structured interviews, which has its share of limitations as well. By their nature, interviews are participants' historical accounts of what happened, including how they felt and what they did as a result. Therefore, I was unable to study any moment-by-moment identity verification processes that participants experienced. I do not have extensive data on how all participants adjusted their behavior as a result of identity verification processes. In addition, because individuals engage in identity verification during all social interaction (Burke & Stets, 2009) and interviews are types of social interaction, it is important to recognize that participants were engaging in identity verification with me, as their interviewer, during their

interviews. Participants may have been describing an idealized version of their faculty identities as a way to try to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear or what they thought was socially acceptable (Gomm, 2004). To mitigate this limitation, at the beginning of each interview, I made clear that there were no wrong answers and that I was seeking their raw and honest responses to questions about their identity and experiences as a community college faculty member. Also, I asked each participant to describe specific times when he or she enacted each element of their faculty identities that they identified. This probe for more specifics helped to clarify and substantiate their responses.

### **Research Implications**

This study proffers several implications for research. For example, this study suggests that working with colleagues who are not aspiring towards same professional identity standard can negatively affect professional identities. Participants found it “frustrating” and were angry and upset when they talked about colleagues who “take the easy road” and “do nothing else beyond” teaching their classes. As Jane explained, the main source of negative emotions for her when it comes to her job is the “incompetence” of some of her colleagues, which she feels diminishes the profession of being a faculty member at a community college and, therefore, puts her and others in the position of having to “defend” ECC and the profession in general.

This study affirms ICT’s prediction that individuals will experience negative emotions when their identity is not verified, i.e., when the meanings they attribute to their faculty identities are incongruent with the meanings they hold in the identity standard; but it also suggests that individuals will experience negative emotions when they feel their colleagues’ faculty identities are incongruent with their own. In other words, they feel frustrated or upset when they feel other faculty do not aspire towards the same identity standard to which they aspire. This is an area



worthy of additional research and theorizing with the goal of examining whether other theories, such as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), may be able to better explain this phenomenon than identity control theory on its own. (See Chapter 5 and 6 for more discussion on this topic.)

Finally, future research should build on this study and examine faculty-student interactions more closely to investigate how students respond to each of the four common meanings that participants ascribed to their view of the community college faculty identity standard. For example, in this study, faculty who taught developmental education emphasized the importance of caring about their students. Do students in developmental courses agree that developing rapport and trust with their instructors and gaining confidence in their academic abilities are key to achieving academic success? What student outcomes are associated with interacting with faculty who enact each and all four common meanings of their faculty identities? These are all compelling future research questions to consider.

### **Practice Implications**

This research recommends several practice implications, especially if these findings are affirmed by future research. First, now that we have a better idea of the faculty identities of community college faculty, hiring committees at two-year colleges should seek individuals who are committed to the four elements of the community college faculty identity standard: teaching students, supporting students, caring about students, and serving their communities. While conducting research has its place at a community college, and should even be encouraged more according to some (Prager, 2003), this study found that community college faculty view the ideal community college faculty member as someone who prioritizes being a teacher over a researcher. Colleges should look to hire individuals who are (or aspire to be) master teachers and

who have a passion for teaching and working with students. The academic backgrounds of candidates are important—they should be content experts—but participants in this study suggest that understanding and being empathetic of students' needs is particularly critical, especially if teaching developmental courses.

An ideal candidate also would have an awareness of the spectrum of difficult life circumstances that community college students face and, therefore, would have two-year college teaching experience; however, colleges should also recognize and be accountable for providing faculty professional development on ways to support students who encounter challenges outside the classroom. This would include an orientation program on the types of students that enroll at community colleges and the types of challenges they may be facing while attending college, including academic, financial, psychological, legal, health-related, and other challenges. Providing an overview of the types of student support services available on campus and in the community would be important as well, especially for part-time faculty (who are not as connected or knowledgeable about these services because of their employment status) but also for full-time faculty who would benefit from an update on this kind of information from time to time as well.

Colleges also should offer professional development to faculty on how to handle situations when a student seeks help from them or needs help with a serious nonacademic issue. Although students would ideally go to a counselor when they need nonacademic help, many students interact with their faculty more frequently than anyone else on campus and, therefore, community college faculty often become someone students grow to trust. Any new community college faculty member should be made aware of this and be prepared to direct students to the help they might need. As this study reveals, this point is especially true for faculty who teach

English composition at a community college. Through writing assignments, students share a great deal about themselves and the difficult challenges they might be facing. English faculty may need additional and/or customized professional development support on how to handle situations when students write essays about serious and difficult life circumstances.

After relating her story of the time she tried to retain every student in her developmental English class, Robin referenced how everyone—from researchers, foundations, and the government—is focused on figuring out what it takes to improve student achievement. She said, “I know what it takes. I’ve done it. And nobody’s going to do [what I did that semester]. *That’s* what it takes. It’s expensive. It’s time-consuming. It has nothing to do with teaching English.” Like the other participants in this study and community college faculty in general, Robin was qualified to teach full-time at a community college because she had a master’s degree in her field of study. Yet, that education and training ultimately did not prepare her for all that she had to take on to fully support her students’ success. Colleges should offer professional development opportunities that help and support faculty with all the elements of their faculty identities, especially caring about and supporting students.

Community colleges should consider providing an overview of the history of community colleges and their multiple missions during faculty orientations and/or faculty professional development sessions. According to participants, serving their communities was an influential component of their professional identities. The more community college faculty are knowledgeable about the variety of ways their colleges serve and support their communities, the more they may understand and embrace how they, as community college faculty, contribute to the important mission(s) of their colleges in serving the local community. In turn, this may

bolster their sense of professional identity and result in being more confident and effective faculty members.

### **Part-time versus Full-time Debate**

My research also helps to shed light on the full-time versus part-time faculty debate. Scholars have claimed that the increased rates of part-time faculty at community colleges has a negative effect on student graduation rates and transfer rates (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009; Jacoby, 2006). This study suggests more emphasis should be placed on the circumstances that may prevent part-time faculty from being able to effectively enact their professional identities of teaching, supporting, and caring for students and serving their communities. Researchers also have advocated that full-time faculty should teach more developmental and gateway courses because they are more available to students than part-time faculty (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014a). This study suggests the answer to better supporting students is more complicated than this recommendation alludes. Just as all part-time faculty cannot be deemed as negatively affecting students, full-time faculty should not be deemed as always benefiting students. The participants in this study suggest that faculty who teach developmental courses should recognize the importance of connecting with students, encouraging students, and caring about students. It is important that they are the type of individual and type of faculty member who can instill confidence in their students and knows to teach soft skills as well as the course content.

Data from this study also suggest that part-time faculty feel disconnected from their college, making it difficult to know services available to students when students come to them seeking extra support. Furthermore, participants described lacking time and space to adequately care about their students, another key component of the community college faculty identity

standard. In response, colleges should make attempts to make their part-time faculty feel more connected to the college. While increased pay and office space would certainly help to achieve this end, these solutions are likely cost-prohibitive given the tight budgets at community colleges. Instead, colleges can look to most cost-effective solutions, including connecting part-time faculty with counselors by holding faculty/counselor breakfasts or coffee hours. Offering private office space options for part-time faculty so they can connect with students in a private quiet setting may also be beneficial. Hiring part-time faculty as tutors, as ECC does, also may help to address their concerns over lacking time and space to meet with students.

### **Conclusion**

As a result of this study, we now have a better idea that the faculty identities of community college faculty encompass four broad areas: teaching students, supporting students, caring about students, and serving their communities. However, we do not know how community college faculty synthesize the meanings that they attribute to their faculty identities or, in other words, how they describe their faculty identities in full. The next chapter (Chapter 4) on the metaphors faculty use to describe their faculty identities addresses this open question. This research also suggests a number of ways to better support community college faculty and their professional identities, but to take it a step further, a study is needed that asks community college directly what they feel best supports their faculty identities. Chapter 5 addresses this research need.

## CHAPTER 4:

### **A Metaphor Analysis of Community College Faculty Identities**

**Abstract:** This study closely analyzed metaphors that English and math community college faculty used to describe their faculty identities. A clear theme across all participants' metaphors is that, whether they are full-time or part-time faculty or teach English or math, their relationships with their students are at the core of their faculty identities. A common grouping of metaphors that they used to describe their faculty identities was as trusted guides to their students, including “priests” who reduce suffering and can be trusted, “shamans” who point the way to success in college and life, and “shepherds” who educate and walk alongside them to make sure they stay on track with their academic and life goals. Their metaphors also point to the importance they place on building, feeling a part of, and serving their communities; supporting their students; and nurturing their students. Implications for research and practice also are discussed.

*“If a picture is worth 1,000 words, a metaphor is worth 1,000 pictures...*

*For a picture provides only a static image while a metaphor provides a conceptual framework for thinking about something.” – Thomas J. Shuell (1990, p. 102)*

A great deal has been written about the power and prevalence of metaphors and their influence on our lives and identities. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have argued in their seminal work, *Metaphors We Live By*, metaphors allow us to understand and experience one thing in terms of another. From medicine (e.g., Sontag, 2001) to politics (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2005) to education (e.g., Bullough, 1991) to psychology and beyond (e.g., Ortony, 1993), scholars have analyzed metaphors as a way to delve deeply into a variety of topics and achieve greater understanding of complex and complicated phenomena.

Metaphors have made an especially important contribution to research on teachers and teacher identities. Education scholars agree that metaphors are very powerful ways that teachers express and make sense of their teacher identities (Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Farrell, 2006; Gillis & Johnson, 2002; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Oxford et al., 1998; Provenzo, McCloskey, Kottkamp, & Cohn, 1989; Saban et al., 2007; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). Whether teachers view themselves as a “parent,” “friend,” “gardener,” or “compass,” metaphors encourage teachers to reflect on what it means to be a teacher, make them aware of implicit assumptions they may have and harbor, and also can foster change in educational beliefs and practices (Guerrero & Villamil, 2000). Because metaphors reveal teachers’ educational values, beliefs, and principles, they contain information essential to the growth of teachers as professionals, including the development of personal teaching

philosophies and an awareness of a teacher's power and influence (Gillis & Johnson, 2002). Furthermore, they play a role in the process of teacher self-formation and self-exploration (Bullough & Stokes, 1994) and can guide the way teachers act in the classroom, interact with their students, and be better teachers (Clandinin, 1986).

To date, these studies have focused on elementary and secondary teachers. Community college faculty have largely been ignored, even though they teach close to half of all undergraduate students in the country and are first and foremost teachers (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Horn et al., 2006). The study presented in this chapter is the first to use metaphor analysis to gain a better understanding of the professional identities of community college faculty. It focuses on the following research questions: What metaphors do community college faculty use to describe what it means to be a community college faculty member? What do those metaphors reveal about their faculty identities?

After I review the literature that has analyzed teachers' use of metaphor to better understand teacher identity, I detail the theoretical frameworks undergirding my analysis. I then describe the methods I use to analyze the faculty identity metaphors of my participants who include full-time and part-time faculty who teach English or math at a suburban comprehensive community college located in the United States. Next, I launch into my analysis, present the results, and discuss the themes that emerged across the sample and within specific faculty groups. I conclude with a discussion of limitations, future research suggestions, and implications for practice. As a first step, I define what metaphors are and substantiate why they are an important area and unit of inquiry.



## Metaphors Defined

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) define the essence of metaphor as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). Metaphors, they argue, are ubiquitous and indispensable. The way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day are all influenced by metaphors we live by. For example, in contemporary English, we talk about time in terms of money: “I *invested* a great deal of time in this project,” “I *spent* too much time running errands,” “This *saved* me a lot of time.” Whether we are conscious of it or not, this metaphorical way of thinking (e.g., “time is money”) is absolutely normal and ordinary. We talk about time in terms of money because we conceive of time that way—as a commodity that can be capitalized or wasted—and, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain, “we act according to the way we conceive of things” (p. 5).

We also conceive of *ourselves* through metaphor. A large part of self-understanding, the authors explain, “is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives” (p. 233). We may not realize we use metaphors to understand, reflect on, and even construct our identities, but it is something we do constantly. As a parent of young children, you may view yourself as a fledgling director of a three-ring circus as a way to make sense of the chaos and commotion in your life. As a graduate student, you may view yourself as a marathon runner as a way to focus on making progress one step at a time and maintaining stamina until the finish line when the degree is in hand. Indeed, metaphors are not just literary devices used by novelists and poets or ways the most pensive of us reflect on our identities and lives. Metaphors actively shape us, influence us, and change us—all of us. This power that they have is reflected in the derivation of the word “metaphor”: from the Greek *metapherein* meaning “to carry over,” “to transfer.” As Conle (1996) notes, *metapherein* suggests that we “do metaphor” when we build language and

when we think about ourselves in the world. In this view, metaphor is a process we are involved in and which “makes us” (Conle, 1996, p. 311).

### **Background**

A substantial body of research uses metaphors to understand teacher identity and teacher identity formation (Alsup, 2006; Briscoe, 1991; Bullough & Stokes, 1994; Farrell, 2006; Gillis & Johnson, 2002; Hunt, 2006; Leavy, McSorley, & Boté, 2007; Mahlios, Massengill-Shaw, & Barry, 2010; Munby & Russell, 1990; Oxford et al., 1998; Provenzo et al., 1989; Saban et al., 2007; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). They have found that metaphors are powerful ways teachers can conceptualize (and reconceptualize) their teaching roles, beliefs, and identities (Munby, 1986; Tobin, 1990). Metaphors that teachers use to make sense of their identities also have a strong influence on classroom practice, how they teach, and who they are as teachers (Briscoe, 1991). A few recent studies that analyze teacher metaphors deserve special attention because they are most closely related to the present study in terms of their research aims or methods. These include Thomas and Beauchamp (2011), Saban, Kockbecker, and Saban (2007), and Alsup (2006).

Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) conducted a qualitative study that examined the metaphors new teachers use to describe their professional identities. They chose to analyze metaphors for the same reason this study does: because the language of metaphor “permitted an enlightening glimpse into the complex and multi-faceted notion of identity” (p. 764). Forty-five new teachers were interviewed immediately after graduating from their teacher education programs and again in the late winter of their first year teaching. The teacher metaphors described by their participants in the first-round interviews focused on supporting, protecting, and nurturing students, including “teacher as offensive lineman,” someone who “protects the

classroom and the students in the class.” In fact, metaphors that alluded to supporting students were the most frequently mentioned type of metaphor in the sample (one-third of all responses). Although the new teachers in this study aspired to focus on their students and nurture and support them, the authors found through their metaphor analysis that many participants became overwhelmed by their new teacher identities and quickly became preoccupied with their own survival. For example, one new teacher described him/herself in the second-round interviews as a “kayak in the river that gets bigger and bigger as we know more about the teaching profession, and it’s like we end up going from the river to the sea where we’re kind of lost” (p. 766). Like this metaphor, many participants’ metaphors alluded to the challenges and “demanding nature of the multifarious roles of a teacher” that they had come to experience in their first year of teaching (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2001, p. 766-767).

Thomas and Beauchamp’s (2011) study has strong potential to inform the study of faculty identities of community college faculty. First, as Chapter 3 revealed, community college faculty ascribe multiple meanings to their faculty identities, including those that focus on supporting students in much the same way that Thomas and Beauchamp’s (2011) participants describe. Some community college faculty also describe feeling overwhelmed in similar ways to which the new teachers in Thomas and Beauchamp’s (2011) study allude through their metaphors. These similarities affirm that “teacher identity” is related to “community college faculty identity” and, furthermore, that metaphor analysis can help to unveil a deeper understanding of how community college faculty make sense of and navigate the multiple ways they define themselves. However, Thomas and Beauchamp’s (2011) analysis basically involved grouping teacher identity metaphors into thematic categories without probing into the *meaning* behind these metaphors. For example, the authors labeled the “kayak lost at sea” metaphor as

evidence that some new teachers “express doubts about their abilities to keep up with the perceived demands” of being a teacher (p. 766), but they do not explore what this specific choice of a metaphor reveals about this participant’s teacher identity. Like many studies on teacher identity metaphors, the authors do not share full details about their participants, thereby decoupling participants’ identities from their metaphors. In effect, they ultimately analyzed participants’ metaphors in isolation and missed the opportunity for their metaphor analysis to shed more light on their participants’ teacher identities. Their lack of a robust and theoretically grounded definition of identity further exacerbated this methodological limitation.

Saban, Kockbecker, and Saban (2007) investigated metaphors of new teachers as well. They analyzed new teachers’ written responses to the prompt, “A teacher is like... because...” Ten main conceptual themes were identified, including: teacher as knowledge provider (e.g., “sun,” “candle”), molder/craftsperson (e.g., “sculptor,” “painter”), counselor (e.g., “friend,” “psychologist”), and nurturer/cultivator (e.g., “farmer,” “gardener”). These metaphors bear strong similarities to the identity meanings described by community college faculty in Chapter 3. Although they also mostly decoupled participants’ identities from their metaphors, a weakness of most of the literature on this topic, Saban et al. (2007) successfully recognized that teacher identity metaphors implicitly evoke images of the identities of others (namely students), not just images of the identities of teachers. For each teacher identity metaphor, they identified a corresponding student identity metaphor. For example, “teacher as knowledge provider” assumes students are passive recipients of knowledge and “teacher as molder or craftsperson” views students as raw materials that need to be shaped and influenced. Recognizing that studying teaching metaphors “simultaneously enables exploration of coevolving conceptions of Other... most importantly students” (Bullough & Stokes, 1994, p. 202) is a clear strength of this study.

Alsup, author of *Teacher Identity Discourses* (2006), also analyzes metaphors to better understand new teachers' emerging professional identities. She argues that metaphors are not merely “creative ways to describe experience”; rather, “they *affect* human experience by changing how we perceive and understand various events, situations, and people” (Alsup, 2006, p. 147). In her multiyear study that followed six new secondary teachers, Alsup (2006) found that the metaphors her participants used—expressed both in words (e.g., “teaching is a puzzle,” p. 152) and in images (e.g., a picture of a hand representing how teachers guide students)—were often the clearest, most insightful expressions of the participants' developing professional identities produced over the course of her study. She believes learning what kinds of discourse facilitate professional identity development and encouraging this discourse is essential to teacher education. I agree with her that when a person engages in this type of transformative discourse—which she calls “borderland discourse,” a term she borrows from Gee (2005)—it can lead to “enhanced consciousness, a meta-awareness of thought and action” about one's “multifaceted, contextual, and sometimes contradictory ideologies and situated identities” (Alsup, 2006, p. 125). In short, reflecting on different metaphors that represent who you are and the kind of professional you are can lead to a new awareness about yourself, including yourself as a teacher or other professional.

Unlike the studies described above, Alsup (2006) did more than just code for *what* her participants described; she also closely analyzed *how* her participants described their teacher identity metaphors to intuit their metaphors' meanings and significance. For example, one of her participants, Karen, metaphorically described teaching as a game of euchre, a card game that is popular in the American Midwest. Alsup (2006) analyzed a long passage of text in which Karen explained her euchre metaphor:

[T]here is great strategy behind the cards that one wants to play [while playing euchre]. I believe that strategy plays a big part in teaching... A new euchre player isn't going to know how to lead [with a card] or what [card] to lead [with]; she must have guidance and time to know what to play... And finally, as in all other things, there is luck... One has no control over what [cards] they get. We are more than likely not going to be able to pick out the cards or children that we want in our classrooms. They are given to us. Euchre and teaching mix in this way because we must play each card with caution and care. It's not a game we're dealing with. We're dealing with kids' lives. (p. 156)

Alsup's analysis focused on how, through this metaphor, Karen recognized that many things contribute to a teacher identity like hers, including "strategy," "guidance," and even "luck." Alsup points out that, by comparing a classroom of students to a hand dealt in euchre, Karen recognizes that each classroom situation varies just as each euchre hand varies, which means that she, as the teacher, will need to teach and treat each child with care, just as a euchre player must "play each card with caution and care." Finally, through this metaphor, Karen also realizes that she, as a teacher, will always be learning and growing and that, as Alsup states, "the teaching life is always in flux" (p. 156).

This example demonstrates that simply coding and interpreting Karen's teacher identity metaphor as "a game of euchre" only scratches the surface with regard to what it actually signifies and means to Karen and her developing teacher identity. Although Alsup (2006) did not (unfortunately) always describe her analytical process in detail, the way her analysis probed deeper and unveiled the meaning and significance of her participants' metaphors was a clear strength of her study. She also shared full details about her participants' personal identities,

including their race, gender, and age, as well as their family backgrounds, what led them to want to become a teacher, and their life and career ambitions. By doing this, Alsup always kept participants' identities linked to their metaphors and did not analyze metaphors in isolation the way many other studies on teacher identity have done. Indeed, Alsup's study is both methodologically informative and operationally valuable for the present study.

Overall, the corpus of literature on teacher identity metaphors makes clear the powerful ways in which metaphorical discourse can both reveal and shape teacher identities. However, these studies too often lack a clear theory-backed definition of identity and, with the exception of Alsup (2006), fail to employ methods that can closely analyze and reveal the meanings and significance behind teacher identity metaphors. Furthermore, although exceptions exist (Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Saban et al., 2007), research on teacher identity metaphors tend to lack clear, explicit discussions of the methods used to conduct their analysis.

Despite its great utility, metaphor analysis has yet to be used extensively to better understand community college faculty identities. This study is among the first to do so. Although teaching (not research) is their primary focus, community college faculty teach in entirely different contexts than elementary and secondary teachers; therefore, the findings from the current corpus on teacher identity metaphors cannot be assumed to also apply to community college faculty. It is important to examine community college faculty identity metaphors because such an examination has the potential to unveil their educational values, beliefs, and principles and inform ways they can grow and be supported as professionals (Clandinin, 1986; Gillis & Johnson, 2002).

The present study also addresses a number of weaknesses in the current corpus of literature on teacher identity. For example, it clearly defines "identity" from the start, uncovers

the ways in which teacher identity metaphors are shaped by coevolving conceptions of others (such as students), and employs advanced qualitative methods, such as metaphor analysis, that reveal the deep and implicit meanings behind the faculty identity metaphors that community college instructors describe.

### **Guiding Theoretical Frameworks**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of identity has been written about extensively across various disciplines and, as a result, has been defined in various ways. Therefore, it is important that I establish how this study defines identity before proceeding with my analysis. This study aligns with the structural symbolic interactionism perspective and defines identity as “what it means to be who one is” (Stryker, 1980, p. 1).

Identity theory is particularly well suited to frame a study of metaphors because both identity theory and metaphors strongly focus on *meaning*. According to the theory, identity is what it *means* to be who one is; that is, the set of *meanings* that define who one is (Burke and Stets, 2009; Stryker, 1980), while metaphors help us make *meaning* by conceptualizing one thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Using identity theory as a guide, this study defines community college faculty professional identity as what it means to be a community college faculty member. Identity theorists closely focus on the roles that an individual plays, such as mother, steelworker, friend, or teacher. Called role identities, these identities are learned from shared cultural knowledge, personal experiences, and negotiating meanings through interactions with role partners (Burke, 2003). For faculty, role partners can include students, department colleagues, other fellow faculty colleagues, college administrators, and board members, among others.



Their common emphasis on the importance and influence of others on the self is another way that identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) and metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) complement each other. Bullough and Stokes (1994) remind us that when thinking metaphorically about identity, there is more at stake than just exploring the self—it involves exploration of coevolving conceptions of others as well (p. 202). This concept is fundamental to identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009). Role identities exist only in relation to others. For example, a mother is not a mother without a child; a teacher is not a teacher without a student. Per identity theory, “others” are role partners who, through interaction, influence the way in which a person views his or her role identity (Burke, 2003). Likewise, per Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are omnipresent ways we view ourselves and others and make sense of our identities and relationships with others. For example, if, as a parent, you view yourself as a fledgling director of a three-ring circus, you may view your children in a number of ways—e.g., as silly, capricious clowns trying to constantly get your attention and/or perhaps as cute but high-maintenance baby tigers that need constant care and training. As Erickson (2004) has stated, identity is “the outcome of processes by which people index their similarity to and differences from others, sometimes self-consciously and strategically and sometimes as a matter of habit” (p. 151). Indeed, the words a speaker chooses “inevitably contain images and metaphors which both assume and invoke ways of being,” both for themselves and for others (B. Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 265). The faculty identity metaphors analyzed in this study reveal a number ways of being—for the faculty themselves as well as their students, faculty colleagues, administrators, and the college and local communities.

Finally, identity theory from the Burke tradition (Burke, 2007; Burke & Stets, 2009) and metaphors from the Lakoff and Johnson tradition (1980) also work together well to determine the

self-identities that are most important to an individual. As described in Chapter 3, identity theory's concept of identity prominence is based on "the internalized importance of an identity" to a person (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Referring back to the identity control feedback loop (Burke, 2007) also discussed in Chapter 3, if one identity is more prominent to a person than another identity, then verification of that identity is more important than verification of the other. As Stets and Serpe (2013) explain, an identity ranking based on prominence characterizes the desires and values of an individual, and how they want others to see them. One way to determine the identities that are prominent to a person is through metaphor. We use metaphors to help us understand concepts that are important to us, including emotions, ideas, and identities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state that "we seek out personal metaphors to highlight and make coherent our own pasts, our present activities, and our dreams, hopes, and goals as well" (p. 233). Therefore, asking someone to come up with a metaphor that represents their identity, as this study does, can be an excellent method for ascertaining the most important—and prominent—aspects of the way they conceive of themselves.

### **Data and Methods**

This study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with the same fifteen community college faculty described in detail in Chapter 2. These faculty members all taught at Eastern Community College (ECC), the same comprehensive community college also described in detail in Chapter 2.<sup>6</sup> In this section, I describe methodological details that are specific to the present study and not described elsewhere.

As the results section reveals, participants used many rich metaphors to describe their faculty identities, and this was accomplished without much prodding by me as the interviewer. However, because I was interested in how participants synthesized the multiple meanings they

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<sup>6</sup> All names, including participant and institution names, are pseudonyms.

ascribed to their faculty identities, (see Chapter 3), I asked each participant at the end of their interview the following summary question: “In your view, what image or metaphor comes to mind that would best describe what it means to be a community college faculty member?”

As part of my analysis, I identified excerpts in each transcript when participants used metaphor to describe their faculty identities, including their answers to the aforementioned question. I identified a total of 27 faculty identity metaphors across the sample. Using Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as guides, I analyzed and coded each of these excerpts, paying careful attention to the metaphorical images participants evoked when describing what it means to be a community college faculty member as well as the positioning of others inherent in each metaphor. I then closely examined the language participants used when describing their metaphors (specifically, what diction or word choice they used), and how they made the connection between their metaphorical image(s) and their professional faculty identities through their discourse. Also, because metaphors can be described as a cognitive map (Lakoff, 1993), I looked at how their metaphors helped them to derive meaning and make sense of their identities as community college faculty. I also analyzed all the metaphor excerpts together to ascertain common images and themes that emerged across the sample. Finally, to determine similarities and differences across faculty types, I examined the metaphorical excerpts by looking at groups of faculty (full-time, part-time, English, math, men, women, developmental, college-level). I sketched numerous diagrams, including cluster maps and Venn diagrams, and built several tables to help organize my findings and shed light on connections and distinctions across the sample. Overall, my analytical process was neither sequential nor linear. It was recursive, which allowed me to revisit transcripts, rebuild diagrams, and rethink connections and conclusions.

## Analysis and Results

Participants identified several metaphors that encapsulated what it means to them to be a community college faculty member. These metaphors reveal that their faculty identities are complex and multifaceted. This section first presents the clear common themes that emerged across the sample of faculty identity metaphors and then presents the few themes that were found to be common to specific faculty groups.

### Common Themes

Five main, interrelated themes emerged from an analysis of the metaphors used by participants to describe their faculty identities. They include being a trusted guide and mentor to students (e.g., priest, shepherd, shaman), a supporter (e.g., ally, educational companion, cheerleader), a nurturer (mother, gardener), a community member (community builder, ambassador), and a “jack of all trades.” Only two metaphors did not fit into these specific categories—furniture refurbisher, and “juggler on a tight rope.” Because these last two metaphors represent perspectives from specific faculty groups (faculty who teach developmental students and part-time faculty, respectively), they also are worth discussion. See Table 4.1 for a summary of how participants metaphorically conceptualized their faculty identities.

Categories aside, a clear theme across the data was that, whether they are full-time or part-time faculty or teach English or math, nearly all participants’ metaphors focused on their relationships with their students, suggesting that students are at the core of their faculty identities. Over the course of their interviews, they each talked about other relationships that influenced their faculty identities, including their faculty colleague relationships, their discipline colleagues, and their interactions with college leadership. However, for *every* participant in this

study (15 total), at least one of their faculty identity metaphors focused on their relationship with their students.

**Trusted guide.** In this category, faculty identity metaphors positioned participants as *trusted guides and mentors to their students*; e.g., as a “shepherd,” “shaman,” “priest,” “servant leader,” and “coach.” While guide-like metaphors are quite common across studies on teacher identities (Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Oxford et al., 1998; Saban et al., 2007), analysis of these participant metaphors suggest a uniqueness about being a faculty member at a community college. These metaphors positioned their students as individuals who need guidance and help, not just with learning math or English, but with college and life circumstances in general. In fact, several participants (12 of the 15, including all faculty who teach mostly developmental courses) explicitly mentioned that they “did more than just teach” English or math.

Justin, a full-time math faculty member, used the metaphor of a “priest” to describe his faculty identity. Justin said he feels the relationship a priest has with his/her congregation “resonates with [him as] the same relationship” he has with his students. In his view, priests are “not barking orders, they’re not telling people what to do. They’re there to provide guidance,” and providing guidance to his students is part of how he views his faculty identity. This priest metaphor also sheds light on his dedication to what he calls “relationship-based teaching.” Like he imagines a model priest would be for his/her congregation, Justin says he makes himself “both physically and emotionally accessible to [his] students as often as humanly possible.”

Table 4.1: Community college faculty identities metaphorically conceptualized<sup>7</sup>

Category	Associated metaphors	Illustration: A community college faculty member...	Participants
<b>Trusted guide</b>	10 total priest, pasturing shepherd, pastor/rabbi/imam, shaman, coach, editor who inspires, traffic director, servant leader	... is a guide, trailblazer, person who points the way; provides foundational truths and keeps students on track through college; turns classroom of disparate individuals into a capable team; is an inspiring mentor; can be trusted and reduces suffering; directs students to services that can help them; guides students like a priest guides congregation	6 total Jon, Sharita, Sam, Lynn, Tim, Justin
<b>Supporter</b>	7 total advocate, ally, cheerleader, open window when there's a closed door, "students above all", helper, educational companion	... encourages students to do their best; offers variety of options for students to succeed and get what they need; helps students to find better options in their lives; wants to see students succeed; hand-holds students; is ally of the students;	5 total Kim, Kathy, Brian, Dan, Justin
<b>Nurturer</b>	4 total mother, "mommy teacher", gardener, buffet	... aims to make students feel confident and do better; cultivates and encourages students; is empathetic and comforting	4 total Jane, Robin, Sarah, Laura
<b>Community server</b>	3 total part of the community, community builder, ambassador	... values impact he/she has on local community; promotes "we are all in this together" attitude among students; represents college to community	3 total Alison, Kathy, Kim
<b>"Jack of All Trades"</b>	1 total jack of all trades	... must find a way to perform all roles that students, others need them to be	2 total Justin, Kim
Hard worker in precarious position	1 total juggler on a tightrope	... has multiple things that require attention and must be careful where they step	1 total Lynn
Builder/refurbisher	1 total carpenter	... must rebuild confidence and competence of students after they have experienced years of academic failure (specific to faculty who teach developmental courses)	1 total Justin

<sup>7</sup> The structure of this table is based on De Guerrero and Villamil's (2000) similar table (Table 1, p. 344) that displayed ESL teachers' metaphors. Bolded categories represent common themes.

Justin extends his priest metaphor further by comparing his classroom to a church. He explained: “I’ve actually told students that my classroom is about as close to a church as I know of, so that when they do things like cuss in my class, I say, ‘Hey, if you wouldn’t do it in church, don’t do it here, because this is my church.’” By comparing his classroom to a church, he reveals that he views his classroom—and he wants his students to view his classroom—as a place of respect and reverence as well as a place where students can feel safe, secure, and part of a community, like a model church would be for its community.

Notably, full-time English faculty member, Tim, also compared being a community college faculty member to “being a priest.” He calls his office “the confessional” because students come to him in his office, at times in tears, to emote about everything from a bad grade on a paper to an abusive relationship to other life circumstances with which they might be struggling. He says he believes his job as a community college faculty member is to “reduce suffering,” especially for his students who often seek his help and guidance. He described how one of his former students, who did well in his class and eventually earned a degree, came back to tell him, “You don’t know it, but you saved my life.” She had been suffering from a lack of confidence and learned she had cancer around the time she enrolled in his class. According to Tim, she told him “My life didn’t have any meaning, and I didn’t know what I was going to do. I didn’t know if I wanted to live even.” Tim said he had no idea that was the case, but he always tries to come across as a positive and a trustworthy person with whom students can connect, because, as a community college faculty member, he can never be sure about the life circumstances and challenges with which his students might be contending.

This perception of priests aligns with literature on priest roles and identities, which describes how ministers are expected to be counselors, teachers, and “helper[s] of the needy” (Neuhaus, 1992, p. 40). Research has found that most priests derive great satisfaction from counseling and believe counseling and providing guidance to others is an essential part of their role (Reilly, 1975). Their priest metaphors suggest that Tim and Justin, too, derive great satisfaction from counseling and being a trusted guide like a priest to their students, which they express as essential parts of their faculty identities.

It is certainly striking that two participants from different departments independently used the same metaphor to describe their faculty identities, especially given the fact that “priest” was not found anywhere in the current literature on teacher or faculty identity metaphors. This suggests a distinctiveness about community college faculty identities compared with other teachers or faculty.

While they proffered the same metaphor, it is important to point out the nuances in the way Tim and Justin made the connection between their priest metaphor and their professional faculty identities. Throughout his interview, Tim emphasized the importance of trust. He explained, “Students will come in here [his office or “the confessional”] and tell me all kinds of things... I think it’s because they trust me.” When asked how students might describe him, Tim said he thinks his students would say: “I can trust him. If I really needed help, and I was embarrassed... He might be the person I’d talk to. He might be able to help me and not tell anybody.” One way Tim enacts his priest-like faculty identity is by opening up his office or “confessional” to his students and being a safe person to whom they can talk. Like he imagines an ideal priest would, he listens to his students; accepts, helps, and mentors them without judging or shaming them. In this sense, and in the way Tim strives to give his students confidence, Tim’s



priest metaphor could fit as well in the “nurturer” category (discussed below) as it can in this “trusted guide” category.

Justin, too, talked about how important it is for community college faculty members to seek the trust of their students and instill confidence in them, but when Justin described his faculty identity, he emphasized how he strives to be extremely accessible to his students, just as he views a priest would aim to be accessible to his/her church members. In support of his goal of making himself available to them “as often as humanly possible,” including late at night, Justin gives his students his cell phone number and encourages them to contact him with any issues or concerns.

Tim, on the other hand, says he rarely telephones his students and is able to “draw that line” so he has some time and space for his other identities, including being a husband and writer of poetry. In effect, the four walls of Tim’s classrooms and “confessional” office help to keep those lines drawn. So, while they both independently chose “priest” as a metaphor that describes their faculty identities and while they both view themselves as trusted guides to their students, it is clear from a deeper analysis of the way they explain their choice that Justin and Tim conceive of their faculty identities in differing ways. This finding highlights the intercomplexity of the professional identities of community college faculty.

Four of the six part-time English faculty members in the sample also used a guide-like metaphor to describe what it means to them to be a community college faculty member. Echoing Justin and Tim’s priest metaphor, Sharita described her faculty identity in multiple ways: as a “pasturing shepherd” and like “a rabbi, pastor, or imam.” She explained that, like shepherds and spiritual and religious leaders, she viewed community college faculty as providing “foundational truths” and “education” to their students and are “doing [their] best to shepherd [students] along

the way,” not just in terms of their subject matter, but with helping their students gain the confidence and skills they need to be successful in college and beyond. Interestingly, when explaining her shepherd metaphor, she described how a shepherd leads by “walking alongside” his sheep and living amongst them. In this way, she tries to teach and lead her students by making herself accessible to them, just as Justin emphasized, and trying to relate to them so as to gain their trust. Yet another example of how these categories—and faculty identity metaphors—are correlated and interrelated, like Tim’s priest metaphor, Sharita’s shepherd metaphor also could fit in the “nurturer” category, because shepherds are known for feeding, caring for, and guarding their sheep. However, Sharita’s emphasis on how she aims to “shepherd” or guide students through their college experience with the goal of keeping them on track towards success suggests that Sharita mostly conceives of her faculty identity as a trusted guide.

It is interesting to note that one instance was found in the literature on teacher identities whereby a secondary teacher also used a shepherd metaphor to describe his/her teacher identity. One of Saban’s (2007) participants remarked, “A teacher is like a shepherd because s/he is responsible for his/her students” (p. 137). This description, however, represents only a portion of the way in which Sharita views her identity as a community college faculty member. Sharita feels responsible to help her students stay on track with their academic and career goals, but her shepherd metaphor also alludes to her desire to be accessible to her students and live amongst them so as to gain their trust.

Sharita’s shepherd metaphor relates to Lynn’s servant leader metaphor. Lynn explained that she likes to view herself as a servant leader because, as a teacher, she wants to help her students and see and treat each of them “as a person, not just a number.” As the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (n.d.) explains, servant leaders focus “on the growth

and well-being of people” and “put the needs of others first” and help “people develop and perform as highly as possible.” They lead by viewing themselves as serving first. Likewise, Lynn strives to do the same as a community college faculty member. She talked about the importance of connecting with students and embracing the “human side” of teaching as a servant leader faculty member.

Evoking another spiritual image, Jon used the metaphor of a “shaman” to describe his faculty identity because, he explained, “shamans are the guides, trailblazers, and people who point the way. I’m giving [students] powerful tools and trying to train them in how to use them.” It is clear from this metaphor that Jon views himself, like the others, as more than just an English writing instructor who lectures on how to write five-paragraph essays and corrects grammar problems. In his view, teaching students how to write and think critically is providing them with “tools,” like education and writing ability, that they can use to empower themselves and improve their lives. While the exact definition of shaman and shamanism is greatly debated (P. N. Jones, 2006), it is clear from Jon’s explanation that he views himself more as a respected and trusted leader than as a mystic to be feared. He explained further, “You’re guiding students... so that they become the fishermen, rather than eat the fish only.” He wants his students to be successful in school, but he also views himself as preparing them for life.

Also a part-time English teacher like Jon, Lynn explained that because most of her students attend college part-time and do not have a resident advisor or much interaction or engagement with other students, “[w]e [community college faculty] might be the person who sees them the most consistently... And you might become the person that that student trusts.” Lynn recognizes the importance of being a trusted guide to her students. She has had students come to her with a variety of difficult life circumstances, seeking her guidance and support. For

example, Lynn said that a student had recently come to her who was scared about an unexpected pregnancy. “It’s almost like you’re the clearinghouse... I get this image of a traffic director,” Lynn explains. When a student comes to her with a problem, she tries to direct them to the right place on campus or in the community that can help them, everything from childcare options, financial support opportunities, learning support or disability services, counseling and advising, and more. “It’s like I might have more awareness of what’s available here at school or out in the world,” she says.

Part-time English faculty member, Sam, used two guide-like metaphors to describe his faculty identity. When asked what it means to be a community college faculty member, Sam responded that he saw himself as a mentor, like an “editor” who is both a good newspaper editor and who “inspires” his staff, and like a “soccer coach,” because like a soccer coach, he said, community college faculty “have to deal with all kinds of personalities. You have to make that into some kind of an active team – not to win a game, but to learn things about life.” The commonality across these metaphors is his emphasis on being an inspirational, motivational leader. In addition, both metaphors represent identities that are directed entirely to students. They position students slightly differently, however. The editor metaphor positions students as staff writers. The coach metaphor positions students as players on a team. Staff writers work more independently and on their own than soccer players on the same team who must rely on each other and work together when in the midst of a game. Sam’s coach metaphor is one example that explicitly refers to the diversity of the students whom community college faculty members tend to teach.

Studies have shown that teachers and faculty have frequently conceptualized themselves as coaches (Gerdy, 2002; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; McEwan, 2007; Oxford et al., 1998). For

example, from their analysis of teacher metaphors, Oxford et al. (1998) summarized that “The coach reminds, encourages and prods the learner to perform well, that is, to “win” at the game of learning or at least play the best game possible” (p. 34). Yet, Sam emphasized that as a coach, “winning” was not his focus, but rather to bring his students together as a team to learn English and prepare for life in general. In this sense, Sam’s coach metaphor aligns better with Guerrero and Villamil’s (2000) study that found that teachers as coaches constantly encourage and guide their students.

All of these metaphors—shepherd, pastor, rabbi, imam, servant leader, shaman, traffic director, and coach—focus on their student relationships and position students as needing guidance beyond how to learn English or math; they need shepherding, guidance, direction, and coaching in terms of how to be successful both in *and* out of school. Like the way Tim and Justin viewed being a priest, these metaphors suggest these participants conceptualize their faculty identities as being trusted guides vis-à-vis their students. It is also important to note that, while similar guide-like metaphors have been used by teachers in other studies, the metaphors of “priest,” “shaman,” “servant leader,” “traffic director,” and “pastor/rabbi/imam” have not been identified in teacher or faculty identity literature to date, suggesting a uniqueness about community college faculty identities. Furthermore, while “shepherd” and “coach” have been cited as teacher identity metaphors in other studies, analysis suggests that community college faculty conceptualize themselves in these roles in unique ways.

Although remarkably similar, these metaphors hint at how these faculty members’ faculty identities are also each distinctly their own. Collectively, these results further reveal the intercomplexity of their faculty identities. For example, Jon’s shaman metaphor uses strong words like “trailblazer” and “powerful tools,” which are quite in contrast to Sharita’s more

peaceful pasturing shepherd metaphor. Instead of being a trailblazer leading the way, Sharita describes herself as “walking alongside” her students so that they stay on track with their college and life goals. Jon and Sharita wish the same for their students—academic and life success—but they describe different ways of accomplishing that goal with their students.

A strong distinction exists between Sharita’s shepherd metaphor and Sam’s coach metaphor. Sam alludes to the diversity of his students when he says he, like a coach, must “deal with all kinds of personalities” in his classes. Sharita’s shepherd metaphor instead portrays students like they are sheep, which suggests they are mostly undistinguishable and lacking personality. Again, however, their metaphors suggest they are seeking a common outcome for their students. Sam wishes to shape each of his classes into a collective team so they can be successful in college and life. Sharita aims to guide and shepherd her students so they stay on track with their goals and find academic and career success.

Lynn’s servant leader metaphor is an interesting contrast to the other metaphors as well. As a servant leader in the classroom, she aims to help and serve her students and treat each of her students as an individual person, “not just a number.” Like Sam’s coach metaphor, this image too is quite in contrast to Sharita’s conceptualization of students that suggests they are like a collective group of sheep.

A curious theme that emerged across this category is that four faculty (including full-time and part-time faculty and English and math faculty) described their identity using metaphors that carry religious or spiritual connotations, namely shepherd, pastor, rabbi, and imam (Sharita); shaman (Jon); and priest (Tim and Justin). Perhaps even more interesting, of these four faculty, only Sharita mentioned in her interview that she is religious, and she made clear that she did not intend for her shepherd metaphor to be interpreted “in the straight religious institutions sort of

way,” as she put it. Furthermore, both Justin and Tim mentioned that their priest metaphors were not based on or linked to religion. In fact, Tim made sure to clarify that he sees himself as a “secular priest” and went further to say, “Let’s just leave God out of it. I don’t know anything about that anyway. I’m clueless about it.” Still, he held on closely to a priest-like image when describing his faculty identity throughout his interview. For example, he calls his office “the confessional” because like a confessional, it is a safe place for students to emote, cry, complain, be themselves, and be around someone they can trust. He, like he views an ideal priest would be, aims to be a safe, compassionate person with whom to talk. Justin revealed that he is not particularly accustomed to religion or official churches when he explained that his classroom is “as close to a church that [he knows] of.” Although Justin claims he is not a deeply religious person, analyzing his interview by closely examining the metaphorical discourse he uses to describe his faculty identity reveals that being a trusted guide and serving and supporting his students ultimately is what he is devoted to, committed to, and what defines him.

Why is it that over a quarter of the faculty in this study independently chose to use religious or spiritual metaphors to describe their faculty identities, even faculty who made clear they were not religious in any way? A comment that Robin made in her interview suggests one explanation. When asked why community college faculty find themselves taking on so many different roles to adequately teach and support their students, Robin asserted: “What systems are there left? We don’t have church anymore. The social network is shrinking. We don’t have families anymore much. Who’s going to do it? Schools are left to do it, which isn’t appropriate, but no one else is doing it.” Robin’s perspective suggests that as churches have declined in number and influence alongside other social institutions, public schools (including community colleges) have found themselves having to do more for their students that churches used to

provide for their communities. In essence, from these faculty members' points of view, in many ways, community college faculty have had to serve as proxies to priests and other religious leaders in so far as acting as shepherds or shamans, providing guidance, and helping to "reduce suffering" in their students' lives. Whatever the reason, a clear theme from this study is that these community college faculty members view themselves as trusted guides like priests, because they felt that is what their students need.

**Supporter.** Another category of metaphors conceptualized community college faculty as supporting and encouraging their students. Seven metaphors represent this category and include "ally," "advocate," "education companion," "cheerleader," "open window when there's a closed door," "students above all," and "helper."

Early in his interview, Justin mentioned that the most important aspect of his faculty identity is that his students grow to believe in him as an "ally." An ally is someone who can be trusted, someone who is a supporter and a friend. Based on his own experience when he was a community college student, Justin revealed that he understands that his students can be skeptical of their instructors and uncertain whether the class they are in will be a positive experience, which is why he makes it clear to them at the very beginning of each semester that he is willing to "make [himself] both physically and emotionally accessible to [them] as often as humanly possible." He explains, "Basically, I tell my students that as long as I'm not sleeping I am accessible to you." Justin is very focused on the "faculty-student student-faculty relationship" and does not view himself as an authority figure at all. Supporting and extending his "ally" metaphor, he said he views himself as a "companion" to his students, more specifically, an "educational companion." Indeed, Justin views himself as much more than just a math



instructor—he is there for them emotionally if they need it, just as an ally or companion would be.

An “ally” implies there are differing sides of a war, argument, or issue. Justin wants his students to know he is on their side. A few times throughout his interview, Justin talks about “the system” to refer to government or authority and “the academic system” to refer to the field of education or top-down educational policy. He also refers to college administrations as “regimes.” He views these authoritative systems as too often “putting up roadblocks” that make life more difficult for his students. For example, he often has students who happen to be parolees and he admits he has had “really uncomfortable, aggressive conversations with parole officers because they keep [scheduling] meetings for their parolees during [his] class time.” He lamented:

How are they [his students] supposed to improve? How are they supposed to make sure that they stay out of that system if they can’t get an education? That is immensely frustrating, when a student is trying their best to change their life, you are trying your best to help them change their life, and the system that wants them to stay out of that system is putting up all these roadblocks.

Justin makes clear in his interview that is not associated with any of these “systems.” Instead, he is on the students’ side; his allegiance is with them. He makes it explicit: “To me, I would never invoke an authority figure to explain what we [community college faculty] do. I do not see us as authority figures. I see us really as student support.” His version of student support involves helping them with academic *and* nonacademic issues. As he put it above, he tries his best to help his students not just learn and excel at math, but to improve their lives.

In order to help improve their lives, Justin describes how he is more than just a supportive ally to his students: he is an active “advocate” for them. Of course, he aims to be “a

really good teacher,” but he explains, “that’s not all they need.” He has students who “don’t know how to get access to the resources that they need,” so sometimes “they do need an advocate, someone who can help them voice what it is that they need,” whether it be counseling, financial support, scholarships, or other student or social services. He sees that his students have many needs—academic and nonacademic—and lack a voice to defend or advocate for themselves, especially within the authoritarian systems with which he believes his students (and himself) are often at odds. Thus, part of his faculty identity involves being an advocate for his students and helping them gain a voice, gain power; helping them help themselves to overcome the challenges and “roadblocks” they encounter in their lives.

While both student- and support-centered, the different way in which Justin’s “ally” and “educational companion” metaphors and Lynn’s “traffic director” metaphor positions students is quite striking. Justin views his students more as equals—even as friends of whom he is an ally and companion. Lynn’s metaphor evokes more distance and hierarchy between herself and her students. While Justin made explicit that he “would never invoke an authority figure to explain what we do,” Lynn’s traffic director metaphor is just that—an authority figure. The more hands-off nature of Lynn’s traffic director metaphor may be explained by the fact that she is a part-time faculty member who lacks the space and time to commit as fully to her students as Justin does. This aspect is discussed later in this chapter and also explored in Chapter 5.

The other metaphors in this category all had a similarly strong student focus and positioned students as needing their support. Brian explained, “My identity as a faculty member... It’s like students above all in a way. You want to see them succeed. [My faculty identity,] it’s entirely student-oriented.” He puts his students first when he is teaching—as he explains, “In the classroom – what are you trying to do constantly? You’re trying to reach the

student”—but he also does what he can to support this students outside the classroom as well. In addition to offering office hours and helping out at as a tutor at the Writing Center (which, as a part-time faculty member, Brian is not required to do), Brian holds free student workshops on how to write a college admissions essay and how to apply for scholarships. Dan, too, puts his students first and aims to support them. He described his faculty identity as a “helper,” someone who teaches content but also is “a little bit more of a hand-holder to help [students] through [the course] or learn some study skills.”

Kathy would agree with this as well. She said she thinks of community college faculty like herself as “an open window [for students] when there is a closed door.” The closed doors that students encounter, Kathy explains, range from having financial problems, being a nontraditional student, needing to work while in school, having dependents to take care of, and more. As an “open window,” she sees herself as providing options to students when life circumstances become barriers to success and become too overwhelming. She related a story that illustrates this identity image well. The day of our interview, Kathy explained that she had a student come to class with her six-year-old son. It was spring break at the local public schools, so school was not in session, and her student did not have an alternative child care option. That day, however, her student needed to take a test at the Testing Center or else she would have received an automatic zero, putting her behind the rest of the class and increasing the chances she would either drop out or fail. Because the Testing Center explicitly does not allow young children inside, Kathy “opened a window” for her student and gave her an option: Kathy told her that she would look after her son while she went to take the test. Kathy explained, “So I went and played Go Fish with the little boy” to keep him occupied while his mom (Kathy’s student) took her test. “I always have cards in my bag,” Kathy said. It goes without saying that “as-needed babysitter”

is not part of any community college faculty job description, but for Kathy and how she views her faculty identity, she felt it was necessary to support her student in this way and “open a window” for her student by looking after her son because her student needed the support.

One of the metaphors that full-time math faculty member, Kim, used to describe her faculty identity was “cheerleader.” Teacher as cheerleader is another common metaphor found in the current literature. Gerdy (2002) discussed how teacher cheerleaders engage and encourage students by expressing confidence in them. Rose (1994) used the metaphor to describe how teachers are “not just attractive entertainers” but rather can demonstrate their own strength and flexibility in learning/teaching strategies and material “while inspiring and encouraging students to do their best with grace” (p. 142). In addition to supporting students in this role, as chair of the math department who also teaches each semester, Kim views herself as a cheerleader for others, too. She explained, “I’m a cheerleader to not only get the students to do their best but faculty to do their best and administrators to work hard for our causes.” Cheerleaders are oriented towards players first and foremost, but also encourage the coaching staff and engage with the fans. Extending this metaphor and relating it to “ambassador,” another of her metaphors (discussed later in this chapter), it seems clear that, to Kim, the players are the students, and arguably the coaching staff is the faculty and administration, while the fans represent the local community.

As a department chair, her perspective is different and focuses on more than just students, but her transcript still suggests that students are the main group that she aims to support and encourage. About the roles she takes on specifically as a teacher, Kim responded, “I’m not just their teacher, I’m their counselor, I’m their advisor, I’m their biggest fan.” In this sense, Kim’s “cheerleader” faculty identity metaphor takes on more than just encouraging students and expressing confidence in them, as Gerdy (2002) described. As a community college faculty

member, she views herself as a cheerleader that provides support to students beyond just academic matters.

Clear overlaps exist across these metaphor categories. For example, in many ways, a trusted guide should provide support in order to be an effective guide. While shamans and priests also support their followers and congregational members, for the faculty who used these metaphors to describe their faculty identities, their primary view of themselves was as a guide or leader. Those who emphasized being a supporter tended to position themselves as equals or in service to their students (e.g., ally, cheerleader, helper, educational companion), while those who positioned themselves as trusted guides used metaphors that connoted a leader-follower relationship (e.g., priest, shaman, coach).

**Nurturer.** Four female participants used a nurturer metaphor to describe their faculty identities. Jane and Robin, full-time English faculty members, used mothering metaphors. Sarah, a part-time math faculty member, viewed herself as a gardener, and Laura, a full-time math faculty member, used a buffet metaphor. While the first three are popular metaphors that have been used to describe many teacher identity metaphors in other studies (Farrell, 2006; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Saban et al., 2007; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011), these participants shared insight into their faculty identity metaphors that suggest their nurturer faculty identities are unique compared to others.

Both Robin and Jane proffered faculty identity metaphors that positioned themselves as mothers and their students as their children. Jane explained that “so much of what [she does] is the idea of what does it mean to parent.” Whether it is encouraging and supporting her students and letting them develop into their own people, she said being a community college faculty member is “almost like raising a child over and over and over” because every semester she has

new classes of students, whom she views as her children. Since becoming a mother to three children, she says she now recognizes that showing empathy and warmth and nurturing her students like a mother would is “sometimes the right thing to do,” especially if one of her students is “having a moment” and needing her to step in as a mother. This metaphorical excerpt positions students as needing nurturing, needing comfort, and needing their teachers to be empathetic and emotionally supportive like a mother would be for her children. Similarly, Robin said she views herself as a “mommy teacher” and, therefore, she views it as her job to “make [her students] feel good, and do better, and nurture [them]” both inside and outside the classroom. Positioning students as their children, as Jane and Robin’s mother metaphors do, implies that their students are dependent and reliant on them for parental care, including emotional support.

Like she would do to help her own children, Robin talked about helping her students when they were broke, could not get to class, and encountered health issues. (See Chapter 3 for full details of how Robin helped her students overcome nonacademic-related challenges so they could continue to take her class one semester.) These ways of enacting a mother-like faculty identity suggest the community college faculty identities are distinct from other teacher or faculty identities, as described in the current literature. For example, studies have shown that K-12 teachers have viewed themselves as mothers in the sense that they feel responsible for their students’ intellectual development and their emotional development (Farrell, 2006; Provenzo et al., 1989), but I found no study that indicated the extent to which Robin has taken on a nurturing role both inside *and* outside the classroom vis-à-vis her students.

Part-time math faculty member, Sarah, described her faculty identity as being like a gardener and positioned her students as “the plants” she nurtures so that they “can grow.” A

gardener also is a common metaphor used by teachers in K-12 settings to describe their teacher identities (Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; McEwan, 2007; Oxford et al., 1998). These metaphors have tended to focus on the gardener role of checking on their flowers (their students) daily while also giving them room to breathe (B. White & Smith, 1994, p. 167). Sarah's gardener identity likely would do the same, but she explained further that as a gardener, she is "cultivating and encouraging students from diverse backgrounds." Mentioning the diversity of her students explicitly when she described her faculty identity metaphor makes clear that the diverse backgrounds of her students has had an influence on her faculty identity. Other teacher-as-gardener metaphors in the literature do not explicitly mention the diversity of student backgrounds as Sarah's metaphor does.

Laura's buffet metaphor arguably provides insight into the distinctiveness of community college faculty and the way they view themselves as nurturers compared to K-12 teachers who have used nurturing metaphors to describe their teacher identity as well. Laura described her faculty identity in the following way:

I'm here for the students. I will give you what you need. In some ways, I am a buffet... I will say this in class—I feel like I'm putting out some pretty high quality food here. I'm going to give you the whole table, from here to here. If you don't like this, I'll give you this; and if you don't like that, wait until next week, we're going to do that.

A buffet is known for its options, convenience, and accessibility, characteristics for which community colleges also are known. Laura's metaphor emphasizes the "high quality" she provides her students. Notably, she does not view herself as a fast food chain or hotdog stand, which also offer convenience and accessibility. Instead, as a buffet, she offers a wide range of

“high quality food” (or learning) that can nurture the taste preferences (or learning preferences) of all her students. The way she introduces her buffet metaphor—“I’m here for the students”—also emphasizes how she views herself as putting her students first while providing them with learning options. She aims to provide students with the learning they need, just as a nurturer aims to provide the people he/she nurtures with what they need.

Laura’s image of a buffet evokes an image of a chef or mother working tirelessly in the kitchen preparing a variety of entrees, vegetable dishes, and appetizers to suit the taste preferences of anyone and everyone. Indeed, this metaphor could be extended to community colleges themselves. They, too, are driven by their missions to prepare a variety of educational offerings to suit the needs of everyone in their communities, including high school students (through dual enrollment programs), adults interested in occupational education, students seeking transfer education, individuals in need of developmental education, seniors interested in lifelong learning, businesses looking for contracted training, and more (Bailey & Averianova, 1998; Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Once again it is evident that these metaphor categories overlap. For example, a nurturer also needs to be a supporter in order to be an effective nurturer. What separated these two categories was that the primary focus of nurturers was taking care of their students so that they feel confident and feel good about themselves, something that supporters also valued, but the supporters’ primary focus was not necessarily taking care of students the way a mother or gardener might. It was providing students with the support they needed to be successful.

**Community member.** Faculty also described metaphors that alluded to the prominence they placed on building, encouraging, and being a part of a “community.” These metaphors



tended to position students and others as equals and had strong connections to other metaphor categories identified by this study.

Part-time English faculty member, Alison, explained that, to her, being a community college faculty member means being “part of the community.” She explained, “It’s a community in which the opportunities both for personal growth and for helping others grow are almost boundless.” Her use of the phrase “helping others grow” suggests strong similarities to Sarah’s gardener metaphor, except Alison’s metaphor suggests she feels a part of the “community garden” as much as her students are a part of it, because she, too, feels she has grown and developed as a result of teaching at ECC and feeling apart of its community. To Alison, “the community” is ECC.

One of the metaphors that part-time math faculty member, Kathy, used to describe her faculty identity was as a community builder. She explained, “It’s that whole ‘we are all in this together’ attitude that I like to promote in my classes – that the only way that we are all going to make it is if we all support each other where we happen to be.” Her emphasis on supporting each other suggests this metaphor has connection to the “supporter” category as well. Kathy also referred to each of her classes as a “community,” which is similar to Sam’s coach metaphor and his goal of turning his classrooms into capable teams, except Kathy’s metaphor does not evoke a hierarchical relationship the way the coach-player relationship does. Instead her community metaphor includes herself as part of the class and suggests more equal standing and comraderie between her and her students. To Kathy, community is what she is trying to build in her classrooms with her students.

Full-time math faculty member and department chair, Kim, summarized her faculty identity by suggesting, “I’m an ambassador of all that we offer here and all that’s available to

students.” To Kim, “community” extends beyond the walls of her classrooms and beyond the campus borders to include ECC’s district, the larger local community. She sees herself as a representative of ECC out, in, and across the college district.

Other metaphors in other categories also evoked images and feelings of being part of a team or community. For example, when Sarah described her gardener metaphor, she mentioned that community college faculty are gardeners that “serve the community—not self-serve, but outward.” Like ECC, her garden “is not exclusive.” She explains “anybody can come.” Any type of plant (or student) is welcome because, as a community college faculty member, she values and serves her community. Sharita’s shepherd metaphor also alludes to a sense of community when she explains that community college faculty “walk alongside” students, the way a shepherd walks alongside his sheep. Like Kathy, she views that she and her students are part of the same community—living, walking, and working together—just as a shepherd and his/her sheep share the same land and live alongside each other.

Metaphors emphasizing community like those noted above were not found anywhere in the current corpus of literature on teacher or faculty identity metaphors. This finding suggests that community college faculty are unique in the ways in which they value serving and being part of their communities.

**Jack of all trades.** As the results presented so far suggest, there is no one universal metaphor, or even metaphor category, that synthesizes what it means to be a community college faculty member. All participants described multiple meanings that they ascribed to their community college faculty identities (see Chapter 3) and four faculty members in this study used multiple metaphors to describe their faculty identities. Two participants used the same metaphor to represent this phenomenon, describing themselves as a “jack of all trades.”

Justin described the challenge of having to be so many different things for his students.

He explained:

You know those handyman people? You hire them not because they are an astounding plumber or an amazing electrician nor any one of these specialties, but because they're kind of a jack-of-all-trades. That's really what we are, or at least what a good faculty member is. I think that it's really being able to synthesize all of those things and balance them so that you can be a friend and confidante and advocate and sympathize all of those aspects. My faculty identity is just that.

Although the qualifications for being a faculty member at a community college typically are a master's degree and teaching experience, community college faculty find themselves taking on a variety of roles that go beyond their disciplinary and teaching expertise. At the very least, "good" community college faculty (as Justin puts it) have to find a way to become like a jack of all trades to serve their students' various needs. In this sense, community college faculty, like Justin, do not *choose* to be like a jack of all trades. Instead, they view that their students' needs require them to be so many different things. In fact, some community college faculty may choose to focus solely on his or her teaching and discipline. However, for community college faculty who value supporting and nurturing their students (like many of those interviewed for this study, including Justin), they view themselves as much more than simply instructor and content expert. Because they perceive that their students have a wide-range of needs, these faculty take on a wide-range of roles.

Kim, too, alluded to this phenomenon and talked about having to be everything for everyone, and not just for her students. Her faculty identity metaphors included being both an ambassador and a cheerleader. Similarities between these two metaphors exist—both support and

advocate for a specific group of people, for example—but the differences are obvious as well. An ambassador evokes leadership, global influence, and ranking, while a cheerleader evokes more of a support role than a leadership role, is more locally focused than globally focused, and is more of a peer than an authority figure vis-à-vis others. In trying to synthesize her faculty identities into one metaphor, Kim stated, “You have to be a jack-of-all-trades a little bit to survive.” Presented this way, this jack of all trades metaphor alludes to the challenges that community college faculty face in trying to be everything from a priest to a traffic director to a cheerleader to a gardener to a community builder all at once. In order to be successful or, in order “to survive,” as Kim put it, you have to be able to perform all these various roles. This metaphor suggests that in order to verify the multiple meanings of the community college faculty role identity (see Chapter 3), you have to take on a “jack of all trades” mentality to do it all. At least to Kim, focusing just on one aspect of her faculty identity—whether cheerleader or ambassador—is not sufficient. An integration of being a trusted guide, a supporter, a nurturer, and a community member is what it means to be a community college faculty member.

### **Developmental Faculty Perspective**

Justin shared a metaphor that he said was specific to his identity as a faculty member who teaches developmental students. He said he feels like a carpenter tasked with refurbishing a “beat up table that’s been beat to hell.” Although he was the only faculty member in the sample to conceptualize his faculty identity in this way, other faculty who primarily taught development students—both math and English faculty—related a similar perspective during their interviews, suggesting that they, too, would relate to Justin’s identity metaphor and view it as prominent to their faculty identities.

Justin explained that students in his classes “were underserved for the 13 years that they were in their public schooling” and, as a result, are not deemed ready for college-level work when they arrive at ECC. As a community college faculty member teaching developmental classes, Justin continued:

You’ve got a much shorter amount of time to try to undo the damage that was done and then get them [i.e., students] amped up and through this process [i.e., college]... It’s very, very tricky because you would think it’s easier to build a table than it is to take a table that’s been beat to hell and refinish it into a beautiful table that someone wants... What we’re asked to do is take a beat up table and refinish it and then have it nice enough that someone wants it in their house. And we’re asked to do that in less than a quarter of the time that it would take someone to just build a table from scratch.

This excerpt is rich with metaphorical language that reveals a great deal about Justin’s faculty identity and the challenges he faces as a developmental teacher. Justin does not just view his students as “underserved” during their elementary and secondary school years. By describing that part of his job is “undo[ing] the damage that was done” to his students in K-12 reveals that he sees their prior education experiences as much more negative and destructive. In this excerpt, Justin positions developmental students as broken and their educational abilities as impaired. He positions developmental faculty as carpenters who are asked to take on the challenging task of refinishing old, shabby tables and making all the flaws and cracks eventually disappear so they look brand new. He claims that community college faculty who teach developmental students like him are asked to educate and motivate (i.e., “amp up”) disadvantaged, undereducated students to be knowledgeable, skilled, and prepared enough that a college-level class would

accept them or an employer would hire them. To add to this challenge, community college faculty like him are asked to do all that—educate a student the way they should have been educated over the course of their lifetime—in a matter of a semester or two.

Justin was incredibly positive throughout most of his interview. He made clear how happy he was to be living out his career goal and working in his dream job. However, in this instance when he describes what it means to be a developmental education instructor, he paints a depressing picture. His anger about how he views his developmental students as having been neglected and damaged while they were in public schools is palpable.

### **Part-time Faculty Perspective**

A noteworthy result from this study is that eight of the nine part-time faculty participants did not describe any faculty identity metaphors that alluded to their part-time status; they instead described metaphors that focused on their students or their communities. This finding is somewhat surprising given the controversy and conflict that surrounds the high rates of part-time faculty at community colleges (Banachowski, 1996; Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2009; Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Roueche et al., 1995). Nearly seven in ten faculty at community colleges teach part-time (AFT Higher Education, 2009), and they are paid substantially less than their full-time colleagues, rarely receive benefits, and must string together multiple jobs in order to make ends meet if they lack any other financial support at home (Benjamin, 2000; Eagan, 2007). Earlier research has shown that faculty at community colleges who teach part-time encounter a range of challenges that negatively affect how they perceive their faculty identities (Thirolf, 2012). For example, one political science faculty member at a community college described herself as a “hired gun” because she viewed herself, as a part-time faculty member, as someone who is “basically paid for the hit, the job. But there is nothing else that comes with it,” meaning she is

paid to teach a class (“the hit”) but receives no health benefits or job security in turn (Thirolf, 2012, p. 274).

One participant in the current study, English faculty member, Lynn, described a metaphor that characterized the challenges she felt as a part-time faculty member at ECC. She said she feels like a “juggler on a tightrope” because she has so many different “balls in the air” on which she has to keep focus and because she often feels isolated as a part-time faculty member.

Although their faculty identity metaphors did not allude to it, each of the part-time faculty in this study discussed challenges they faced because they teach part-time, including lack of secure office space, little connection with colleagues, and very low pay with no benefits. For example, Brian compared the part-time faculty experience to the part-time student experience. As he put it, “Come to campus, go to the classroom, do your thing, go home. That’s it. No interaction with anybody else.” Sharita lamented, “When you’re part time you don’t have the time to really commit to students that you know need that extra help.” So, although Lynn was the only participant in this study to describe a faculty identity metaphor that alluded to the challenges she faces as a part-time faculty member, her “juggler on a tightrope” image is one with which other part-time faculty in this study likely could relate. She explained this metaphor in the following way:

The first image that pops into my mind—I think it’s pretty accurate, or at least it’s kind of compelling to me. It’s like you’re a juggler on a tightrope. It’s not so much that there’s danger on all sides, but you have all these different things that require your attention. Um. At least as a part-time [faculty member]. I can’t speak to full-time... But at least for the part-time [faculty], it’s like, I have to focus on

the ball that's coming down to my hand and the ball that's being tossed up into the other hand. I also need to know where I'm putting my feet at all times.

Lynn uses a combination of two metaphors—being a juggler and being on a tightrope—to describe what it means to her to be a community college faculty member. Like a juggler, she must maintain focus on multiple “balls in the air,” a phrase that she repeats six times over the course of her interview before she describes this summary metaphor at the interview's end. The balls in the air, as she explains, are among “all these different things that require your attention,” including her multiple jobs (being a part-time faculty member at two different colleges, a writing center tutor, a barista, and an ACT tutor) and the multiple roles and responsibilities she describes she takes on specifically as a faculty member (see Chapter 3).

Maintaining focus is key to being a juggler. As Lynn describes it above, “[A]t least for the part-time [faculty], it's like, I have to focus on the ball that's coming down to my hand and the ball that's being tossed up into the other hand.” Like a juggler, Lynn cannot decide to focus solely on one ball, even if she would prefer to or even if one ball (i.e., one role or responsibility) needs more attention from her. She has to focus on all the balls equally and all at once in order to keep them all in the air.

In addition to maintaining keen focus, jugglers also have to keep moving their arms to keep all the balls in the air. Taking a break, letting your arms and body rest even for a minute or two, means letting the balls drop or fall. Constant focus *and* energy is therefore required. Like a juggler, Lynn only has two eyes, two arms, and two hands, all of which are required to keep her multiple balls “in the air.” This means she cannot get involved in activities that would take her focus and energy away from her juggling duties, activities such as participating in professional development, going back to school, getting involved in her discipline, interacting with other



faculty, and even getting to know her students better. As she puts it, “I know there are efforts made for [meeting other faculty], and I just don’t take advantage of them because I have all these other balls in the air.” She also admits, “I have not taken advantage of [professional development] as I wish I could... But routinely – there’s one that I really want to go to, but I don’t have the energy.” With regard to her students, she says in describing her traffic cop role, “I’m not going to solve their problem for them or become too involved. I tell them what [services are] available.” As a juggler with so many balls in the air, she lacks the time, energy, and capacity to contend with her students’ problems; she can only tell them about student services on campus and nudge them there so she can keep her eyes, her focus on juggling the many balls she has to juggle.

The juggler Lynn describes—her faculty identity as a community college faculty member—is lone and “very isolated,” not connected to a team of other faculty (or jugglers) or coaches or cheerleaders. At the college, she feels “disjointed” and even describes herself as a “lone-wolf faculty member” and later admits “I honestly don’t know the mission of the college. I probably should. If I were a good faculty member, I would have that somewhere.” She laments feeling like she is not a good faculty member and not “seeing” how her work contributes to the mission of the college, something she was able to “see” at her previous job as a high school teacher. So she focuses on her “own mission as an educator,” not a shared or collective one.

This sense of isolation also comes through in the way she describes walking on a tightrope as a community college faculty member. She always “needs to know where [she’s] putting [her] feet at all times,” which suggests no one is there to help her or guide her to take the right steps; she’s on her own. On a tightrope, you can’t just step anywhere. You have to be very careful and cautious or else you might fall. Lynn’s discourse paints this type of image more than

once over the course of her interview. For example, when discussing faculty assessment at ECC, she discloses, “[Faculty assessments] terrify the heck out of me. I worry that some disgruntled student or something like that could torpedo me.” Just as a tightrope walker must, Lynn has to be careful where she steps, including how she comes across to her students and her colleagues, because, as a part-time faculty member, her employment is tenuous. There is no guarantee that she will be hired again to teach in subsequent semesters.

In a tender moment in her interview, Lynn admits:

I think the hard thing for me is to pullback sometimes [from engaging with students more]. I think that’s something I’ve had to do here because I have so many balls in the air. I can’t be available whenever my students need me to be available. So that’s the harder thing. That’s where I feel perhaps I’m falling down – that I’m not doing a good of a job as I did [in my previous job as high school teacher].

This admission illustrates well the tension of being a juggler *and* walking on a tightrope. She has limited ability to focus and limited energy to do much else than these two complicated things, which limits her ability to get to know her students better, something she was better able to do in her previous job as a high school teacher and found fulfilling.

At the time of her interview, Lynn was also one of the youngest participants in terms of age (late 20s) and spent the least amount of time teaching at a community college (one academic year). Her age and her inexperience at community colleges may be influencing her view of her faculty identity as “a juggler on a tightrope” as much as her part-time status. As Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) found, new K-12 teachers also viewed themselves as “lost” and overwhelmed by the “demanding nature of the multifarious” new teaching roles they had taken on (p. 766-

767). Lynn's metaphor appears to resonate with the identity metaphors of brand new teachers, not just part-time faculty.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This study shows that metaphor analysis does much to broaden understanding of community college faculty identities. The participants in this study described metaphors that exemplify the multifaceted nature of being a community college faculty member. They view themselves as more than just merely English or math instructors. Whether part-time, full-time, English, or math faculty, their relationships with their students are at the forefront of their professional identities. Indeed, the most striking finding from this study is that their faculty identity metaphors were all relatively similar in this regard, regardless of discipline or employment status. They view themselves as guides to their students, whether as “priests” who reduce suffering and can be trusted or “shamans” who point the way to success in college and life. They view themselves as supporters, whether as “cheerleaders” who encourage students to do their best or an “open window” that can provide students with options when they encounter difficult life circumstances. They view themselves as nurturers, whether as “parents” who are concerned with the emotional development of their students or “gardeners” who aim to cultivate and encourage student growth. Their metaphors also point to the importance they place on community—including building a sense of community, feeling a part of a community, and serving their communities—a noteworthy finding considering it is a theme not yet seen before in literature that has examined teacher or faculty identity metaphors.

Indeed, compared to the extant literature on teacher or faculty identity, these community college faculty identity metaphors suggest that the community college faculty profession is distinct from K-12 teachers or other college faculty. “Priest” was one metaphor that faculty in

different departments used to describe their faculty identity in this study, yet “priest” was not found in any current literature on teacher or faculty identities to date. Even for the metaphors that were proffered by these participants and also found in the current literature—including “gardener,” “coach,” and “parent”—analysis of the community college faculty identity metaphors revealed that they allude to providing substantially more support and guidance for students with matters outside of class than the K-12 or other college faculty metaphors.

Furthermore, although Lynn may have been an inexperienced community college faculty member, she was not an inexperienced teacher. In fact, among the English part-time faculty in this study, she had the most full-time teaching experience: she taught high school English for four years before taking the part-time job at ECC. This suggests that K-12 teaching may not entirely be comparable to community college teaching. If it were, then Lynn may not have felt so overwhelmed and considered herself a “juggler on a tightrope.” While any teaching experience is better than none, this finding suggests that new community college faculty are best prepared if they have at least some community-college-specific teaching experience.

This study also revealed the ways in which these faculty positioned others, namely students. As guides, these faculty viewed their students as needing direction and guidance, but some also viewed students as companions, part of their communities, and needing to be served and cheered for. Indeed, this study shows that faculty/student relationships at community colleges can be very close and complex; and it is perhaps because of this closeness and complexity that student relationships are at the core of many community college faculty identities.

This metaphor analysis revealed further nuance and complexity inherent in community college faculty identities, including the challenges community colleges faculty face and how

these challenges influence their faculty identities. Like a “juggler on a tightrope,” Lynn feels alone, overwhelmed, and isolated, feelings she associates with being part-time and having to string together multiple part-time faculty jobs. Like a carpenter faced with an impossible refinishing job, Justin laments being asked to do too much to sufficiently help his students in much too little time. However, the faculty interviewed for this study also described several positive metaphors that capture the fulfillment they feel as community college faculty. Sam views himself as an editor who inspires, Kim described herself as a cheerleader who supports the college and student success, and Sarah sees herself a gardener that cultivates and encourages. Over all, these faculty identity metaphors reveal that participants view what they do as difficult, challenging work, but they also view it as important and find fulfillment in it as well.

Finally, this study reveals that faculty identity metaphors are indicators of identity prominence for community college faculty (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). The four main faculty identity metaphor categories identified by this study—trusted guide, supporter, nurturer, and community member—characterize the desires and values of the participants, and how they want others to see them—exactly the definition of identity prominence according to Stets and Serpe (2013). Future research that examines identity prominence should consider using Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as a framework and metaphor analysis as a method in order to investigate the ways in which people rank their identities in terms of identity prominence.

### **Future Research Directions**

In addition to the study limitations noted in Chapter 2, it is important to note that metaphors, while they offer unique and important insight into the study of identities, including faculty identities, they also have their limitations. As Morgan (1986/1997) has argued, “Metaphors create insight. But they also distort... In creating ways of seeing, they create ways of

not seeing. Hence there can be no single theory or metaphor that gives an all-purpose point of view” (p. 348). This study mitigated this limitation somewhat by analyzing multiple faculty identity metaphors and allowing participants to describe more than one metaphor themselves, thereby revealing multiple points of view on community college faculty identities. Analyzing additional faculty identity metaphors would capture even more perspectives and uncover additional nuance on this important topic.

Comparing the results of this chapter with the results of the previous chapter also addresses this limitation. Indeed, these metaphor categories match extremely well Chapter 3’s role identity categories. Providing students with the support they need links directly to the “faculty member as supporter” category. Caring about students is strongly associated with the “faculty as nurturer” category. Serving communities is clearly related to the “faculty as community member” category. Finally, being a passionate and expert teacher captures similar themes as the “faculty as trusted guide” metaphor category. Being able to triangulate the results from this study with the results from Chapter 3’s study helps to affirm that analyses were not distorted and that interpretations were accurate. Future research should analyse faculty identity metaphors from other community college faculty who teach at other community colleges to determine to what extent the themes from both studies emerge elsewhere.

Examining the faculty metaphors by gender reveals some interesting themes. Three females (also mothers) proffered nurturer metaphors to describe their faculty identities. Four male faculty members used metaphors that evoked images associated mostly with males not females, including “priest” (Tim and Justin), “shaman” (Jon), and “soccer coach” (Sam). Justin’s carpenter metaphor (i.e., “[What developmental teachers like me are] asked to do is take a beat up table and refinish it and then have it nice enough that someone wants it in their house”) also

tends to evoke an image of a male, not a female. (However, the final faculty identity metaphor that Justin describes is that of an “educational companion,” which does not evoke any gender-specific connotations per se but does suggest empathy, caring, and warmth—all characteristics that are stereotypically associated with women.) The large number of parents in this sample may also have influenced these results. At the time of their interviews, all participants had at least one child or stepchild except Tim, Sharita, and Lynn. These findings suggest that a person’s gender and parental identities may tend to shape how they view their faculty identities, which is an area worthy of additional research.

Related to the issue of gender, it is particularly interesting that two participants independently chose the metaphor of “priest” to describe their faculty identity, and that this metaphor was not seen in the literature on faculty or teacher identity metaphors to date. Future research should examine the interplay between faculty identity and faculty ego. Do other community college faculty view themselves this way? Do they welcome this kind of portrayal, or do they feel it forced upon them due to the extensive needs of their students? For Justin and Tim, I believe it is a combination of the two, but the question requires additional exploration.

Although focused on faculty at community colleges, this study can help inform research on elementary and secondary teachers as well. Unlike many studies on K-12 teacher identity, this study uses robust theoretical frameworks, takes into account the positionings of others inherent in identity metaphors, and employs advanced qualitative methods that can uncover more complexity and nuance into identity metaphors than simple qualitative coding can. Future research on teacher identities can use these and similar frameworks and methods to advance research on teachers and teacher identity.

In terms of methods, conducting faculty focus groups may yield richer and even more meaningful faculty identity metaphors. Metaphors are excellent tools for conceptualizing complex things, like identities. Several faculty in this study initially struggled to identify a metaphor that represented how they view what it means to be a community college faculty member. Allowing faculty to reflect on, work through, and build faculty identity metaphors in groups could help participants think about and articulate their faculty identities. This technique may ultimately lead to more and more comprehensive metaphors than what this study was able to solicit.

### **Practice Implications**

This study suggests that creating spaces for narrative work, such as encouraging teachers and faculty to describe their professional identities through metaphor, can lead to more holistic teacher and faculty development (Conle, 1996). Brian was one participant who spent quite a bit of time (almost a minute) thinking in silence when he was asked what image or metaphor he would choose to encapsulate his faculty identity or what it means to be a community college faculty member. He explained that the fact he struggled to come up with an answer “speaks to the quality of the question” and “says how important [it] is.” “I really should have this,” he said. For current community college faculty, colleges should offer professional development opportunities for them to reflect on and discuss their professional identities both within and across departments. Organizing faculty retreats that feature a mix of one-on-one conversations, small group discussions, and department- and college-wide dialogues focused on what it means to be a community college faculty member could facilitate this type of faculty development. In her study of pre-service teachers, Alsup (2006) found that participants who fully engaged in discovering and creating teacher identity metaphors developed a stronger sense of themselves as



teachers, were more confident in their teacher abilities, and stayed committed to the teaching profession longer than those who did not. Graduate programs that train and prepare future faculty should incorporate reflection and discussion of faculty identities through metaphor, much like many K-12 teacher preparation programs do.

It also is recommended that community colleges include information and discussion about the complex faculty identities of community college faculty during new faculty orientation sessions. Indeed, findings from this study affirm that engaging community college faculty in a variety of dialogues, including the use of metaphors, about their professional identities can be “an effective approach for preparing them [and developing them] for [their] complex and demanding profession” (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011, p. 768). Like Alsup’s (2006) participants, community college faculty, too, may benefit from developing a firm faculty identity that provides a foundation for confidence and commitment to the profession.

This study reveals that community college faculty members view their faculty identities as more demanding and complex than just being an instructor or purveyor of knowledge. With the increased attention on community colleges with regard to accountability measures and student outcomes (e.g., K. J. Dougherty, Hare, & Natow, 2009; Kelly & Schneider, 2012), being a community college faculty member is likely to become even more complex and demanding. Encouraging community college faculty to engage in more reflection and exploration of their faculty identities through metaphor likely would help them think through these complexities and demands, how they might impact their work, and prepare them to be better guides, supporters, nurturers, and community builders as a result.

## CHAPTER 5:

### **Positive Organizational Influences on Community College Faculty Identities**

**Abstract:** Guided by identity frameworks (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Positive Organizational Scholarship concepts (Cameron et al., 2003; L. M. Roberts & Dutton, 2009), this case study examines positive organizational influences on community college faculty identities. Results show that interactions with colleagues, especially naturally forming and informal interactions, had the strongest positive influence on how full-time and part-time faculty teaching English and math at a suburban community college in the United States viewed their professional identities. Data also suggest that thoughtful design and use of workspaces, technology, and faculty gatherings can help to initiate and facilitate these types of important collegial and identity-affirming connections. Directions for future research and implications for practice also are discussed.

Identity has been written about extensively in organizational studies (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Ashforth, Joshi, Anand, & O'Leary-Kelly, 2013; Brickson, 2005; Brown & Toyoki, 2013; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). With few exceptions, however (Chreim et al., 2007; Ibarra, 1999), little is known about what influences a person's view of his or her professional identity. Meanwhile, studies have shown that forming a professional identity (Ibarra, 1999) and having a high regard for it (Dutton et al., 2010) is associated with many positive outcomes. For example, individuals who have a positive perception of their professional identity are more likely to “vest their sense of self” in their work (Ashforth et al., 2013, p. 2430), find it easier to adjust to new jobs (Beyer & Hannah, 2002), and feel greater unity, purpose, and empowerment as professionals (S. J. Roberts, 2000). Ultimately, the way in which an individual views his or her professional identity influences how he or she interprets, judges, behaves, and performs in work situations (Beijaard et al., 2000; Pratt et al., 2006; Weick, 1995).

To advance research on this topic, this study asks: What organizational level influences might positively influence the way in which individuals view their professional identities? I focus on a group of professionals about whom very little is known—community college faculty. Given that community college faculty teach nearly half of all U.S. undergraduates (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014), the lack of knowledge about them and their professional identities is a concern. Identifying ways to support community college faculty by focusing on ways to positively influence their views of their professional identities has the potential to enhance their self-esteem (Cast & Burke, 2002) and performance (Burke & Reitzes, 1981) and, therefore, can have a positive impact on their effectiveness as a teacher (Alsup, 2006). In turn, these outcomes all have the potential to positively impact their students.

Using a case study approach (Yin, 2009) and guided by identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Positive Organizational Scholarship concepts (Cameron et al., 2003; L. M. Roberts & Dutton, 2009), this study focuses on the English and math departments at Eastern Community College (ECC), a suburban community college located in the United States. In addition to analyzing college documents, touring campus buildings, and observing faculty meetings, I conducted a total of 15 interviews with both full-time and part-time faculty in those departments. The goal of this research was to identify what, at the college-level, has a positive influence on community college faculty identities and what colleges can do to facilitate positive faculty identities.

To begin, I first review the literature on community college faculty identity and the organizational influences on professional identities in general. I then describe the theoretical frameworks guiding this inquiry. Following a description of the data collected and methodology used, I present the results of this study. I then discuss the findings, including the ways in which identity frameworks and Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) concepts shed light on the results. Implications for practice and research are then discussed.

## **Background**

Professional identity and work identity are terms that have been used interchangeably without clear explanation (e.g., Grimaldi, Mattarelli, & Tagliaventi, 2009), so it is important to contrast them. Abbott (1988) defines a profession as an “exclusive occupational group applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases” (p. 8). In organizational studies literature, professional identity is defined as the collection of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences that people use to define themselves in a professional role (Ibarra, 1999; Schein,

1978). Work identity has been defined as how individuals perceive and define themselves in the workplace (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Pratt et al., 2006).

The profession of community college teaching, however, does not have a single, specific, or confined workplace. Community college faculty enact their faculty identities in a variety of settings: in the classroom (both on campus and online), of course, but also outside of class when interacting with students or fellow faculty, or even at home when responding to student emails about course work or a final exam, for example. Therefore, for purposes of this study, I draw on both professional identity *and* work identity concepts and literature to frame my exploration of community college faculty identities.

As described in Chapter 2, with few exceptions (Levin et al., 2013; Thirolf, 2012, 2013; Toth et al., 2013), very few empirical studies have examined the professional identities of community college faculty. Particularly scarce is literature that has examined influences on faculty identities. Based on interviews with faculty at a large suburban community college, Fugate and Amey (2000) found that faculty development programs had a positive impact on the faculty they interviewed, but they also lacked a guiding theoretical framework and focused only on full-time faculty, even though part-time faculty represent over two-thirds of all community college faculty today (AFT Higher Education, 2009). Furthermore, they focused more on the concept of careers than professional identity, leaving both concepts undefined and the latter concept much underdiscussed. Other studies have either focused solely on part-time faculty (Thirolf, 2012, 2013), faculty of color (Levin et al., 2013), or faculty teaching writing and composition (Toth et al., 2013). Furthermore, only Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf (2013) include brief discussion of the organizational factors that influence community college faculty. They

found that informal connections among faculty are key to the socialization of new part-time faculty teaching English.

Building on Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf's (2013) work, this study takes a broader focus and examines the positive impact that organizational factors, including collegial connections, union membership, professional development, and faculty evaluations, have on the professional identities of English and math faculty, including both full-time and part-time instructors. This study also aims to identify what colleges can do to facilitate and enable those types of identity-affirming experiences.

### **Identity Theories**

Like the other analytical chapters in this dissertation, this study aligns with the structural symbolic interactionism perspective and defines identity as “what it means to be who one is” (Stryker, 1980, p. 1). According to identity theory (Burke et al., 2003; Burke & Stets, 2009), people have multiple identities, including multiple *role identities* and *social identities*. Because I have discussed role identities in depth in previous chapters, I focus my discussion here on social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), social identities are based on a person's identification with certain social groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). These groups can be categorized in a number of ways, including by nationality (e.g., American), race (e.g., African-American), and profession (e.g., doctor), among others. Individuals also identify with smaller social groups, such as church groups, alumni associations, and hobby clubs. Social identity theory argues that identifying with a social group implies being a member of an “in-group” in contrast to an “out-group,” and that feeling a sense of belonging to a social group provides a definition of who one is. As such, social identity theory has focused on group behavior and

intergroup relations and concentrated on the causes and consequences of identifying with a social group or category (Stets & Burke, 2000).

In their seminal piece, Ashforth and Mael (1989) introduced social identity theory (SIT) concepts to the study of organizations. They argued that organizational identification is a specific form of social identification. Furthermore, they proposed that an individual's social identity may be derived from his or her work group, department, or union, among other suborganizations. Therefore, the organizationally situated social identity may, in fact, they argue, "be comprised of more or less disparate and loosely coupled identities" (p. 22). This study uses SIT concepts to examine the extent to which participants described being a member of certain social groups within their profession—including full-time or part-time faculty, the English or math department, the college union, the college in general, and community college faculty overall—and how these memberships influence their view of their professional identities.

Although identity theory and social identity theory were developed independently and have different emphases, scholars have argued for linking the two theories to establish a more fully integrated theory of identity (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stets and Burke, 2000). For example, Thoits and Virshup (1997) have argued that roles (e.g., mother) and social categories (e.g., Muslim) can be the basis of individual *or* collective identities. An individual may describe her identity as, "I am a mother" or "I am a Muslim" (individual identities), *and* also describe her identity as a member of a group, such as "We are mothers" and "We are Muslims" (collective identities). They point to the example of a group of professionals, nurse practitioners. They may normally view and refer to themselves in terms of their individual professional identity (i.e., "I am a nurse practitioner"), but may at times shift to a collective identity ("We nurse practitioners") when, for example, "their abilities status or functions related to physicians are in

question” (Thoits & Virshup, 1997, p. 126). Similarly, Burke and Stets (2009) have argued that “roles are embedded in groups” (p. 122). Using these frameworks, this study examines to what degree community college faculty identities are both role identities and group identities, and what influence (if any) that has on how positively they perceive their professional identities.

### **Professional Identities and Organizations**

As is true for anyone who is part of an organization, community college faculty are “social beings embedded in organizational contexts” (Alvesson et al., 2008, pp. 5-6). Research has shown that elements in these contexts can influence an individual’s professional identity (Chreim et al., 2007). For example, in their qualitative investigation of a Canadian health clinic, Chreim, Williams, and Hinings (2007) found that organizational dynamics, such as incentive systems, physical structures (e.g., collocating physicians under one roof), and integrating physicians into teams, facilitated new behaviors and interactions that led to a reconstruction of professional role identities among participants. Other studies have found that socialization practices and role-modeling relationships contribute to professionals being able to adapt to new roles because these organizational elements enable experimentation with “provisional” professional selves (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764). Like Chreim, Williams, and Hinings (2007), Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann (2006) conducted their research on professionals in medicine. They found that residents’ professional identities were influenced by observing and modeling after role models, a factor that Ibarra (1999) also found to be influential. In addition, Pratt et al. (2006) found that receiving feedback from senior physicians contributed to their professional identity construction. Based on this corpus of literature, this study examined the influence that organizational dynamics such as incentive systems, workspaces, and role models had on participants’ faculty identities.



Recently, research has focused on positive identity construction at work (Dutton et al., 2010; L. M. Roberts, 2007; L. M. Roberts & Dutton, 2009). In their review of the literature, Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar (2010) categorize work-related identities into four perspectives, including the evaluative perspective, with which this study aligns. This perspective posits that a person's identity is deemed positive when he or she regards it favorably. When a person derives self-esteem from being who they are, they will view their identity (including their professional identity) in positive terms. An example of a study that employs this perspective is Fine (1996). In his ethnographic study of restaurant cooks, Fine (1996) found that cooks used a range of occupational rhetorics, including narratives of business, art, and labor, as resources to define their identities and provide a sense of self-worth. Like Fine (1996), this study defines a participant's identity as positive when evidence suggests that the participant regards his or her identity in positive terms.

Finally, I use Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) frameworks to analyze my findings. POS focuses on the study of positive influences, outcomes, and attributes of organizations and their members. It attends to the enablers, motivations, and outcomes or effects associated with positive phenomena (Cameron et al., 2003). A POS concept related to this study is the concept of high quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). High quality connections are interactions between two people that lead to positive, beneficial outcomes, such as feeling more positive energy, feeling liked and loved, feeling more alive, and feeling an enhanced and enriched sense of identity (L. M. Roberts, 2007; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2012). High quality connections (HQCs) were selected to help guide this study because recent research on community college faculty suggests faculty connections are key to helping part-time faculty acclimate to a new college and perform in their faculty roles (Thirolf, 2012; Toth et al., 2013).

Advancing this line of inquiry, this study turned to the concept of HQCs to investigate these colleague connections and examine to what extent they positively influenced both part-time and full-time community college faculty views of their professional identities.

Obviously, not all organizational influences on professional identities are positive. For example, a variety of research in K-12 educational settings has explored negative influences on teacher identity. Studies have found that teaching context, including perceived lack of support from school leadership and culture of the school, can negatively influence teacher identities (Beijaard et al., 2000; Gu & Day, 2007). Teachers have described that they feel core aspects of their professional identities are “under threat” by the way new reform policies have been implemented at their schools and, furthermore, the resulting increased workload and non-teaching duties that take time and energy away from making themselves available to their students negatively effect their teacher identities (Lasky, 2005, p. 913).

Research on higher education contexts also has studied negative influences on faculty identities. Based on interviews with academics, Archer (2008) found that participants felt the marketization of higher education was poisoning any remnants of a collegial and collaborative academic environment—and, thereby, poisoning their faculty identities—due to increased pressures on them to always be publishing (quantity over quality) and writing grant applications to “bring in the money” (p. 273). Indeed, evidence suggests that the marketization and managerialism of higher education have had negative consequences for academic identities, morale and stress (Archer, 2008; Bronwyn Davies & Petersen, 2005; Hey & Bradford, 2004). More at the organizational level, Gersick, Bartunek, and Dutton (2000) found in their qualitative study of business school faculty members that a majority of their participants described relationships with colleagues that had a positive influence on their faculty identities, but notably,

participants also described negative relationships as having an influence on them. These participants described encountering “problematic, unfair, or damaging treatment” from a colleague that they felt was “harmful” (Gersick et al., 2000, p. 1034). For example, female business school faculty described situations when they felt they and their academic identities were tokenized and marginalized by others. Male faculty members also encountered harmful colleague relationships. One participant described when, after he continually voiced his concern over the direction his department was going, a colleague stormed into his office and screamed, “I wish I could kill you!” (p. 1037). The participant ultimately left that institution to “escape the negative,” so he could connect with new colleagues who could offer a more positive influence on his faculty identity (p. 1037).

In the community college context, studies have documented negative influences on faculty identities as well. Levin et al. (2006) found that neoliberal pressures have affected community college faculty work and their faculty identities. Levin et al. (2006) is carefully optimistic that there is an opportunity for community college faculty to “chart incremental change in redefining their role and status as professionals” (p. 134). Still, the authors state, “the neoliberal state offers a glum prospect for faculty” (Levin et al., p. 137). The faculty they interviewed lamented the rise of student consumerism and the many demands students insisted upon in terms of technology and clinical placements. In addition to external forces, Levin et al. (2006) note that the prescribed and often limited role faculty play in terms of governance is often a negative influence on their faculty identities. They argue that the lack of institutional governance leads to faculty being “de-professionalized” and becoming “cogs in the corporate education wheel or gear” (Levin et al. 2006, p. 137).

Thirolf (2012) examined the faculty identities of part-time faculty at a community college and found that participants experienced positive faculty identity development through their teaching and interactions with students, but they encountered negative faculty identity development vis-à-vis their faculty peers. As one participant described, “I think they think of themselves as ‘the faculty’ and the rest are, you know, different [or] ‘other.’ I see them together... But they don’t stop and talk to me for long periods of time, like I see them talking to themselves” (Thirolf, 2012, p. 276). This participant calls herself a “hired gun” because she is paid for teaching a class (“the hit” or “the job”), “but there’s nothing else that comes with it,” like health insurance, job security, career development opportunities, or positive collegial interactions or support (Thirolf, 2012, p. 274).

While research on negative influences on faculty identities is important, this study is specifically interested in the positive organizational influences on community college faculty identities for the following reasons. First, one of the primary goals of this research is to identify ways in which colleges can support their faculty by helping them develop a positive sense of their faculty identities. Focusing on positive organizational influences, rather than negative or neutral influences, directly addresses this goal. Second, POS researchers like Jane Dutton, Laura Morgan Roberts, and Jeffrey Bednar have provided a foundation of theory-backed literature on which to frame a study. It is because of this foundation that this study has the potential to advance understanding of influences on community college faculty identities and other professionals’ identities and advance research on POS concepts like HQCs as well.

### **Data and Methods**

A case study approach (Yin, 2009) was selected because of this study’s interest in the factors and conditions at the organizational level of the college. Case studies are, by design,

excellent methodological approaches as a means to collect and analyze multiple levels of data. Although data collected from one institution is not generalizable, the goal of this study is not to arrive at generalizable findings, but rather to further understanding of a complex issue, such as community college faculty identities within a single context. Focusing on one institution, as this study does, allows for the deep-level analysis of organizational influences on professional identities that this kind of study requires. The guiding research questions include the following: Outside the classroom, what has a positive influence on the ways in which community college faculty view their faculty identities? What organizational level conditions facilitate and support these positive influences?

This inquiry focuses on influences on identity that occur in the broader institutional context outside of the classroom for the following reasons. First, as current research, including the two previous chapters of this dissertation, has shown (Fugate & Amey, 2000; Levin, Montero Hernandez, & Yoshikawa, 2011; Thirolf, 2012), teaching students is at the core of community college faculty identities. What happens in the college classroom is undoubtedly influential to the faculty identities of community college faculty.<sup>8</sup> However, inside the classroom is also the space that, as professionals, faculty (at least full-time faculty) have control over shaping and influencing (Coldron & Smith, 1999). Because one of goals of this research is to identify ways colleges, as organizations, can better support their faculty and enhance their views of their professional identities, I focused on organizational contexts outside the classroom over which college administrators have more control, including office spaces, colleague interactions, department culture and leadership, college administration leadership, union membership, faculty assessment, professional development opportunities, among other contexts.

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<sup>8</sup> To clarify, by “classroom” I mean both brick-and-mortar and online classrooms.

Finally, a bulk of qualitative research on community college faculty has focused on what happens in the classroom (Cox, 2009; Grubb, 1999; Mesa, 2010; Mesa et al., 2013). With the exception of Levin et al. (2006), which focuses on external neoliberal forces on community college faculty, little to none is known about the influences on and experiences of community college faculty outside the classroom. Meanwhile, studies have shown that community college faculty are only in the classroom, on average, between 13 to 15 hours a week, and that figure is specific to full-time faculty (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Therefore, another goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of the other, majority hours of the week when community college faculty are not teaching a class. It is important to also note that influences on faculty outside of the classroom may very well influence what happens in the classroom.

I collected and analyzed a variety of data for this study. I reviewed a variety of information on Eastern Community College, both in hard copy and electronic form. This information included the college profile, faculty orientation materials, and the college website, which itself included a wealth of information on student services at the college and the English and math departments. I attended and observed a handful of college-wide and departmental meetings, including faculty in-service meetings, faculty professional development sessions, a part-time faculty orientation, and a pre-semester English department part-time faculty orientation meeting that featured brief workshops and opportunities for informal discussions. I toured campus buildings and viewed faculty office spaces. For privacy reasons, I did not observe faculty teaching students or observe closed-door, one-on-one faculty meetings. The crux of the data collected for this study came from the semi-structured interviews I conducted with the same fifteen community college faculty described in detail in Chapter 2.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> All names, including participant and institution names, are pseudonyms.

The coding I conducted for this study, like the subsequent studies, also was guided by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Using NVivo qualitative research software, I first analyzed and coded each transcript paying particular attention to the ways faculty described the influences on their faculty identities. I used axial codes to orient the major themes discussed in the Results section below. Selective codes emerged through further analysis and interaction with the theoretical concepts associated with identity theory, social identity theory, and Positive Organizational Scholarship. I used the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to identify similarities and differences within codes across the sample. This led me to pay particular attention to the similarities and differences in responses between full-time and part-time faculty, English and math faculty, and faculty who teach mostly developmental classes and faculty who teach mostly college-level classes. I also sketched several diagrams and tables to help organize my findings and highlight connections and distinctions across the sample.

To ensure validity and trustworthiness of the research, I sought out informant feedback and conducted member checking throughout the course of the study. As a means to triangulate my data, I compared the data I collected during my observations to confirm and shed light on data collected during faculty interviews, particularly vis-à-vis their perspectives on their office spaces, faculty interactions, and faculty meetings.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations of this study are important to note. First, data were collected at only one institution. ECC is representative of financially sound, single-campus, comprehensive suburban community colleges, but certainly not representative of all community colleges in the country. Given the different contexts at urban and rural colleges especially (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007), findings should not be assumed to be applicable to faculty who teach at other college

types. Furthermore, I interviewed only fifteen faculty members who taught English or math; therefore, findings cannot and should not be generalized across other departments. Future research is necessary to test whether these findings are representative of faculty in other fields, including and especially faculty in vocational fields, given that research has demonstrated differences between faculty who teach in academic-oriented disciplines and faculty who teach vocational-oriented programs (Levin et al., 2006; Wagoner, 2007).

### **Results**

According to the participants in this study, the strongest, most positive influence on their faculty identities that happened outside the classroom were collegial connections they developed with other faculty at their college. This finding stood firm for participants across the sample; both full-time and part-time faculty and English and math faculty made clear that the connections they made with their colleagues were incredibly important and had a positive influence on their professional identities as community college faculty.

These connections can be classified into two different categories: informal and formal. Informal connections are defined as the connections that developed between or among faculty members in an unstructured, natural way. Whether it was collegial conversations that took place before or after class; getting to know each other at meetings, in their office areas, or at work-related faculty gatherings; or friendships that developed over time, these informal, unstructured connections were very powerful and positive influences on participants' faculty identities. Formal connections are defined as those connections that developed in a more hierarchical, structured way, including the relationships between department chairs and department faculty, course mentors and part-time faculty, and college administrators and faculty.



## **Informal, Naturally Occurring Connections**

All fifteen participants talked about the positive influence that informal, naturally occurring connections with colleagues has had on their view of their faculty identities. Among other benefits, these types of connections (1) led to them to share and learn new teaching strategies, making them feel like better, more prepared community college faculty members; (2) allowed them to vent and “let off steam,” which enabled them to gain perspective and reenergize for their next class; and (3) led to meaningful friendships and mentor relationships that had a positive influence on their faculty identities.

**Connecting about teaching.** All participants talked about the importance of connecting with colleagues about their teaching and how such interactions led to feeling positive about their faculty identities. For example, when asked what has influenced or help shape her professional identity as a community college faculty member, Robin, who had taught English for thirty years at ECC, answered succinctly: “My colleagues—the people who taught me how to teach.” Robin explained: “I went to a liberal arts college and got a master’s in lit[erature], so I learned to read and write. For an English teacher, that’s about it... I wasn’t trained to be a teacher, except by my colleagues.” Although Robin speaks specifically about English here, it is true that for many college faculty members—two-year and four-year college alike—their academic training did not necessarily include pedagogical training. Many college faculty are experts in their fields, but they likely were not required to take courses on teaching and learning theories, effective pedagogies, or curriculum design, for example (Davis, 1993).

Rather, the formative way Robin and fellow community college faculty learned to teach is through interactions with colleagues. Robin described what would happen. When a class she was teaching concluded, she would mentally review what she thought worked well and what

could have worked better. She would bump into or seek out a colleague to share her thoughts and get feedback and advice. Her office area, like many at ECC, included faculty in her department (English) but also faculty from a variety of other departments, including history, biology, and dental assisting. “I learned so much from those people, who weren’t necessarily teaching English,” Robin said. Ultimately, these interactions helped her and other participants discover how to be a better teacher, including everything from learning “teaching tips” on how to better design a small group discussion, to how to grade a student essay, to how to encourage and support self-doubting students or students with learning disabilities. In turn, these interactions led Robin and others to feel positive about their faculty identities.

This was the case for part-time faculty as well. Sarah discussed how these types of connections have helped her evolve into becoming the community college faculty member she is today. “If I didn’t have those sort of connections,” she said, “it would’ve taken me way longer to be a better instructor. Sure, I can do the math, but that’s not the goal here. It’s to teach the student. [Those informal connections were] crucial to getting up to speed quickly.” Over all, she feels she is a better instructor and has a more positively affirming sense of her faculty identity because of these types of connections with colleagues. Kathy, too, talked a great deal about the influence fellow faculty have had on her faculty identity. Very informally, she joined a group of faculty who frequently found themselves working in the part-time faculty office area at the same time. They got together for lunch one day, and then another day, and then decided to try to meet up more intentionally because they were enjoying the conversations they were having about different pedagogical approaches, how to handle certain student situations, how to encourage students to turn in assignments on time, etc. “We learned a lot of ideas from each other,” Kathy remarked.

**Connecting to vent.** Indeed, several faculty talked about the importance of having connections with colleagues in order to vent and “let off steam” with someone who can relate. Because they shared a break between classes, Lynn and a fellow part-time faculty member teaching English connected and began having lunch together on occasion. Lynn explained, “We just started actually having a little bit of a – I’m trying to think of a non-vulgar word for it – bitching, basically. ‘I can’t believe [students are] doing this again after we’ve talked about it!’” As Lynn noted, “I do care about my students, but I also have to let off some steam.” Justin would agree. He gets a great deal of personal and professional support from his colleagues, including through informal, often short, and impromptu chances to vent to each other. “You talk in meetings, in your department meetings and stuff like that and in the hallways,” he said. “They’re usually not long conversations, they’re just short. And you’re just helping each other kind of get through the day.” Opportunities to vent with other faculty helped participants gain perspective and led to building a support network and fostering genuine connections with colleagues, which affirmed a shared sense of what it means to be a community college faculty member. Therefore, although faculty vented about things that they found irritating, the outcome was positive, namely a deeper connection with a professional colleague, and a more positive sense of self.

**Informal but meaningful connections.** Even more than participating in formal professional development activities, Justin said informal conversations with his faculty colleagues have the most influence on his faculty identity. He explained, “I’m not saying I don’t benefit from [structured professional development activities], but I benefit more when it’s, ‘Hey, from 4:00 o’clock to whenever we’re going to be down here drinking coffee and just having a faculty conversation.’” Although he confesses that he is an extreme introvert, Justin says he tries

to make an effort to go to as many social faculty events that he can because they are “incredibly valuable.”

“That’s the best way to do professional development – the social way,” said Tim, who has served on ECC’s faculty professional development committee for many years. For him, too, the connections he has built with fellow faculty have been deeply influential. “The personal part of a job is so important. It’s almost sort of like you have friends at work – even though you might not go out for a beer with them or ever do anything social with them, you do like them a lot. You have a lot in common, and you share a lot. So that has a lot of meaning, I think.” The connections that Tim described as having the most influence on his faculty identity were the informal connections.

An example of this type of connection that has evolved into an informal mentorship is the connection that has developed between Tim and Brian. Brian described how influential his connection with Tim has been on how he views his faculty identity. “The first in-service I came to, I approached [Tim] just because I picked up a copy [of the literary magazine Tim edits] and read it and liked it. So I just told him that I admired his review.” Since then, they have had frequent conversations about teaching, ways part-time faculty can position themselves for a full-time job, and getting involved in or even leading events outside the English department. As a result, Brian considers Tim “kind of a mentor” of his, a relationship that he said has had a “really positive” effect on how he views himself as a community college faculty member.

### **More Structured, Hierarchical Connections**

More formal and hierarchical connections also had a positive influence on community college faculty identities. These connections included interactions between faculty and department chairs and part-time faculty and course mentors.

**Interactions with department chairs.** A very strong finding across the sample was the important influence that department chairs had on participants' views of their faculty identities. For both the English and math departments at ECC, that influence was positive. The two qualities that participants most valued in their department chairs were being supportive and accessible.

For example, the part-time faculty members who taught English talked in universally positive terms about their relationships with their department chair, Cindy. Brian explained that his relationship with Cindy has positively influenced the way he views his faculty identity because every time he has gone to her with ways he wanted “to grow as faculty member,” including teaching online, teaching a literature class, or creating an anthology of student writing that required some extra funding to print, she was “very supportive” and encouraged him to pursue those opportunities. Sharita was thankful that Cindy is “always making herself available” and being a source of “great support.” She explained that Cindy is always “a good resource, especially when it comes to teaching” and she “makes sure that we have all the resources that we need to make sure the students are doing well in the course.” Sharita said her relationship with Cindy “really has impacted [her]” because she feels supported and prepared as a result of it. Like Sharita, other part-time faculty expressed how thankful they were for having a department chair who devoted time to support them as they became more familiar with teaching at a community college and developed their faculty identities as community college faculty.

The part-time faculty teaching math had universally positive things to say about the influence that Kim, their department chair, has had on their faculty identities as well. Kathy emphasized just how important her connection with Kim was. She said:

[Kim] is fantastic. She is never too busy to answer a question. She is always willing to sit down and chat with you. In fact, I miss her when I don't have a problem. This semester haven't seen her at all because I don't have any reason to go and talk to her. I keep thinking "What can I go up and talk to [Kim] about?" Because she is just so helpful. I think that makes a huge difference to know that your chair is approachable and nonjudgmental and supportive.

Kathy not only enjoys her interactions with Kim, she thrives on them. She wishes she had more interactions with Kim because she finds them positively affirming of her faculty identity. This is because Kim treats Kathy as a colleague and as a professional by welcoming her into her office, chatting with her, and answering any questions she might have. Furthermore, as Sarah explained, "[Kim] makes me, all of us feel part of the team." Sarah described how being a faculty member, especially a part-time faculty member, can feel "isolating" at times. However, because of Kim's support and leadership, Sarah feels like she is part of the math department team, which has been very positively affirming of her faculty identity.

When Sarah first started teaching at ECC, she was considering asking someone like Kim to observe her class to get feedback on her teaching, but she hesitated. "I was shy about it," Sarah said. Instead, because she felt she had a positive, supportive connection with Kim, Sarah asked Kim if she could observe *her* class one day. To her credit, Kim agreed. Sarah found the experience tremendously helpful. She learned a great deal from Kim's teaching "style" and gained teaching tips, including how to present the material and more effectively integrate the textbook into the course, as well as confidence that she applied to her very next class.

The full-time faculty members interviewed for this study also talked about the positive influence that their interactions with their department chairs have had on their faculty identities.

Laura referred to Kim as a friend who “absolutely” has had an impact on her faculty identity. Justin described Kim as “amazing, absolutely amazing.” Describing the effect Cindy has had on his faculty identity, Tim said, “She’s one of the most important people in this department. Hands down. She got me this job. I owe her a lot, and she’s a friend of mine.” Indeed, this study suggests that the department chair role and relationship are critical to community college faculty identities.

**Course mentor/mentee relationships.** Another more structured and formal relationship that faculty described as having a positive effect on their faculty identities is the course mentor/mentee relationship. ECC’s math department asks full-time faculty members to be course mentors for part-time faculty in courses they have either designed or taught a number of times. The job of the course mentor is to be a point of contact for the part-time faculty teaching the course. Before each semester, course mentors meet with their part-time faculty to share sample syllabi, course handouts and assignments, and past final exams. Part-time faculty are not required to use the same syllabi, handouts, or assignments—these materials are shared with them only for reference. Before and throughout the semester, course mentors also are there to answer questions that part-time faculty have about teaching the course. The ECC English department does not have an official position called “Course Mentor” the way the math department does, but they have long-standing full-time faculty members who fulfill the same kind of role and provide similar support to part-time faculty. (For simplicity sake, I use the term “course mentor” to describe this role in both departments.)

Part-time faculty universally described how influential their course mentors have been to how they view their faculty identities. Alison talked about how Maureen, the designer of one of the online classes she teaches (a full-time faculty member in the English department), has had a

very strong and positive influence on her professional identity as a community college faculty member. Alison said she thinks of Maureen as her boss—“even though I think she isn’t [my boss] in any official or technical sense”—but also considers her a “friend.” Alison summarized the importance of their connection when she said, “She’s the person who knows me.” As a part-time faculty member, Alison does not have office space in the department nor is she invited to department meetings. The only consistent collegial interaction she experiences is with Maureen. I asked her how that relationship has shaped her faculty identity, and Alison responded, “Giving me confidence as a teacher. She really has supported me, and she’s given me praise and been open to my thoughts on things.” Receiving this type of positive feedback from their course mentors has helped part-time faculty in this study to develop a more positive view of herself as a community college faculty member.

Dan also finds the math department course mentors supportive. While they have shared course materials they have used in the past, including syllabi, they also make sure to give him and other part-time faculty the freedom to do what they want. He explains, “[Course mentors] do a really good job of providing all the material... But it’s still like, ‘Here’s access to [my materials] if you want to make modifications,’ which is good.” Allowing and even encouraging part-time faculty like him to “own” their courses for themselves and make changes as they see fit has made Dan feel more like an autonomous professional. “I’ve changed the way I’ve set [courses] up over the last 12 years,” he said. This sense of autonomy has had a positive effect on how he views his professional identity.

Interestingly, the course mentor/mentee relationship has been positively affirming for the full-time faculty serving the course mentor role as well. Kim explained that being a course mentor is “another way to feel pretty fulfilled [professionally] because you’re sharing your



experience with someone and you're also, if you're open, you're gaining experience." She views the course mentor/mentee relationship as important and influential because "it's creating more bonds and relationships with people to better do what we do," namely teaching math to community college students. Jane, Tim, Laura, and Justin also talked about feeling a professional responsibility and deriving professional fulfillment from working with, encouraging, and supporting part-time faculty.

### **What Facilitates These Types of Connections?**

Indeed, a clear finding from this research is that collegial connections and interactions with other faculty are strong, positive influences on the professional identities of the community college faculty who participated in this study. Unfortunately, however, participants talked about how difficult making those types of connections can be. This challenge has been commonplace for too long at other community colleges, not just ECC. As Grubb (1999) described fifteen years ago, "The isolation of community college instructors inhibits the interaction with their peers that might provide them with new ideas about teaching, suggestions about teaching problems, and support for their experiments" (p. 49). Even the full-time faculty at ECC lamented the fact that they seek, but lack, connections with other faculty. As Jane put it, "A huge issue for community college faculty is that we don't get out enough... But I look for those connections. I need to have those connections." Justin agreed. He explained his frustrations when students would ask him for recommendations on who the strong and supportive faculty members are in other departments. Justin lamented, "I have to tell them I'm sorry, I don't really know anybody." Therefore, to Justin, not only is lacking collegial connections a detriment to his sense of professional identity, it is detrimental to his students.

Of course, making connections with other faculty also was a real challenge for part-time faculty, who are on campus much less than their full-time colleagues and often juggle multiple jobs at multiple sites. Kathy explained that as a part-timer, “You come in, do your thing, and leave. You don’t have any part of the bigger picture.” Without interactions with colleagues, “you are just a loner,” she said. As a part-time faculty member, Lynn described feeling “isolated” and “being one of millions.” Each part-time faculty member interviewed expressed the desire for more collegial connections.

Therefore, beyond simply ascertaining that connections with colleagues positively influence the ways in which community college faculty view their faculty identities, this study also examined the organizational level factors and conditions that facilitate those connections. The data suggest that thoughtful design and use of workspaces, technology, and faculty gatherings have the most potential to facilitate and encourage collegial connections among community college faculty.

**Workspaces.** The workspaces for part-time faculty and full-time faculty were kept very separate at ECC. Full-time faculty each had their own private office and computer and also had exclusive access to a full-time faculty lounge. In contrast, all part-time faculty shared a common office area called the Part-time Faculty Resource Center. Located on the first-floor of one of ECC’s largest buildings, the Center offered computer workstations, a copier and fax machine, lockers and file cabinets, campus mailboxes, coffee, and space (albeit open space) to meet with students. Although the workspaces for part-time faculty and full-time faculty were kept very separate at ECC, both faculty groups talked about the ways in which they benefited from where they worked on campus when they were not in the classroom.

*Full-time faculty office areas.* The structure of the office spaces for full-time faculty has helped to foster the development of friendships, collaborations, and other collegial connections. At ECC, many full-time faculty office areas are interdisciplinary. For example, Robin’s office area consisted of faculty from the English, biology, and dental assisting departments. While each faculty member has his or her private office, the offices are located very close to one another. A narrow hallway in each office area separated the two rows of offices. As a result, it is difficult not to interact with one another if you are in your offices at the same time. Jane talked specifically about how much she has benefited from the structure of her office area because it has helped her make connections with other faculty. These connections have evolved into formative friendships. “I’m lucky in my office [area],” she said. Many of the fellow faculty in her office area, including biology faculty members—whom Jane affably referred to as “the biology guys”—are the same age and share common interests. They have routinely gotten together outside of the office. One of her colleagues plays on the same softball team as her husband and their kids have gotten to know each other as well. “They [her officemates] razz me like I’m their sister,” she said. “So for me, I think it’s a very familiar place to be. Sometimes they make fun of me just as my brothers would.” Thanks to the structure of her office area, Jane has developed a very close, even familial closeness, with her officemates.

When Dan was hired as a temporary full-time faculty for a year, his office was in the same area as a faculty member in the Academic Skills department. Their schedules lined up well and they got to know each other. This connection led to a wonderful cross-disciplinary collaboration whereby he helped her introduce some of the basic math curriculum in one of her classes. Dan truly learned a great deal from that collaboration, about ECC, about community college students, and about himself as a community college faculty member. “I’ve gotten a lot

from her [his Academic Skills colleague],” he said. “Yeah, it’s been quite nice. It is a lot of fun.” He added, “You can get a good perspective on trying different things” when you get the chance to collaborate with another faculty member. This collaboration and positive result likely would not have occurred if they did not share the same office area and most certainly would not have happened if Dan was still teaching part-time that semester, since part-time and full-time office spaces are kept very distinct and separate at ECC.

A previous high school teacher and longtime faculty member at ECC, Kim had interesting perspective to share on this topic. When she first starting teaching at ECC, one thing she missed “severely” about teaching at a high school was the frequent interaction she had with other teachers. She explained that as a high school teacher, “every fifty minutes you’re out in the hall talking with your colleagues. ‘Oh, my gosh. That was an awesome class.’ ‘Oh, my gosh. That was terrible.’ ‘Oh, my gosh you wouldn’t believe.’” Because of the standard class schedules and vicinity of classrooms in her high school where she taught, “everyday all day” she was talking to her colleagues. However, when she left high school to teach at ECC, she found that faculty “came in, they taught, they had their office hours, which are probably not when you had your office hours, and left... I never talked to anybody around here.” Since the structure of her office area has changed, however, she has found that she interacts a great deal more with her colleagues. She finds it “a lot more fulfilling as a faculty member” now that her office area is more conducive to getting faculty to connect more. “That part is definitely shaped my faculty identity because we’re definitely more collegial,” she said. Several of her officemates get together outside of work to “debrief, to decompress, to share ideas, and problems, and life.” Indeed, those connections have been very positively affirming of her faculty identity, and they

may not have formed if it were not for the way her office space facilitated those types of connections.

***Writing Center.*** For the English department, full-time faculty as well as part-time faculty often congregate in ECC's Writing Center. Writing Centers can be found on many college campuses, not just at community colleges. They are spaces on campus that provide free assistance to students seeking help on writing assignments. At ECC, the developmental and beginning-level English classes include assignments that require students to visit the Writing Center and consult with a Writing Center tutor, who are all full-time or part-time faculty in the English department.

The Writing Center at ECC is a very large room on the fourth floor of one of the largest buildings on campus. One of its walls boasts very wide windows that look out over part of the campus that backs up to a pond and a hilly forest area. It is a picturesque scene that helps to foster the Center's friendly and collegial vibe. Tim, the Writing Center director, explained that one of his goals when he took over the director role was to create that kind of atmosphere, mainly for students, but also for faculty. One of the first things he did was repaint the original "institutional gray" walls with a warm yellow. "We wanted to do something fun here," he said. "The big space is nice. The big windows make a big difference." He also put up "funky posters" and brought in big, communal tables as well as cushiony couches and chairs. "It's not slovenly," he explained, "but it's easygoing in here." Because of the space it affords and the community-building atmosphere it emits, the Writing Center is where many English faculty meetings take place, including the department's part-time faculty orientation that takes place before each semester.

According to participants, the relaxed and friendly culture of the Writing Center benefits them as much as it benefits students. When Robin talked about how much support she gets from her department, she explained that the Writing Center “serves so many functions,” including providing a space that fosters connections with colleagues, which she finds very supportive of her faculty identity. As she summarized, “It’s the place where you share [how your classes are going] and you get help.” The math department does not have its own space comparable to the Writing Center that provides opportunities for faculty to connect and engage in professional identity-affirming conversations.

***Part-time faculty resource center.*** As discussed earlier, identity-affirming connections took place less frequently for part-time faculty, given they were not teaching or on campus full-time, but when connections did take place, they often happened in ECC’s Part-time Faculty Resource Center. Kathy talked a great deal about how helpful she has found the Part-time Faculty Resource Center to be, in particular how helpful it has been to facilitate collegial connections. “In the part-time resource center, we share a lot,” she said. “We are constantly asking ‘What did you do for this [class]?’” In the Resource Center, Kathy and her colleagues share ideas and materials for lesson plans, including handout books, and utilize the file cabinets there to store their textbooks and handout books. Just as Kim, her department chair, does with her materials, Kathy makes a point to tell her part-time colleagues that they are welcome to look through and use her teaching materials. “I just say ‘Help yourself. If you are teaching it for the first time... if there’s something you want, just don’t take the last copy. Just copy it and stick it back in there.’” The workgroup described earlier of which Kathy became a part formed because they happened to all be working in the Part-time Faculty Resource Center at the same time one day. As Kathy explains, “We become connected in the Part-time Resource Center... We become

friends.” Sarah would agree. Because of going to the Part-time Resource Center, she got to know faculty from departments across the college. “I’ve met people in chemistry and English and everything else,” she said. “It’s really nice. I love my colleagues here. That is social for me, too. Otherwise, I’m really just working alone.” Indeed, this type of workspace for part-time faculty can foster professional connections *and* social connections, both of which were viewed as being supportive of faculty and positively influencing the way in which faculty viewed their professional identities.

However, one common criticism of the Part-time Faculty Resource Center was its lack of private space, especially to meet with students. Sharita appreciated having a dedicated space for part-time faculty like her, but she explained, “It’s not really conducive to that one-on-one meeting space, you know, that you kind of need for students.” Sharita talked about the importance of developing trust between herself and her students, something that other developmental faculty in the sample also talked a great deal about (see Chapters 3 and 4). “I don’t think every faculty [member] needs to have their own office,” she continued, “but just something that can be ours that we can meet with students in a more personable setting.” She was concerned about having student meetings in the Part-time Faculty Resource Center because students would be reluctant to “engage” with her due to the lack of privacy and be worried that they would think “someone’s going to be in my business, someone’s going to overhear me if I ask this question.” Lynn, too, described the lack of privacy in the Resource Center as a problem. “Especially when I’m in the part-time center, I feel very isolated – even when there are a bunch of people around me,” she said. “I overhear conversations sometimes, and it feels like the kind of sniping I would avoid... They’re sniping about the administration or the students or this or that. It’s not something I’m interested in engaging in.” Although she

was happy there was some place where part-time faculty at ECC could go to get work done and connect with others, she described the Part-time Faculty Resource Center as not ideal and not always positively affirming of her faculty identity.

The juxtaposition between the Part-time Faculty Resource Center and the Writing Center is worth noting. First, they serve two different purposes: the Part-time Center serves as an office area for part-time faculty across the college, while the Writing Center is primarily for students who need help on their writing assignments, although English faculty members also use it as a space to connect with each other, as described earlier. The Part-time Faculty Resource Center is mostly filled with cubicles and offers 10 computer workstations and a couple small round tables set aside for student-teacher discussions. The Writing Center is a large, open space containing many long tables that can be reconfigured as needed for meetings or student-teacher consultations. It also has a couple couches and soft chairs, offering comfortable seating for students or faculty who are there. These types of furniture are not found in the Part-time Faculty Resource Center, which predominantly offers office chairs and classroom chairs. The walls in the Part-time Faculty Resource Center are painted the typical institutional gray, while the walls in the Writing Center, as noted earlier, are painted a warm yellow.

The Writing Center is not exclusive to full-time faculty; many part-time faculty work as tutors in the Writing Center, too. However, due to the busy off-campus lives that many part-time faculty have (e.g., all part-time faculty participants in this study at one point were juggling at least one other job), part-time faculty usually do not have the time to convene at the Writing Center before or after class the way many full-time faculty members do. Ultimately, in terms of a space to informally connect with colleagues, which earlier in this chapter was identified as a



strong positive influence on faculty identities, part-time faculty had the gray, cubicle-filled Part-time Faculty Resource Center, and full-time faculty had the large, warm, and comfortable Writing Center. While having a dedicated space for part-time faculty has its benefits, as explained by Kathy and Sarah above, the disparities between it and the Writing Center are striking.

**Technology.** Especially for the part-time faculty interviewed for this study, email, internal blogs, and Blackboard sites were important tools that helped them make and continue connections with colleagues. Due to their busy schedules and not being on campus other than to teach their classes, except for rare instances like attending face-to-face meetings at the beginning of the semester, these “e-connections” were, for some, the most reliable and consistent ways that they interacted with others at ECC. When I asked what her interactions with other faculty were like, Sharita explained the situation this way:

It’s [on] email that I really end up interacting with Jane a lot and Tim at the Writing Center. Because everyone’s schedule is crazy. I mean, there’s a lot of people who are part-time faculty that have fulltime jobs like I do, that are outside the community college, or they’re teaching at like five different community colleges across the state. And so no one is really coming together as much as we probably could because everyone’s schedule is so intense... [So] knowing that I could e-mail back and forth with Jane and Cindy and Tim still makes me feel connected.

Through email, the English department Blackboard site, and the department blog, Sharita gains a variety of professional learning from her colleagues, including teaching tips and ideas on how to motivate students. Despite the lack of frequent face-to-face interactions—meeting with faculty in

person happened “almost never” for Sharita—she said she thinks the department faculty “all really do well” to make e-connections with others. “Keeping in touch” with her colleagues that way has been very helpful to her and has supported a positive view of her professional identity as a community college faculty member. She not only gains knowledge through these e-connections, she also gives it. Especially if and when a new part-time English faculty member joins the department, Sharita always exchanges emails with him or her. Connecting with new faculty over email is a way for Sharita to “pay it forward,” because when she first arrived, she relied on frequently emailing with Jane and others as she became familiar and confident in her new role.

In many ways, it seems establishing e-connections with other faculty is part of the culture in the English department. Sam talked about receiving emails from other faculty (usually full-time faculty) who attended a conference on teaching composition and emailed the department different articles on new and different teaching techniques and approaches. He has found these emails really helpful and informative. “There are some techniques, for example, that I’ve used in class that straight came from reading some of these papers,” he said. These e-connections have led to knowledge about new ways to teach, which has led Sam to try new teaching techniques and feel like a more effective teacher.

Although perhaps not to the same extent as the English department, the math department is also very e-connected. Kathy lamented that she generally does not see colleagues “on a regular basis” due to different class schedules, but she connects with her colleagues over email, too. “I get an email from somebody I haven’t seen in a semester, but they will say ‘What did you do for this chapter?’” she said. She has exchanged lesson plans with colleagues over email, too. To

Kathy, these types of e-connections “need to be built.” She credits Kim, the department chair, for building and fostering that kind of culture in the department.

**Faculty gatherings.** The part-time faculty in this study appreciated the opportunity to connect with colleagues online because in-person connections were infrequent, but for both part-time faculty and full-time faculty, there was no question that in-person, face-to-face interactions were preferred and more positively affirming of their faculty identities. Faculty gatherings—both formal and informal—were excellent at facilitating these very important interactions.

**Formal gatherings.** Examples of formal gatherings when faculty were able to connect with each other included department meetings, committee meetings, and professional development sessions.

At the beginning of the Fall and Spring semesters, the ECC math department brings all its faculty together—both full-time and part-time—for a department-wide meeting. In addition to communicating general news about the department and college, these meetings are used to provide an opportunity for course mentors to get together with the faculty teaching their course. The benefits of the course mentor/mentee relationship have already been discussed, but it is important to note that the opportunity to connect face-to-face before the semester gets started at these department-wide meetings contributes to how effective and positively affirming these relationships are for faculty throughout the semester. Although it is a formal event, in that it is scheduled and faculty are expected to attend, these department-wide meetings offer faculty the chance to connect more informally, both personally and professionally, before and after the meeting. As Kathy put it, at these meetings “We learn a little bit about each other, and we support each other in that way.” The casual conversation that takes place at these meetings between faculty builds important rapport and a sense of togetherness that provides a strong

foundation for the rest of the semester, especially for the part-time faculty who may not have another in-person meeting with their course mentor.

The English department does something similar, but instead of calling it a department-wide meeting, they refer to it as an orientation specifically for English part-time faculty. While several full-time faculty attend, it is primarily geared for the part-time faculty, as the title suggests. As mentioned earlier, the event is held in the Writing Center and, in addition to providing breakfast and encouraging conversation before the session begins, it includes several concurrent workshops on various topics ranging from grading, using technology in the classroom, developmental level English courses, Blackboard tricks and tips, library and media services available at ECC, and more.

Sharita talked about how critical and helpful she finds the part-time faculty orientation, which she tries to attend each year even though she already had been teaching at ECC for a couple years. The size of the college and the department can feel intimidating at times, she said. It helps to have an in-person meeting to be able to put faces with names and connect with colleagues. “I wish we are able to [meet] more,” she explained, “but at least once a semester I’m able to see the same faces and interact with them.” Without the orientation meetings, “I wouldn’t have been able to connect with the colleagues that I do, that I do talk to online,” she said. Just as Kathy alluded, Sharita, too, finds these face-to-face interactions foundational for the rest of the semester. Without the orientation meeting, Sharita admitted: “I don’t think I would have been comfortable doing it,” that is, connecting so much over email. She also appreciates the vibe and atmosphere of these meetings. She explained:

Having that one time [meeting] before each semester to come together... It's like a kumbaya experience, like we're all like "Rah, rah, rah! Yay, new semester!" It is really good, uplifting.

She always finds the workshops helpful and informative and likes that the department sends out a survey ahead of time to solicit input on which topics faculty are most interested. Over all, she finds the English part-time faculty orientation events "very key to my identity of being an instructor here."

Serving on committees is another type of formal faculty gathering that participants described as facilitating connections that were so integral to their faculty identities. Justin talked about how much he generally tries to avoid serving on committees because he is a self-reported "extreme introvert," but he also talked about how he found serving on the college's Achieving the Dream<sup>10</sup> committee very affirming of his faculty identity because he connected with other faculty who also work with developmental students in other departments. He explained:

I would say what's interesting is not so much the direct impact [of the ATD initiatives on students], which I found interesting. I really thought, at first, that it would be the actual things that we're accomplishing, but it's really the connections between [faculty and staff, and] the communication that I see as most beneficial.

Justin believed that it was those connections and conversations with other faculty that led to them "thinking about how they can serve students better."

He had a personal example to share. Because he served on ECC's ATD committee, he connected with fellow ATD committee member and Academic Skills department faculty

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<sup>10</sup> Achieving the Dream is a national student success initiative of which many community colleges across the country, including ECC, are a part. More information at [www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org).

member, Jennifer, and collaborated with her to incorporate contextualized learning in both their classes. That collaboration “came directly out of” his conversations with Jennifer and others who served on the ATD committee. “Really, Jennifer and I wound up connecting a lot more because we’re on that committee, so it’s been really positive in that regard,” he said. Serving on that committee has led to a very professional fulfilling collaboration, which has been, as Justin put it, “very, very worthwhile.”

Faculty also described participating in professional development sessions, such as the faculty in-service sessions, as worthwhile and “community building.” For example, Dan enjoyed learning about “other perspectives,” Alison gets “really encouraged” and “really good ideas” by connecting with other faculty in those sessions, and Kathy talked about enjoying them because “you get to know some of the other teachers” as well as learning about a new pedagogical approach that could be useful in the classroom. However, it was clear from the interview data that faculty did not view the college-wide professional development sessions they attended as positively affirming of their faculty identities as much as the department-specific faculty gatherings. By far, the department-specific faculty gatherings were most powerfully affirming according to participants.

***Informal gatherings.*** Unlike the formal faculty gatherings described above, which were all scheduled, on-campus events that focused solely on topics related to work, informal faculty gatherings that cultivated casual conversations among colleagues were also positively affirming for participants. These gatherings brought faculty together to connect off campus, without any structure or agenda, for no other reason but to get to know one another and socialize. These gatherings ranged from impromptu get-togethers to chat over coffee or meet up for happy hour at the end of the day to faculty members volunteering to having everyone in the department over to

their house for a wine and cheese night. Justin's quote from the previous section is representative of a theme that emerged throughout the interview data—formal professional development sessions are beneficial, but not as beneficial as informal conversations he has had with colleagues. He tries to make an effort to go to as many informal and social faculty events that he can because they facilitate the more comfortable and organic connections with his colleagues that he values most of all.

The English department has recognized the importance of informal faculty gatherings to the functioning and health of the department and tries to have them once a month or at least two times a semester. Started by a former part-time faculty member who became full-time a few years prior to when interviews were conducted for this study, these get-togethers occur at different full-time faculty members' homes. All faculty are invited, but like their pre-semester faculty orientation meetings, they are mostly geared toward the dozens of part-time faculty in the department. Lynn had gone to two and found them "really great" and "a lot of fun." Of the six part-time faculty in the English department interviewed for this study, five were able to attend at least one, and Tim and Jane, both full-timers, talked about hosting them at their homes and finding them enjoyable and valuable. Overall, these gatherings were very warmly received, described by nearly every part-timer as "nice" and/or "helpful." They all appreciated the effort that the full-time faculty put into getting to know them and appreciated the opportunity to connect with others off campus as well. "On top of that," as Sam described, it was especially nice gathering at a colleague's home as opposed to anywhere else. Seeing their homes and being warmly welcomed into their homes made the atmosphere feel like friends socializing, not just colleagues getting together after work. This added to the welcoming and "low-pressure"

environment that participants found very conducive to making connections and having conversations that were very positively affirming of their faculty identities.

However, not everyone had universally positive things to say about the English department informal faculty gatherings. Jon found them “interesting because it’s a social event, and it’s a little less structured,” but did not find them helpful in shaping his faculty identity. Because he finds it more of a “social get together,” he explained that “people don’t tend to get too much in-depth” about their teaching or what works well in the classroom. Jon sought out connections that were more professional than personal in nature. Sharita appreciated that the department tried to have special social events for part-time faculty, but she explained, “I am never really comfortable in those settings,” in good part because they were publicized as “networking events,” which Sharita correlated with schmoozing sessions. In the two years Sharita has taught at ECC, she had not attended one yet, and really had no plans to. Still, despite these critiques and with the exception of Jon, the English faculty interviewed for this study who had attended a gathering said that the gatherings were valuable because they offered more opportunities for collegial conversations and connections, which they found to be integral to having a positive view of their faculty identities.

### **Other Types of Connections**

While collegial connections were overwhelmingly the most positive influence on the faculty identities of the participants in this study, other types of connections were also positive influences on their faculty identities. These included connections with college leadership, connections with others outside of ECC, and connections with students outside of class.

Although the part-time faculty described little connection to college leadership (such as deans, vice presidents, or the president) and, therefore, said college leaders had little to no



influence on their faculty identities, the full-time faculty interviewed for this study mentioned feeling supported by their deans and administration, which they described as positively influencing their view of their faculty identities. Jane felt particular support from Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Dr. Tanney, whom she described as “so accessible.” She continued, “I just so appreciate the openness I’ve been able to have with her.” Justin called her “incredibly supportive” and described his dean as “amazing.” He was really appreciative of both their leadership styles. He explained, “I’ve seen what it’s like to work for an incredibly authoritarian dean... It can completely make the job 100 times harder to do.” He said he felt “incredibly fortunate” to have supportive leaders in the administration because it enables him to “be [his] most effective.” Less was said about the president’s influence, but not because it was negative, just that they interacted with her less.

A few faculty also described connections they had with others outside of ECC as having a positive influence on their faculty identities. Jon still connects with peers and colleagues he met through his master’s program, a group he considers a “support group.” Asked if those connections have played a role in influencing his faculty identity at all, Jon responded, “It has a lot.” Tim has attended and presented at the Community College Humanities Association conference every year for the last decade. “I got to know some people there,” he said. “I have many friends through that organization – a bunch of friends in Illinois, Iowa, South Carolina. It’s been great for professional development.” Those connections have been very influential to how he defines himself as a community college faculty member. According to Tim, being a part of CCHA and developing those connections has “been a huge thing in my professional life. It’s been a big piece.”

Four faculty members in the sample also explicitly thanked their families for the positive influence they have had on their faculty identity. Supportive spouses let them vent after the tough days and understood when they were up late on email handling students' questions before a big exam. Laura also talked about how her father was a principal and has been "proud" of her that she followed in his footsteps and has a career in education. Regarding his pride in her, she said, "That's important to me." Indeed, participants talked about the importance of the supportive connections they had with family members and how that support positively shaped how they viewed their faculty identities.

Eight faculty out of the 15 who were interviewed for this study explicitly mentioned that they received a great deal of support from their students outside the classroom and that support influenced how they viewed their faculty identity. The week of her interview, Kathy received a note from one of her students whom she had three years previously. "She still recognizes me as being a great teacher for her... To be recognized and remembered by students, it feels great," she said. Kim, too, receives "a lot" of thank you cards and small gifts at the end of the semester from students who tell her they never had success in math before taking her class. Knowing that her teaching "meant that much to them to bring me something" was very professionally fulfilling. While connections with colleagues made them feel more like professionals than isolated teachers, the feedback that many participants in this study valued most of all came from their students. As Lynn put it, "Building a reputation among students is more important to me than building a reputation among colleagues." Robin valued the feedback she received from both students and colleagues. She discussed how her faculty identity is shaped by what happens in the classroom with students and "what happens right afterward" when she talks about her classes and

teaching with her colleagues. “That feedback I get from the students and other teachers” is integral to her faculty identity.

### **Less Influential Factors on Faculty Identities**

This study also identified organizational factors that had surprisingly little influence on the faculty identities of participants. At ECC, part-time faculty are not unionized, so the part-time faculty interviewed for this study had no interaction with the union nor felt it had any influence on their faculty identities. In fact, Alison and Sarah were not aware a union existed at ECC. Of the full-time faculty members, Jane mentioned she did not have the time to dedicate to the union. Laura said she is a “proud union member” but is not interested in getting involved in any union leadership positions. “I’m very glad for the benefits [and] the salary negotiations,” she said, but the union had no effect on her faculty identity. Two faculty had served in union leadership positions at some point during their careers—Tim was secretary and Robin served as union president—but even they mentioned that the union had relatively little impact on their faculty identities. They both talked about getting involved merely because they were asked to and they wanted “to help.” Robin eventually stepped down from being president because it was “too much work” and took away from what she really wanted to do—teach. Tim admitted that, despite his involvement with the union, “I’m not really a pro-union kind of guy... I have really mixed feelings about unions.” Kim went so far as to say, “I just don’t see the union working for the betterment of the students.” Only Justin mentioned specifically that he was “real supportive” of the union and said “I wouldn’t work for an institution that didn’t have a union,” but other than knowing that the union was there to support faculty, it had little influence on his personal view of his faculty identity.

College-wide meetings, like faculty professional development in-service sessions or the college-wide part-time faculty orientation, also were not very influential to the faculty identities of participants. Department-specific meetings, as discussed above, were viewed as much more important and influential. Observations of these meetings offer insight into why this is the case.

As part of this study, I conducted observations of two different faculty in-service sessions at ECC. At ECC, these in-service sessions are required for all full-time faculty members to attend; it is part of the union contract. As a result, they typically take place in the largest auditorium on campus in order to meet the capacity requirements. At the sessions I observed, they both began with remarks from the president updating the faculty on the state of the college, which took about 30 minutes. Faculty and staff from various areas on campus—including student activities, BlackBoard support, and human resources—then took the stage to provide their own specific updates, which lasted about 40 minutes. Following this, a speaker from outside the college attended one session I observed and spoke about the changing world of higher education. By the time his presentation was over, roughly 30 percent of the audience had left. It was clear that most faculty members did not find the standard in-service schedule of activities particularly engaging. Instead of interacting with others and making connections, the benefits of which were described earlier in this chapter, faculty sat in silence in a large, dark auditorium, while people talked to them lecture-style from a podium.

The college-wide part-time faculty orientation I observed also was very lecture-based. The highlight of the orientation may have been at the very beginning when light food and refreshments were provided in the lobby of another auditorium on campus. This arrangement was favorable because it facilitated mingling and informal conversation among the new part-time faculty hires. Within 10 to 15 minutes, however, attendees were shuffled into the adjacent

auditorium and they were essentially lectured to for the next hour and 15 minutes. Even as someone who had some familiarity with the college, I found the information presented to be very overwhelming. It included everything from how to drop a student to where the Testing Center is located on campus to how to handle an on-campus emergency to an accelerated training on how to use BlackBoard, the college's main learning management system.

It was helpful that the college provided attendees with an orientation notebook, materials of which were also stored online in BlackBoard, and that the college offered a part-time faculty orientation at all (some community colleges do not), but overall, my observation supported the feelings felt by the participants I interviewed that the orientation was not particularly faculty-identity-building in a positive sense due to the fact that it focused predominantly on providing a vast amount of information in a short period of time and facilitated limited interactions between faculty. Furthermore, the interactions it did facilitate were brand new faculty interactions. I did not observe that any full-time faculty attended. Given the benefits that Sharita and others in this study expressed about their connections with full-time faculty, the lack of any full-time faculty in attendance limited the potential of such an event to support new part-time faculty hires and help them develop a positive sense of self.

Lastly, as much as participants appreciated feedback from students on their teaching in the form of emails, notes, small gifts, or just saying "hi" and "thank you" outside of class, they did not find ECC's student evaluation system as particularly helpful or influential to their faculty identities. As Tim put it, "I don't really read them [his student evaluations] very much. I look at the score just to make sure I'm okay. That's what I do. The comments are often kind of similar. I personally don't get a lot out of the written comments." A few faculty talked about how their student evaluations have fluctuated quite a bit from one class to the next. Jon was one of those

faculty. He has received both high and low average scores since the time he began teaching at ECC. When asked if student evaluations has ever influenced his faculty identity and how he viewed himself as a community college faculty member, he answered, “No, I teach the same way.” Some of the part-time faculty found the comments helpful and some of the most positive comments made them feel good—it was nice to get positive feedback—but overall, the faculty assessment process at ECC was not influential in shaping their faculty identities.

### **Discussion**

According to identity theorists (Burke, 2003; McCall & Simmons, 1978), role identities—such as being a teacher or a parent—are influenced in part by negotiating meanings through interactions with role partners. When one thinks of a teacher or faculty member, the most obvious role partner that comes to mind is a student. In order to be a teacher, you need a student; just as you need a child in order to be a parent. However, as this study shows, when considering community college faculty and their professional identities, one should not overlook the importance of another important and influential role partner: faculty colleagues.

Outside classrooms, connections with faculty colleagues had the most positive influence on their faculty identities—more than the faculty assessment process, more than their union membership, and more than official college-wide orientations or meetings. In particular, all fifteen participants talked about the positive influence that informal, naturally occurring connections with colleagues had on their faculty identities. Whether it was to share teaching strategies, vent about difficult days, receive or provide professional advice, or just to talk and get to know each other, faculty conversations were powerfully positive influences on the ways in which participants felt about themselves as community college faculty. More formal connections also were viewed favorably. Both the English and math departments at ECC had supportive

department chairs who encouraged professional growth, were personable and accessible, and developed a sense of a team across the department, inclusive of both full-time and part-time faculty. Participants described the course mentor/mentee model in the math department as positively affirming of their faculty identities as well. It functioned to support part-time faculty without encroaching on their professional authority to decide how to structure their classes. Full-time faculty viewed it as an opportunity to share and receive teaching ideas as well as to, as Kim described it, create “bonds and relationships with people to better do what we do.” Indeed, this study supports identity theory’s claim that role partners greatly shape the way in which individuals perceive their role identities.

Can social identity theory concepts (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) also help to explain these findings? As discussed earlier, much of SIT focuses on how individuals come to see themselves as members of a group (the in-group) in contrast to another group (the out-group) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In terms of what these groups might be, Ashforth and Mael (1989) posited that an individual’s social identity may be derived not only from his or her organization (in this case, their college), but also from his or her work group, department, union, and even lunch group. Although slightly mixed, the findings mostly suggest that SIT on its own does not fully explain the identity-affirming experiences described by participants. For example, faculty talked very positively about their interactions with colleagues from other departments, suggesting there was not an in-group versus out-group dynamic with regards to departments. In fact, ECC provided many opportunities for faculty to connect with colleagues in different departments. The interdisciplinary office pods enabled interdisciplinary connections, and even led to interdisciplinary collaborations, which positively influenced the faculty identities of several participants, including Laura, Kim, Dan, and Jane, who explicitly talked about how much

they benefited from the professional and personal friendships they have made with their interdepartment office pod mates.

In terms of union membership, even active members of the union (Tim and Robin) mentioned that the union had little impact on how they viewed their faculty identities. Context matters a great deal on this point, however. Specific to ECC, there was essentially no strife between the faculty and the administration at the time data was collected. Jane admitted that getting more involved in the union was “not high on [her] priority list,” but she also recognized and appreciated the longstanding agreeable relationship between the union and the administration. “If we had this us-versus-them, this bitter battle, that would be problematic,” she said. In part because ECC did not have an “us-versus-them” situation, i.e., a union-versus-administration dynamic, Jane did not strongly identify as a union member. In fact, instead of describing herself as part of the union, she said, “There are good people who want to do it, and have a passion for it. I just assume let them take care of it.” Not only does she not include herself as part of an “us” when it comes to the union, she referred to the union as “them,” clearly suggesting the union had little influence on her faculty identity.

Not surprisingly, participants described some in-group/out-group dynamics between full-time and part-time faculty, but unexpectedly, any “us-versus-them” feelings were not very influential. Indeed, all participants described a generally positive relationship between the part-time and full-time faculty in their departments. Lynn mentioned that she does have a feeling she is “one of millions” as a part-time faculty member in the English department and referred to the department as having a “dual identity” between full-timers and part-timers, but she also said “Every time I interact with other faculty, it’s a very collegial environment” and described her colleagues as “helpful and engaging.” She continued:



Every fulltime faculty member I've spoken with has been wonderful. They've been helpful and supportive. I don't know if they all come from a part-time background or not, but they certainly seem to understand what goes on for a part-time person.

Instead of feeling like a “positively distinct” and superior “in-group” with more power and prestige, as SIT would predict (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 16), full-time faculty in this study described going out of their way to include part-time faculty and remove the separation between them. This was especially the case for full-time faculty in the English department who arranged the identity-affirming part-time faculty orientation sessions and off-campus get-togethers. Again, context is significant to note in this instance. ECC had a culture and structure in place to facilitate positive colleague relationships between part-time and full-time faculty. The course mentor/mentee structure (explicitly arranged in the Math department and implicitly arranged in the English department) did not make the part-time faculty in this study feel belittled nor did full-time faculty view it as a burden. Instead, faculty viewed it as a benefit. As Kim put it, the course mentor structure serves to “create more bonds and relationships with people to better do what we do.” Her use of “we” in this statement is important to note because it is indicative of the view held by participants across this study that there existed few if any in-groups or out-groups; instead, a collective “we” was more representative of how they worked and how they viewed themselves.

Developmental instructors did occasionally talk in terms of an in-group and out-group. They viewed themselves and described themselves as different from faculty who teach exclusively college-level courses. Sharita mentioned that faculty like her who teach only developmental courses are their “own little cohort.” She explained:

So I feel like we are our own little cohort because those who teach developmental, just stay in developmental. [Laughs] It just tends to be like that. We are our own little cohort, so we all kind of understand, you know our students and our students' needs, so we get a lot of support for coaching from colleagues who are in that same boat.

She perceived that her experience as a community college faculty member was different than faculty who teach college-level composition or Shakespeare because their students have very different needs than her students who require remediation. She described how faculty who teach developmental classes all have the same "stories," such as when they hear from students who tell them they were arrested and in jail and not sure they would be able to finish the semester.

Justin, who teaches developmental math, discussed this same issue of having students who find themselves in jail and on parole during the semester. He suggests he does not identify with colleagues who teach only upper-level courses when he remarked, "The folks who teach the more upper-level courses, the folks that avoid the 0-level [developmental] courses like the plague, don't have to deal with [parole officers and restraining orders] as much." This statement makes clear that Justin does not identify with faculty who do not like teaching developmental courses the way he does. Instead, Justin made clear who he identifies as and whom he identifies with when he stated, "I'm a developmental math teacher. The math is secondary." Indeed, this study found that there was more in-group identification among faculty who teach developmental courses than faculty who teach in the same department.

The findings from this study suggest a blend of identity theory and social identity theory, for which several scholars argue (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stets & Burke, 2000; Thoits & Virshup, 1997), is more fruitful than applying only IT or only SIT. At least according to the participants in

this study, community college faculty view themselves as having both a *role identity*, which has been the historical focus of identity theorists like McCall and Simmons (1978) and Burke (1980), and a *group identity*, which has been the focus of social identity theorists like Tajfel and Turner (1986). Through collegial faculty interactions, participants found themselves identifying both as “I am a community college faculty member” (a role identity) and “We are community college faculty” (a group identity).

This finding echoes Thoits and Virshup’s (1997) discussion of role-based and collective-based identities. They argue that roles (e.g., mother) and social categories (e.g., Muslim) can be the basis of individual *or* collective identities. Particularly for a professional like a community college faculty member, he/she may view him/herself both as “I am a community college faculty member,” and “We are community college faculty members.” I would argue that this phenomenon especially applies to teachers, including community college faculty, because of the two different contexts in which they enact their professional identities: inside the classroom and outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, they are often the only faculty member present and, therefore, they have full autonomy and authority over what occurs. As a result, there is ample opportunity to develop a strong individual (role) identity as a community college faculty member. However, as this study reveals, a great amount of important identity development occurs outside the classroom, especially when interacting with colleagues, whether to connect about teaching, to vent, or to provide or receive guidance and mentorship. Manifestations of this collective community college faculty identity (“We are community college faculty”) can be found in Kathy’s impromptu part-time faculty support group; the English department’s networking nights, pre-semester orientations, and gatherings in the Writing Center; and the math department’s course mentor model. These collective identities directly influenced participants’

individual (role) identities. Speaking about the faculty group, Kathy mentioned, “*We* learned a lot of ideas from each other,” namely, ideas that they could use to improve teaching and learning in the classroom. A collective identity formed among the group (a “we” identity) that ultimately supported their individual identities (“me” identities) that they enacted in the classroom. Indeed, this study affirms Burke and Stets’ (2009) assertion that “roles are embedded in groups” (p. 122) and further supports the claim that group identities are both linked to and influence role identities.

Organizational studies scholarship also has the potential to help advance understanding of this study’s results. Like Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann (2006) and Ibarra (1999), this study suggests that professional identities are influenced by role-modeling relationships, such as the course mentor/mentee relationship and department chair/faculty relationship. Like Chreim, Williams, and Hinings (2007), this study found that physical workspaces can have a positive influence on professional identities as well. Other research has found that patterns of bantering and joking among colleagues in informal settings are very important and influential (Roy, 1959). In Roy’s (1959) seminal study, the informal patterns of play and interaction led to job satisfaction among participants because they relieved boredom. For community college faculty in this study, the informal interactions led to feeling connected and feeling a part of something bigger than themselves. As noted earlier, in the classroom, faculty identify as “I am a community college faculty member.” When interacting with colleagues outside the classroom, whether it is over wine and cheese at the English department get-togethers or between classes in office spaces, faculty shift perspective and identify as “We are community college faculty.”

POS frameworks also have great potential to explicate these results and advance research on the topics of professional identities and faculty identities in general. As Roberts (2007) has

argued, “identity is inherently linked to relationships” (p. 29). From that perspective, it should come to no surprise that connections with colleagues had such a significant impact on the faculty identities of the participants in this study. Moreover, POS scholars like Roberts (2007) posit that there is a link between *positive* relationships and *positive* identity. Dutton and Heaphy (2003) and Bartel and Dutton (2001) point out that positive, high-quality relationships can lead employees to derive positive meaning about what they are doing and make them feel valued. Very similar to how the part-time faculty in this study felt supported by their course mentors and derived confidence and a positive sense of self from that relationship, Bartel and Dutton (2001) found that coworkers and supervisors also played pivotal roles in helping temporary workers in a service agency see their value. Positive relationships between and among colleagues, like the ones described by participants in this study, help people develop a positive sense of who they are at work and who they are as professionals (Pratt, 2000). Indeed, POS frameworks predict and help explain the key finding from this study: positive interactions with colleagues—whether connecting about teaching, connecting to vent (but not gripe), or connecting just to connect and socialize—had a positive and significant influence on participants’ sense of their professional identities.

### **Practice Implications**

As Grubb (1999) described, “[C]ommunity colleges are not set up to encourage collegiality around teaching, and so teaching is often an isolated and idiosyncratic activity” (p. 27). This study recommends a few concrete ways that colleges *can* encourage collegiality around teaching. First, participants revealed that they connected with colleagues to gather teaching tips and strategies and appreciated and wished for meaningful feedback on their teaching. Instead of having deans observe faculty, which is common practice at community colleges, this study

suggests that departments should encourage faculty to observe each other. Likely even more beneficial, colleges should encourage known master teachers to invite colleagues into their classrooms to observe them and/or be willing to be videotaped and available for consultation so that other faculty can learn from them. In the same way that medical students and residents learn from attending physicians, there should be more opportunities for faculty to connect and observe each other. When Sarah first began teaching part-time, she was shy about asking someone to observe her class, so she asked Kim, her department chair, if she could observe one of *her* classes, an experience that she found tremendously valuable and affirming of her faculty identity. Scholars have used the term *possible selves* to describe the evolving ideas that someone has about who he or she might become or would like to become (Ibarra, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986). One way these possible selves develop is through observational learning (Ibarra, 1999). This study recommends that more colleges should offer more observational learning opportunities to their faculty members. Not only would participating faculty members likely learn new teaching strategies, these opportunities also would facilitate collegial connections that this study finds to be positively affirming of community college faculty identities.

Another practice implication is for colleges to be thoughtful about the structure and design of office workspaces. ECC faculty benefitted from the interdisciplinary nature of both the full-time and part-time office areas and also connected more than they otherwise would because of the closeness and openness of workspaces. One thing ECC did not do but could do more of to facilitate more collegial connections is offer more opportunities for part-time and full-time faculty to interact on campus. Disparate workspaces between full-time and part-time faculty are perhaps the norm, but they also limit the opportunities that faculty have to, as Sarah described, “rub elbows” with each other, interact, and get to know one another.

The ECC English department is a model for many departments seeking to connect their part-time and full-time faculty in more effective and meaningful ways. The English department's informal, off-campus get-togethers were generally well-received, and its part-time faculty orientation at the beginning of each semester was universally well-received. These gatherings all facilitated opportunities to connect with colleagues and fostered professional development as well. The department's Writing Center also was designed and maintained to be a warm, friendly inclusive place to gather, for students as well as faculty (although full-time faculty used it more for that purpose). Because of these thoughtful examples that brought faculty together, it is no coincidence that the part-time faculty in the English department had positive things to say about ECC and expressed positive views of their professional identities.

This study also points to the important role that department chairs play in influencing faculty identities. At many institutions, chairs are selected for a finite term by faculty vote and, for the person elected, "the opportunity is often reluctantly accepted as 'my turn in the barrel'" (Seagren, Creswell, & Wheeler, 1993, p. xv), findings suggest that the department chair should be carefully and thoughtfully selected. Because of their influence on faculty identities, chairs should be accessible, relatable, and respected members of their departments, among part-time and full-time faculty alike. This research suggests that the stronger a department chair is with regard to these qualities, the more positive the faculty in the department will view their personal faculty identities.

At ECC and likely at other colleges, there seem to be missed opportunities to facilitate more collegial connections vis-à-vis professional development sessions and faculty orientations. Given the collective identities that emerge at the department level and among faculty who teach exclusively developmental courses, specific professional development opportunities and

orientation sessions should be offered in these areas. Not only will such opportunities support the individual (role) identities of faculty, in that they can help faculty grow as teachers and be masters of their craft, they also can be opportunities for faculty to connect with one another as colleagues. That said, college-wide professional development that encourages conversation, interaction, and connections also should be offered and bolstered. Participants talked about the benefits of their multidepartment office spaces, which facilitated cross-department communication and collaboration. Instead of simply identifying as English or math community college faculty, these cross-department connections helped faculty to identify more broadly as community college faculty.

Finally, although not as powerful as face-to-face interactions, e-connections should not be dismissed. Especially for part-time faculty in this study, connecting with faculty over email was sometimes the only professional engagement they might take part in for weeks at a time over the course of the semester. Full-time faculty leaders should recognize the importance of communicating and connecting with part-time faculty, especially since part-time faculty represent nearly 70 percent of all faculty at community colleges (AFT Higher Education, 2009). While any e-connection is better than none, this study suggests that blast emails would not be as effective as more personal, one-to-one emails. Faculty should be encouraged to email each other questions or seek support when needed.

### **Future Research**

This study identifies several areas of future research that would help us better understand and encourage positive influences on professional identities. While this research interviewed six faculty who taught some courses online, future research should investigate the faculty identities of faculty who teach exclusively online and the ways in which they interact with colleagues.



Especially given the predictions that enrollments in distance learning are expected to continue to rise (Lokken & Mullins, 2014), colleges need to be prepared to support their faculty who teach exclusively online courses. Collegial connections are important to how faculty view their faculty identities. How can colleges create opportunities for collegial connections between and among faculty who teach online?

Methodologically, future studies should incorporate more observations of faculty interactions to get a better sense of what happens during these connections that are often so identity-affirming. Given that identities are dynamic and change over time, longitudinal studies (e.g., Pratt et al., 2006) will be necessary to determine whether and the ways in which college-level influences on community college faculty identities might change with time.

Future research should examine more than just internal organizational dynamics at a single college. Much the same way that Chreim et al. (2007) did in their examination of the professional identities of doctors, investigations of the broader macrolevel environment, or “organizational field” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and its influence on community college faculty is important. Building on Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf’s (2013) work, triangulating faculty interviews with observations of faculty interactions at professional conferences would help to expand this area of inquiry into a cross-level analysis for which Chreim et al. (2007) argues. Research questions to explore include: To what degree does participation in professional organizations influence community college faculty identities? Are there multiple levels of collective (group) identities among community college faculty? Why or why not?

Because this study focused on positive influences on faculty identifies, new research is necessary to explore negative organizational-level influences on faculty identities. What organizational or institutional-level factors might be detrimental to the way in which community

college faculty perceive their faculty identities? What are ways that colleges or professional organizations can prevent or mitigate negative influences on community college faculty identities? Interviewing community college faculty who have left the profession in unhappy terms would provide insight into these questions.

While ECC's union was not particularly influential to this study's participants' faculty identities, given the goals and nature of faculty unions, they are likely sources of collective identity development at other colleges. Future research should examine the ways in which faculty unions have and can positively influence faculty identities. In light of the point above about negative influences, future research also should examine the ways in which faculty unions may at times negatively influence faculty identities as well.

Sluss and Ashforth (2007) point out that the study of identity in organizations, while vast, has focused on the individual and how he or she defines or locates him or herself within an organizational group. Only recently has research begun to study the interpersonal level and the influence of one-on-one relationships on one's identity. Sluss and Ashforth (2007) term these relationships as role-relationships. More research is needed on these types of role-relationships at community colleges, including course mentor/mentee relationships, department chair and faculty relationships, and one-on-one colleague relationships. In addition, future research should investigate the ways in which role-relationships are related to identity theory's concept of role partners (Burke & Stets, 2009) and their influence on professional identities.

Related to the last point, it is clear that Ashforth and Mael's (1989) introduction of social identity theory to organizational studies has had a profound impact on the field; a great deal of valuable research has resulted. However, as identity theory and social identity theory have grown and evolved, and as scholars have been encouraging the two theories to evolve together (Stets &

Burke, 2000; Thoits & Virshup, 1997), I believe more organizational studies research should incorporate more blended identity frameworks in the future. This study has demonstrated the benefit of using a blend of identity theory and social identity theory frameworks to study professional identities. In 2000, when Stets and Burke wrote their seminal piece arguing for a merger between the two theories, they admitted, “We think that this overlap [between identity theory and social identity theory] ultimately will cause these theories to be linked in fundamental ways, though we do not think that time has come” (p. 224). Fourteen years later, in 2014, that time may be now. In order to better understand and support organizations and the people that are a part of them, future research may, like this study, require a blend of several frameworks to thoroughly investigate phenomena, especially as they relate to complex topics like professional identities.

## **CHAPTER 6:**

### **Conclusion**

The introduction of this dissertation explained the importance of better understanding and supporting community college faculty and their faculty identities given the significant influence faculty members can have on their students. The three preceding chapters represent some of the rare examples of empirical, theory-based research on community college faculty identities currently available. To review, the purpose of this dissertation was threefold: (1) to identify ways in which community college faculty teaching English and math describe their faculty identities; (2) to identify ways in which they synthesize the meanings they ascribe to their faculty identities; and (3) to identify organizational-level influences that have a positive influence on their faculty identities. These goals mirror the foci of the three preceding analytical chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 3, 4, and 5). In this final chapter, I (1) provide a summary and synthesis of the findings; (2) discuss the strengths and limitations of the research, (3) discuss ways in which the three studies, when viewed together, add to the literature on community college faculty, professional identities, and theories of identity; and (4) discuss the practice implications and areas of future research that the three studies collectively suggest.

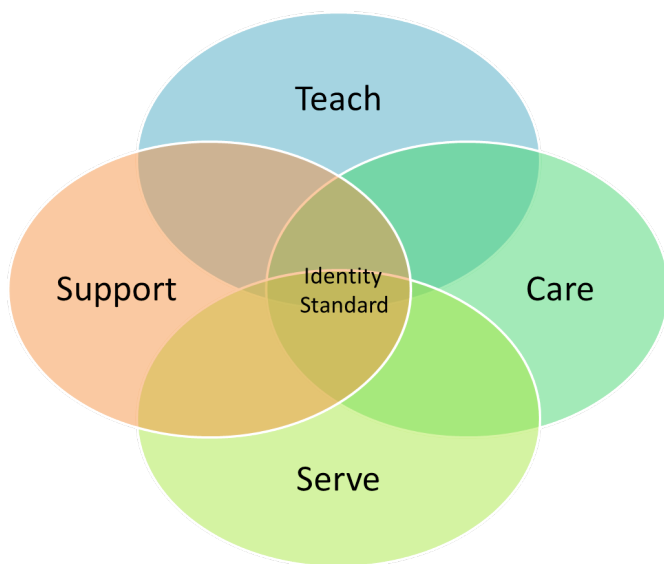
#### **Summary and Synthesis of Findings**

As noted in Chapter 1, the definition of community college faculty as per the seminal compendium, *The American Community College*, is as follows: “As the arbiters of the curriculum, the faculty transmit concepts and ideas, decide on course content, select textbooks, prepare and evaluate examinations, and generally structure learning conditions for the students” (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014, p. 79). All three analytical chapters of this dissertation reveal

that participants defined themselves in much broader and more significant ways than this definition suggests.

Chapter 3 set out to address the following research question: What does it mean to be a community college faculty member? Framed using identity theory concepts (Burke & Stets, 2009), results suggest that community college faculty ascribe the following meanings to how they view the community college faculty identity standard: teaching students, supporting students, caring about students, and serving their communities. As Figure 6.1 depicts, all four components are integral to their view of the identity standard.

*Figure 6.1 What it means to be a community college faculty member, according to participants*



While Chapter 3 identified four core components (or meanings) that form the foundation of English and math community college faculty role identities, it also begged the question: How do community college faculty synthesize the multiple meanings they ascribe to their faculty identities? Framed using Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Chapter 4 addressed this question and closely analyzed metaphors used by English and math community college faculty to describe their faculty identities. Findings were closely aligned with Chapter 3's

results and also revealed additional complexity and nuance to the overarching inquiry into the ways in which community college faculty describe their faculty identities. In Chapter 3, three of the four main meanings they ascribed to their faculty identity centered on the relationships they had with their students. In Chapter 4, a clear theme across all participants' metaphors was that, whether they are full-time or part-time faculty or teach English or math, their relationships with their students are indeed at the core of their faculty identities.

Viewed together, one of the most compelling findings that both Chapters 3 and 4 support is that, despite the diversity of the participants' backgrounds, employment statuses, and types of classes taught, participants described their faculty identities in strikingly similar ways. This finding suggests that English and math community college faculty share a common sense of who they are as professionals. Of course, given the limitations of this study, including that the data represent perspectives from only 15 faculty members who teach at one suburban community college, additional research is necessary to verify this claim. However, if future research does affirm this finding, it has clear practice implications, which are discussed below, and also points to areas where more research are needed, including identifying factors that can help support and foster the professional identities of community college faculty.

The case study presented in Chapter 5 set out to address that specific research need. Findings suggest that, in terms of factors outside the classroom, collegial connections were the strongest, most positive influence on community college faculty identities. This finding stood firm for participants across the sample. Especially in light of research on community college part-time faculty that suggests that interactions with (and perceptions of) fellow faculty do not always lead to positive faculty identity development (Thirolf, 2012), Chapter 5 investigated this topic further to find out the types of organizational level factors and conditions that facilitate

these types of collegial connections. In summary, the case study results revealed that thoughtful design and use of workspaces, technology, and faculty gatherings have great potential to facilitate and encourage collegial connections among community college faculty. Chapter 5 results suggest that, when considering community college faculty and their professional identities, one should not overlook the importance of faculty colleagues as an important and influential role partner. This is a key finding, especially given the findings of Chapters 3 and 4 that focus a great deal on the student-faculty relationship. While the connection faculty have to students is central to the faculty identities of community college faculty, Chapter 5 findings bring to light that the influence of the collegial connections on community college faculty identities deserves attention, too. Indeed, more than the faculty assessment process, more than their union membership, and more than official college-wide orientations or meetings, for English and math faculty at ECC, positive connections with faculty colleagues had a very positive influence on their faculty identities.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

As I did in each of the analytical chapters, it is important to reiterate the limitations of this research while also noting its strengths. The sample was limited in terms of size (fifteen participants), departments (English and math were represented), and institution type (all participants taught at same suburban community college). Findings from all three studies cannot and should not be generalized across all community college faculty. However, in relation to the current corpus of research on community college faculty, the sample arguably is one of the strengths of these studies. Specific to the topic of community college faculty identities, only six peer-reviewed qualitative studies have been published, three of which were published in the same article (i.e., Toth et al., 2013). These studies range between three (Thirolf, 2012, 2013) and

25 (Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2014) instructional faculty participants and have 12 participants on average. Furthermore, in comparison to research on teacher identity, most studies (including monographs) have ranged between one and nine respondents (see Beijaard et al., 2004). Therefore, having fifteen participants, while at first glance seems small, is a relatively strong sample size. Furthermore, although they represent only two departments, English and math are two of the largest departments at two-year colleges in terms of number of faculty hired and number of students taught. Therefore, faculty members in these departments were chosen intentionally and strategically because they have some of the most influence on community college students and their academic and life trajectories. Finally, although focusing on one institution certainly limits the generalizability across institution types, it enabled me to conduct a first-of-its-kind case study (Chapter 5) that identified specific organizational level factors that help to facilitate the development of a positive faculty identity among community college faculty.

Another collective strength of these studies is the diversity of analytical approaches used. Although all qualitative studies, Chapter 3 used a grounded theory approach to analyzing the interview data, Chapter 4 used metaphor analysis, and Chapter 5 was a case study and included analysis of observations and documents, in addition to interviews. The key shared finding from Chapters 3 and 4—that community college faculty describe their faculty identities in strikingly similar ways—is all the more convincing because of the chapters' differing analytical approaches. Chapter 5's case study takes a necessary step towards making the research conducted in Chapters 3 and 4 worthwhile and relevant to practitioners by suggesting ways colleges may be able to support their faculty and the important work they do.



My dissertation also used a clear and consistent definition of identity to guide the research. In each chapter, I defined “identity” as “what it means to be who one is” per Stryker’s (1987) identity theory from the symbolic interactionism perspective. This consistent framing helped to tie each chapter together in a theoretically grounded and consistent way. Due to the complexity of the topic, my choice to use additional, complementary theories to dig deeper into each chapter’s inquiry was necessary. In Chapter 3, I used identity control theory (Burke, 2007) to uncover the meanings participants ascribed to their faculty role identity and the identity standard towards which they aspired; in Chapter 4, I used Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) work to frame my analysis of participant’s use of metaphors when describing their faculty identities; and in Chapter 5, I used social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Positive Organizational Scholarship concepts (Cameron et al., 2003; L. M. Roberts & Dutton, 2009) to better understand the influences on faculty professional identities.

Additional limitations are important to reiterate. The scope of this dissertation did not include an analysis of faculty identities by race, age, gender, or socioeconomic status. Recent work by Levin and colleagues (Levin, Haberler, Walker, & Jackson-Boothby, 2014; Levin et al., 2013) suggests the experiences of faculty of color are important to consider on their own and study further. Especially given the research that suggests professional identity is really a amalgamation of role identity as well as person identity and social identity (Alsup, 2006), my primary focus on role identities is a notable limitation of this research.

Participant self-selection is another important limitation to note. The type of faculty members who would be interested in participating in research on faculty identities likely would be individuals who are comfortable and confident talking about themselves and how they view themselves as community college faculty. The \$50 incentive payment I offered attempted to

mitigate this issue and attract all eligible individuals to participate, even those who may not be happy being community college faculty or particularly interested in the topic; however, self-selection bias is difficult to eliminate entirely and should be noted as a limitation of these studies collectively.

As the only researcher who collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data, I do not know to what extent my interpretations of the data and resulting codes match others' interpretations and codes. Because of this circumstance, I was unable to perform any inter-rater or inter-observer reliability testing. Also noteworthy is that I collected my data at an institution with which I was familiar. Although this allowed me to build rapport with participants quickly, my insider/outsider status (Merton, 1972) is a bias I must claim as a researcher. I made every attempt to analyze the data as objectively as possible, but my knowledge about ECC may have influenced the way I heard participants describe their faculty identities and, thereby, influenced my interpretations.

### **Contributions to the Literature**

As noted in the introduction and above, there exists a relative dearth of literature on community college faculty. Very few peer-reviewed qualitative studies have been published specifically on the topic of community college faculty identities (Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2014; Thirolf, 2012, 2013; Toth et al., 2013). While there is still much progress to be made, this dissertation's three separate studies represent an important contribution to the current corpus of literature on the topic.

First, we now have an empirically based and theory-backed better understanding—not a complete understanding, yet, but now a better understanding—of what it means to be a community college faculty member who teaches English or math. I argue it is time to move past the discussion that has tended to dominate literature on community college faculty identities to

date, namely whether community college teaching is a profession (B. R. Clark, 1989; Levin et al., 2006; Outcalt, 2002; Palmer, 1992). Instead of perseverating on whether community college teaching is a profession, it is more important and meaningful to conduct additional empirical research on community college faculty, their professional identities, and their impact on students. Like this dissertation, these types of inquiries can lead us to determine how best to support community college faculty and the too often overlooked work they do. Debating whether community college faculty are professionals does not help us learn how to better support faculty so they can better support their students.

Previous research has suggested that part-time faculty at community colleges sometimes feel professionally disconnected and different from their full-time faculty colleagues (Thirolf, 2012). This dissertation, specifically Chapter 5, sheds new light on these findings. In particular, it reveals the crucial impact that departmental culture and relatively inexpensive and easy methods of bringing faculty together can have on the ways in which faculty view their faculty identities. Being a part-time faculty member can be challenging regardless of the context, but due to the efforts to facilitate collegial connections, ECC part-time faculty described having positive interactions with other faculty and feeling supported by their full-time faculty colleagues. In other studies, part-time faculty described rarely interacting with their colleagues, noting that the part-time/full-time faculty relationship was “difficult” (Thirolf, 2013, p. 181). As discussed in more depth in Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf (2013), rather than a source of support, required part-time/full-time faculty mentoring programs can have the effect of making part-time faculty feel belittled and patronized because it was forced upon them. Conversely, the informal and completely voluntary faculty gatherings at ECC had the effect of making most participants feel included and appreciated. To summarize, this study reveals that positive collegial connections

are very important to faculty, and such connections can be relatively easy to encourage and facilitate.

This dissertation points to the potential of using identity theory from the symbolic interactionist perspective (Burke & Stets, 2009) as a framework to study professionals and their identities. “What it means to be who one is” (Stryker, 1980, p. 1) is a definition of identity that is specific enough *and* allows for nuance and interpretation, two elements that are necessary to effectively and adequately study a complex subject like professional identity. Identity theory also complements other theoretical frameworks well. In organizational studies, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) has been used extensively, in good part because of Ashforth and Mael’s (1989) seminal work. However, as was revealed in Chapter 5, participants found themselves identifying both as “We are community college faculty” (a group or social identity, a la SIT) and “I am a community college faculty member” (a role identity, a la IT). As Thoits and Virshup (1997) argue, roles (e.g., mother) and social categories (e.g., Muslim) can be the basis of individual *or* collective identities. This dissertation suggests that this phenomenon especially applies to professionals like teachers and community college faculty because of the two different contexts in which they enact their professional identities: inside the classroom and outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, they are often the only faculty member present and, therefore, they have full autonomy and authority over what occurs. As a result, there is ample opportunity to develop a strong individual (role) identity as a community college faculty member. However, as Chapter 5 reveals, a great amount of important identity development occurs outside the classroom, especially when interacting with colleagues. Indeed, this dissertation affirms Burke and Stets’ (2009) assertion that “roles are embedded in groups” (p. 122) and further supports the claim that group identities are both linked to and influence role identities.

This dissertation (specifically Chapter 3) also affirms ICT's prediction that individuals (professionals) will experience negative emotions and seek to change their behavior when their identity is not verified, i.e., when the meanings they attribute to their faculty identities are incongruent with the meanings they hold in the identity standard. It also suggests that an individual's view of his or her professional identity is affected when they feel their colleagues' professional identities are incongruent with their own. Faculty in this study felt frustrated or upset when they perceived other faculty did not aspire towards the same identity standard to which they aspired. This is an area worthy of additional theorizing and research.

### **Practice Implications**

This dissertation has potential implications for several stages of the community college faculty career lifespan, including faculty preparation, recruitment and selection, professional development, teaching and learning, and faculty assessment. In this section, I also describe contextual factors, such as faculty unions, student counseling offerings, and part-time faculty ratios and work circumstances, upon which this dissertation touches and discuss ways in which these factors may both be ideally and realistically reformed to support community college faculty and their professional identities. I begin with a discussion of the practice implications my dissertation has for preparing new faculty to teach at community colleges.

#### **Professional Preparation**

Full-time English faculty member, Robin, participated in a community college teaching Doctor of Arts program prior to teaching at ECC. Although she did not finish the program—she was hired full-time at ECC before she finished her dissertation—she said it had a positive influence on her teaching and her faculty identity. The program taught her how to teach and prepared and trained her for teaching English at a community college specifically. While

participation in these programs would undoubtedly be helpful to individuals (like Robin) who experienced little to no teacher professional development and have little to no familiarity with community colleges, it is questionable whether such programs are viable. While some universities offer community college leadership doctorate degree programs or master's degrees or certificates in community college teaching, very few offer doctorates in community college teaching (Council for the Study of Community Colleges, 2010). This suggests that the demand for those types of degrees are marginal. The program Robin participated in is one example of a doctoral program focused on community college teaching that no longer exists. Furthermore, a doctoral degree is usually not a requirement to teach at a community college (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). However, one could argue that master's or certificate programs that are focused on community college teaching may be worthwhile and can have a positive impact on community college faculty members. At least for English and math faculty programs, if they were designed to focus on the four components of the community college faculty identity standard identified in Chapter 3, had students reflect on their professional faculty identities as in Chapter 4, and fostered cohorts of students who could support and positively influence one another as fellow faculty members, the importance of which is discussed in Chapter 5, such programs may have a worthwhile impact on participants and the community college faculty profession.

Others may argue that community colleges (including ECC) already have an effective built-in faculty training and preparation model at their institutions: hiring part-time faculty members. The "on the job" training part-time faculty receive, they might say, prepares them well for the unique demands community college faculty encounter. Indeed, of the six full-time faculty interviewed for this dissertation study, *five* (83%) started as part-time faculty members. Although

this may be common practice at community colleges, the concern is that new part-time faculty members who lack teaching experience and lack awareness of the unique demands of community college teaching will likely not adequately teach, support, and care for their students or serve their communities. (Note: If hiring committees do not consider suggestions outlined below, this outcome could be true of new full-time faculty members as well.) Simply put, community colleges are teaching institutions, *not* teacher *training* institutions. Individuals who do not have at least some teaching experience and competence should not be hired to teach at a community college, whether for full-time or part-time faculty positions.

### **Faculty Selection Process**

To reiterate, a key finding from this dissertation is that the community college faculty I interviewed share a common sense of who they are (and who they aim to be) as professionals, and evidence suggests this faculty identity is distinct from faculty identities common at four-year colleges and universities. These findings have clear practice implications. As Twombly (2005) explained, the tendency is to assume that the norms guiding the selection of community college faculty are similar to those at other types of colleges and universities. My research suggests that these assumptions are wrong. First, implications are apparent for search committees at community colleges and the “problematic” interview process that they typically follow (Flannigan, Jones, & Moore, 2004, p. 832). Despite the important decisions they are charged with making, research shows that search committee members are rarely trained or prepared to ask the right kinds of targeted questions that would help them determine the best candidate to hire (Flannigan et al., 2004; Grubb, 1999). As Van der Vorm (2001) has argued, if search committees fail to take into consideration their institution’s mission and fail to ask questions of

candidates and their references about the candidates' values in fitting with that mission, the chances for an unsuccessful search or a mis-hire greatly increase.

Especially if validated by future research, this dissertation arguably equips search committees, at least in the English and math departments and perhaps beyond, with a clear and empirically and theoretically based set of qualities that they should be looking for in community college faculty hires. As per the model presented in Chapter 3, new community college faculty should value teaching (over research) and be passionate about teaching and view it as a craft; they should value supporting their students (or finding support for their students) with matters that arise both inside and outside of the classroom; they should value caring about their students' wellbeing and academic success; and they should value serving their local communities. In addition to following standard legal guidelines and management best practices when conducting interviews (Rafes & Warren, 2001), committees should ask candidates questions that reveal the extent to which they attribute these meanings to their faculty role identities. See Appendix D for an extended list of sample interview questions. Candidates' responses to these types of questions should be verified during reference checks. Committees should investigate: To what extent do candidates' references also describe them as valuing teaching, supporting students, caring for students, and serving their communities?

To clarify, these questions are in addition to, certainly not in place of, a standard teaching demonstration. All community colleges require (or should require) teaching demonstrations among their full-time faculty hires (Lydic, 2009). Given the high numbers of part-time faculty teaching at community colleges (AFT Higher Education, 2009), this dissertation's finding that teaching and students are at the core of community college faculty identities suggests that teaching demonstrations—even brief, informal ones—should be required of part-time faculty



hires as well. As Twombly (2005) found, teaching demonstrations played a crucial role in identifying the strongest candidates during a faculty search. Some candidates may be able to impress committees by saying the right things during their interviews, but if they cannot substantiate their teaching ability and passion for teaching during their teaching demonstration, they may not be as good a hire as originally thought.

Although surprisingly not mentioned in other literature on the community college faculty search process (Flannigan et al., 2004; Grubb, 1999; Murray, 1999; Rafes & Warren, 2001; Townsend & Twombly, 2007; Twombly, 2005), this dissertation suggests that candidates should interact with students during their visits, ideally during their teaching demonstrations. Such interactions also could take place over lunch or through a small question and answer session with students. A consensus in the literature on community colleges exists that, as Twombly (2005, p. 431) put it, “students are at the center of what community colleges do” and, therefore, students are the center of what community college faculty do (B. R. Clark, 1987; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Grubb, 1999). Indeed, this dissertation validates that claim. Therefore, in order to really get a sense whether a candidate is a good fit at a community college, it seems that a logical component of the selection process should include some interactions with actual community college students. Do candidates seem comfortable around students? Do students seem comfortable around candidates? Incorporating student interaction in the standard community college faculty selection process could be as informative to candidates as it could be for colleges, especially candidates with little to no community college teaching experience. For candidates who are not entirely familiar with community colleges, it would be an opportunity for them to get a better sense of the diverse types of students that community colleges enroll.

## **Professional Development**

This dissertation has implications for faculty professional development at community colleges. Secondary education research widely recognizes the importance for teachers to reflect on their teacher identities (Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Beijaard et al., 2000). However, among faculty at colleges and universities, teacher reflection is sorely lacking (Cowan, 2006). Given that community colleges are teaching institutions above all else, community college faculty leaders should prioritize providing professional development opportunities that encourage faculty to reflect on their teaching and their faculty identities. Professional organizations that attract community college faculty, such as the Community College Humanities Association and the American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges, also should encourage them to reflect on their faculty identities.

To this end, questions that were asked of participants in Chapter 4 can serve as a guide for colleges and professional organizations. An example includes, “In your view, what image or metaphor comes to mind that would best describe what it means to be a community college faculty member?” This type of question is what pre-service teachers in Alsup’s (2006) study reflected on, and her research revealed that participants who fully engaged in this type of identity reflection exercise developed a stronger sense of themselves as teachers, were more confident in their teacher abilities, and stayed committed to the teaching profession longer than those who did not. As Chapter 5 revealed, if offered by colleges, these types of sessions may best be delivered at the department level, not at the full college level. Sessions could involve individual reflection time, small group discussions, and large group discussions, and could be structured as part of a department meeting, a professional development opportunity, or an inter- or intra-department faculty group. The structure of such sessions is less important than simply offering faculty the

chance to reflect on their faculty identities in some way, shape, or form. Lastly, compensating part-time faculty for their time and participation at these types of sessions is advised, even if the department can only afford to pay each faculty member something in the range of \$25, the amount ECC's English department pays to part-time faculty who participate in its bi-annual department-specific part-time faculty orientation. Offering compensation signifies to part-time faculty that their talents are valuable and their participation is appreciated.

Fugate and Amey's (2000) claim from nearly fifteen years ago still rings true today: community college faculty are members of a shared profession, but they lack awareness of what characterizes that profession. My dissertation sheds new light on this claim. It is apparent that, indeed, community college faculty are members of a shared profession, but so far, they have lacked the structure or opportunity to reflect on their professional identities—both on their own and in groups—that would make them more aware of the characteristics of their profession. Brian, like other participants in this study, remarked that he appreciated the opportunity to be interviewed because it forced him to reflect on important questions about being a community college faculty member—his profession—that he had not thought about before. To reiterate, whether through structured preservice or in-service professional development opportunities or unstructured connections with colleagues, reflecting on what it means to be a community college faculty member can help strengthen the profession of community college teaching and support community college faculty throughout their careers.

This dissertation suggests specific professional development and support opportunities should be made available to English faculty who teach composition, who, like Alison in this study, find themselves “frozen by the devastation” of the tragic life events that some their students write about via essay assignments. As a first step, English departments should bring

faculty together (full-time and part-time) to discuss how they handle those situations. Do they, like Brian, attempt to compartmentalize their teaching and caring elements of their faculty identities by first emphasizing how they appreciate them having the courage to take the risk of writing about such a difficult life event before they attempt to critique the writing? Or do they, like Alison eventually decided to do, tell their students not to write about personal and emotional life events for their class assignments? Or, do faculty have other strategies they use to overcome this professional challenge? I do not believe there is a single right answer to this question. After reflecting on their faculty identities and their comfort level with how much to allow students to write about their personal lives, individual faculty members should decide what works best for them personally and professionally. Although I do not believe this is a one-size-fits-all issue, I do believe bringing faculty together to discuss the challenge and how they have handled it would be beneficial. Doing so is further substantiated by research presented in Chapter 5 that identifies collegial connections as positively influencing faculty identities.

This research also suggests that specific professional development opportunities should be made available to faculty who teach mostly or only developmental students. Across both the English and math departments, participants talked about how instilling confidence in their students and educating students about the importance of soft skills and college knowledge were critical, even more important than conveying content. It seemed, however, that the participants in this study who taught mostly developmental courses learned this on the job, and were not prepared for it in advance. It also seemed that faculty had little guidance on *how* to instill confidence in their students and *how* to teach soft skills and college knowledge concepts. This dissertation suggests that holding an orientation specifically for new developmental faculty and/or developing professional development programming specifically for current development

faculty could be very beneficial. Orientation programs would emphasize the importance of gaining developmental students' trust and focusing on building up their students' confidence in the beginning of semesters. Professional development opportunities that were led by master teachers who teach mostly developmental courses could offer an array of strategies and resources that faculty could use to convey the importance of soft skills, student responsibility, and how to be successful in college. Such faculty should be encouraged to attend professional association conferences, like the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE), which aims to “to improve the theory and practice of developmental education at all levels of the educational spectrum, the professional capabilities of developmental educators, and the design of programs to prepare developmental educators” (National Association for Developmental Education, n.d.).

To be clear, however, this dissertation does not recommend creating a distinct developmental education department on college campuses. Due to the importance of keeping curriculum consistent and making sure students can readily progress from the math or English developmental sequence to college level coursework, participants described the importance of keeping math developmental educators closely linked to other math faculty and English developmental educators closely linked to other English faculty. What this dissertation does recommend, however, is creating more opportunities and spaces for developmental educators from across departments to connect, interact, share teaching strategies, and support one another. At ECC, this interaction took place via its Achieving the Dream committee, but it could also happen through a developmental education committee or task force, or more informally through coffee or lunch hours among developmental educators. As Chapter 5 revealed, connections across faculty were very beneficial and positively influential on faculty identities. Strong connections across developmental faculty will similarly help these faculty to feel more prepared

and confident teaching the courses and connecting with their students to encourage their academic success.

### **Faculty Assessment and Observation**

This dissertation has implications for ways colleges might re-engineer and relate their professional development and faculty assessment processes. Faculty in this study had very few positive things to say about ECC's faculty assessment process. Their student course evaluations generally lacked helpful, in depth feedback that they could use to improve their teaching or courses. They were skeptical of the model that has deans observe classes because it, too, (in their view or experience) rarely generates meaningful, actionable feedback. Instead, this dissertation suggests that colleges rethink faculty assessment as a way to promote faculty development. As noted in Chapter 5, departments should consider encouraging faculty to observe each other, and offer incentives as needed (e.g., via stipends, release time, or recognition awards, etc.). As Chapter 5 might suggest, getting feedback from a respected colleague on classroom management or pedagogical technique likely would be more positively received and acted upon than feedback from students or administrators.

Colleges and faculty leaders also should encourage known master teachers to invite colleagues into their classrooms to observe them and/or be willing to be videotaped and available for consultation so that other faculty can learn from them. In the same way that medical students and residents learn from attending physicians, there should be more opportunities for faculty to connect and observe each other. This echoes Ibarra's (1999) "possible selves" argument, as described in Chapter 5. Not only would participating faculty members likely learn new teaching strategies, these opportunities also would allow for faculty to observe and connect on how peers balance the caring and supporting elements of their faculty identities, something that this

dissertation reveals are important elements of the way community college faculty view themselves. These observation opportunities would further facilitate collegial connections that this dissertation found to be positively affirming of community college faculty identities (see Chapter 5).

### **Teaching and Learning and Classroom Dynamics**

What implications does this dissertation have for the teaching and learning that takes place in community college classrooms every day? I believe this research equips faculty with an awareness of the range of expectations and needs that students have in their classrooms, needs that extend beyond simply learning needs, but that certainly have an impact on how they learn, and therefore, how faculty teach.

In developmental classrooms, this dissertation suggests that faculty may decide to place an emphasis on having students build confidence as part of their teaching strategies, especially in the beginning of semesters. This may include limiting graded assignments until later in courses, so that feedback to students can remain positive and encouraging. As Jason explained, “If you can’t convince [students] that they can do [math], then it’s kind of over.” That is, students will not even try to be successful in his class—and just accept failure like they have experienced in the past—if they do not have the confidence that they can do well. Sharita admitted that she sometimes gives her students more positive feedback on their writing than she otherwise would because “if you are just very harsh on them in your grading, they are not going to want to put forth the effort. They’re just not.”

Encouraging students and helping to build their confidence in this way falls under the “caring about students” element of the community college faculty identity standard described in Chapter 3. Research in K-12 contexts have explored the idea of caring classrooms and caring

schools (Noddings, 2013; Teven & McCroskey, 1997; Weinstein, 1998). It has argued that an ethic of caring is important to being an effective teacher (Rogers & Webb, 1991). This research has shown that teachers can demonstrate that they care about their students' academic success and general welfare by incorporating empathy, understanding, and responsiveness into their teaching (McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006). Rogers (1991) found that students perceived that their teachers cared about them when their teachers tried to see things from a student's perspective, gave second chances, helped them to make sense of their school tasks, and created a safe, secure environment in the classroom. Responsive teachers show they care by reacting to student needs or problems quickly and actively listen to students (McCroskey, 1992). This dissertation implies that these are concrete example behaviors that community college faculty could consider employing in their classrooms, if they have not already, to develop the caring element of their faculty identities.

For faculty who need extra support to effectively support their students, this dissertation suggests that bringing counselors into classrooms may be beneficial. Instead of having faculty always perform the middleman or "clearinghouse" role of directing students to counselors, connecting counselors directly with students in their classrooms could be an effective solution. Involving counselors in the classroom has shown to be beneficial in both K-12 (M. A. Clark & Breman, 2009) and community college contexts (Rendón, 2002). Rendón (2002) describes an English community college classroom whereby students write in their journals to both the faculty member and a counselor, who, as a team, provide academic assistance as well as encouragement and support. This type of arrangement could be especially beneficial for English faculty, like Alison in this study, who find it difficult to negotiate their teaching and caring aspects of their



faculty identities when students divulge very personal and emotional parts of their lives through writing assignments.

With the rise of international students on community college campuses (Institute of International Education, 2014), community college faculty may find themselves needing to teach and support their students in new and different ways. Faculty should become aware of English as a Second Language (ESL) tutoring and other counseling support specifically available to international students. Faculty may need cultural awareness and respect training, so they can effectively connect and communicate with international students, so they, in turn, can effectively teach, care about, and support them.

### **The Role of Unions**

Not one participant in this study said the faculty union at ECC had a particularly positive influence on their faculty identities. Kim even alluded to the union having a negative effect. She said, “I just don’t see the union working for the betterment of the students.” Especially given the findings from Chapter 5 that collegial connections have a positive influence on faculty identities, the finding that the union at ECC essentially had zero impact on participants’ identities is a depressing missed opportunity. Ideally, a college’s faculty union represents faculty leaders who aim to thoughtfully support their faculty colleagues and their careers as much or more than they aim to blindly protect them and their jobs regardless of performance or commitment to student success. For example, related to the points raised about faculty assessment, teacher unions in K-12 contexts that conduct teacher evaluation through peer review have been successful at developing and supporting high quality teachers, while also identifying low performers (Johnson, Donaldson, Munger, Papay, & Qazilbash, 2007). K-12 unions also have been shown to work collaboratively with their districts to design and implement excellent professional development

programs that engage and encourage all teachers and provide support to teachers who are struggling and need additional assistance (Tom Mooney Institute, 2009). Boston's teacher union president said that they prioritize offering high quality professional development to teachers because it is important for the union to be "the instrument of change for the further professionalization of our own teaching ranks" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 16). Related to the element of faculty identities that emerged in Chapter 3 around the value that participants placed on serving their communities, K-12 unions in Ohio, Illinois, and Atlanta have built alliances with organizations throughout their local communities (Tom Mooney Institute, 2009). This dissertation suggests that these are types of promising practices that more community college faculty union organizations should consider engaging in as a way to better support community college faculty, their identities, and ultimately their students. Faculty unions, by their nature as colleague organizations, are in prime position to encourage the type of positive collegial connections that Chapter 5 found to be so beneficial to faculty identities. Unions can and should use their power and influence to build positive relationships—and thereby, positive professional identities—across its members.

### **Implications for Student Counseling**

Findings from Chapter 3 and 4 in particular suggest that counselors should be continuously connected with instructors. Including counselors in classrooms has already been discussed above as an implication of this research. This option is likely too costly for most community colleges to implement. At the very least, counseling offices (what is offered to students and where offices are located) should be discussed at faculty orientations so that faculty are aware of the counseling services available to students before they enter a classroom. Efforts should be made to have counselors attend part-time faculty orientations as well, if only to present

this basic information. As Sharita discussed, she wished she had a name of a counselor to send a student to, so introducing counselors at faculty events and gatherings would be an easy way to address this need. Ideally, genuine interactions could and should occur between counselors and faculty, not just at orientations but throughout each semester.

### **Part-time Faculty**

This dissertation has several implications for ways in which colleges can better support their part-time faculty. Ideally, there would not be so many part-time faculty teaching at community colleges. The latest national data available suggest seven out of ten community college faculty members teach part-time (AFT Higher Education, 2009). Counted another way, part-time faculty teach approximately 58% of community college classes and over half of all community college students (JBL Associates, 2008). If community colleges were not the typically resource-strapped institutions that they are, one solution would be to hire more part-time faculty as full-time faculty, but the reality is that lack of resources is the motivating factor why community colleges hire so many part-time faculty in the first place (Cohen and Brawer, 2008). It is important to mention, however, that some colleges have made it their goal to offer equal pay and benefits for equal work. For example, at the Community College of San Francisco, compensation for part-time faculty is determined using a salary schedule that mirrors salary schedules for full-time faculty, and Seattle Community Colleges offer full health care and benefits to employees who work .50 full-time equivalent hours (Kezar & Maxey, 2012). Even these institutions, however, recognize that they cannot survive without hiring a large percentage of part-time faculty. As Gappa and Leslie (1993) noted years ago, the hiring of part-time faculty has become a “permanent fix” (p. 3).

Therefore, finding ways to better engage and support part-time faculty is critical. A recent report showed that, compared to full-time faculty, part-time faculty are less likely to refer students to academic advising or financial aid advising and spend less time preparing for class or providing feedback to students (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014b). Furthermore, while 55% of full-time faculty respondents indicated they engaged in some kind of academic advising as part of their teaching role, only 7% of part-time faculty indicated the same (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014b). Given the results of Chapter 3 that suggest the community college faculty identity standard involves both supporting students and caring about them, these are alarming statistics.

As Kezar (2012) has written, a change in institutional culture is the most important and effective way to institutionalize change, including improving the way in which non-tenure track faculty are supported. Changing culture is much easier said than done, but it can be accomplished if leaders focus on change in three areas: revising policy, practices, and principles (Kezar, 2012). In terms of policies, colleges should revisit their Board of Trustee policies, faculty contracts, faculty handbooks, and any department-specific documents that may include discussion about part-time faculty policies, rights, roles and responsibilities, and issues related to hiring and evaluation. New policies may need to be developed that are specific to part-time faculty and their appointments (Kezar, 2012). For example, by including mention of part-time faculty in academic freedom policies, Board policies, and department-specific policy books, these policies can be extended to them.

In terms of practices, across higher education and including community colleges, efforts to include and socialize part-time faculty are notoriously weak, which can negatively affect faculty identity development and teacher effectiveness (Toth et al., 2013). At least in its English

and math departments, however, ECC was doing quite a bit to support and involve its part-timers. Part-time English faculty found the mini-conferences during in-service helpful and the informal faculty gatherings beneficial. The math part-time faculty had positive things to say about the department's course mentor system. These are three concrete things that other colleges should consider employing in their departments if they have not already.

However, even with these thoughtful and intentional supports in place, ECC part-time faculty expressed frustrations about "being one of millions" and concerns about not being able to adequately fulfill the student support component of their faculty role identities because they were less familiar with the student support services available on campus. As Sharita described it, the "least enjoyable part" of being a part-time faculty member for her was not being able to directly connect her students to specific counselors or advisors on campus because, as a part-timer, she did not personally know anyone in the counseling offices.

In agreement with other research on this topic (Kezar & Sam, 2010; Toth et al., 2013), this dissertation suggests that colleges should make more concerted efforts to socialize and involve their part-time faculty. As mentioned above, this effort can start before part-time faculty are hired. Studies have shown that part-time faculty are sometimes hired 24 hours before their first class (Thirolf, 2012), a practice that should be avoided at all costs. Instead, as argued earlier, colleges should follow a more standard interview and selection process that mirrors the processes used to hire full-time faculty.

Once hired, colleges should offer both a college-wide and departmental orientation specifically geared for part-time faculty, just as ECC does. These orientations should emphasize the mission of community colleges, the influence that faculty-student interactions have on student outcomes, the wide range of students (and their wide range of needs) who attend

community colleges, and the strategies current community college faculty employ as part of fulfilling their teaching, supporting, caring, and serving elements of their faculty identities. In line with findings from Chapter 5, these orientations should definitely include an opportunity for new faculty to connect with other new and more veteran faculty. For math and English departments that often hire several new part-time faculty each semester, department chairs should consider creating a listserv of the email addresses of all new faculty that they can use to establish the e-connections that faculty deemed so helpful in Chapter 5. Part-time faculty can use this to connect with each other about teaching strategies, student struggles, or classroom challenges, and full-time faculty can use it to connect with part-time faculty as well.

Related to connections, several colleges across the country have established beneficial mentoring programs for their part-time faculty (Kezar, 2012). When run well, these programs connect part-time faculty with a helpful full-time faculty resource who can offer advice, information about the college, and a person to simply talk and vent to as needed. However, research has shown that requiring part-time faculty to pair with a full-time faculty member mentor without careful considerations can lead to less than positive results (Thirolf, 2013). The most effective faculty mentoring relationships are those that are not forced but rather facilitated at the department level. Full-time faculty should not be required to mentor a part-time faculty member if they do not wish to. If a faculty member is forced to be a mentor, he or she likely will not be a very effective mentor. Similarly, if a part-time faculty member is forced to be a mentee when he or she would prefer not to, he or she likely will not benefit much from the mentoring relationship. Department chairs should solicit volunteers from the full-time faculty ranks to serve as mentors to part-time faculty who wish for the connection. The department could organize mentor breakfasts or coffee hours to show appreciation for the mentors and mentees and to show

support for the program. These events would also foster the beneficial connections across faculty that Chapter 5 highlighted.

As discussed earlier in this section, colleges should find ways to intentionally connect part-time faculty with student services professionals on campus, especially in counseling and academic advising. This practice would address the concern of part-time faculty in this study who wished they had a name of a counselor to whom they could direct their students who needed counseling support, as opposed to directing them to the counseling center counter, which can be intimidating and difficult for a student to approach on his or her own.

As ECC does, colleges should offer designated space on campus for part-time faculty to work, meet with students, make copies, prepare lessons, and so on. Ideally, this space would include private offices that faculty could use to meet one-on-one with students when necessary, which would address the concern that many part-time faculty members expressed in this study. Storage space, like lockers, in which part-time faculty could use to put books and papers would be beneficial as well, so they do not have to carry all their materials with them at all times.

Given their numbers and reach across a broad spectrum of students, part-time faculty should be included in campus efforts to strengthen student learning and success. Like full-time faculty, they have important insights to share about challenges students face, and they would benefit from exposure to teaching and learning best practices (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014b).

Overall, by reexamining and revising institutional policies and by investing time to institute new, beneficial practices like those described above, it can lead to the development and fostering of institutional principles centered on valuing and supporting part-time faculty. Once

achieved, an institution's culture will adapt so that supporting part-time faculty will become part of the norms and expectations of the college, and not the exception.

### **Future Research Directions**

#### **Community College Faculty**

Each analytical chapter in this dissertation noted the importance of conducting more research on community college faculty at different institutional types (urban and rural community colleges) and additional departments beyond English and math. More research is needed to examine the meanings that faculty in other disciplines (including and especially vocational fields) attribute to their faculty role identities. This dissertation suggests more research is needed specifically on faculty who teach developmental courses. Across a broader sweep of faculty types, several open questions remain: What type of professional development is especially effective for them? How close do they describe the same faculty identity standard as participants in this dissertation? What are the similarities? What are the key differences, if any? What metaphors do they use to describe their faculty identities? How influential are collegial connections to them and their professional identities? These are all worthwhile areas for future research.

Another important next step following this dissertation is researching students and, specifically, faculty-student interactions now that we have a clearer, better sense of what it means to be a community college faculty member. How do students respond differently to faculty who express different faculty identities? Faculty in this study who taught mostly developmental courses suggested that they prioritized supporting and caring for their students. How important are these faculty qualities from the perspective of students? After controlling for as many other variables as possible, what student outcomes are associated with faculty who



demonstrate the four qualities of the community college faculty identity standard identified in Chapter 3? What student outcomes are associated with faculty who use guide-like metaphors to describe their faculty identities versus other metaphors? What student outcomes are associated with faculty who actively seek out and foster collegial connections?

Future research also should investigate other individuals at community colleges. Despite their potentially influential role, department chairs are greatly understudied. At most colleges (including ECC), they are considered faculty, not administrators, even though they have administrative responsibilities. Deans and their professional roles and identities also are understudied. Future research should study the role identities of student services professionals at community colleges to determine the overlap with the multiple role identities of community college faculty. Like faculty, community college presidents enact multiple role identities, which may be indicative of the multiple identities and missions of community colleges. What is the relationship between the identity of the institution and its people?

Chapter 5 makes clear that research is necessary on faculty-faculty interactions, a topic that only has been peripherally examined (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Research on resident and attending physician interactions and the mentor-training relationship could provide great insight into how to design the research and the practical implications such research might have (see for example, Levy et al., 2004). What are the concrete benefits of faculty-faculty interactions? When do such interactions have positive outcomes? When might they have negative outcomes? Beyond what this dissertation identifies, what else can colleges do to facilitate collegial connections among faculty? Observations of faculty interactions, including full-time/full-time, part-time/part-time, and full-time/part-time faculty interactions, could reveal

new insight into their influence and impact. Chapter 5's focus on positive influences essentially tells only half the story: negative influences also exist and should be studied in depth.

Given that identity is ever evolving and never static, future research should aim to conduct longitudinal studies to investigate to what extent and in what ways community college faculty identities evolve over time. What institutional-level supports are especially important at the beginning of faculty careers? in the middle? towards the end? Future research should explore these open questions as well.

### **Professional Identities**

This dissertation has research implications for the general study of professional identities. There appears to be great potential for using identity theory frameworks to study professional identities of individuals in other professional fields. In his seminal work, Abbott (1988) argued that professional occupations are not standalone and detached, but interrelated and part of a system of professions. Inspired by Abbott (1988) and using identity theory as a consistent framework for studying professional identities, the question begs: To what extent are professional identities across professions similar and interrelated? Furthermore, this dissertation did not explore the extent to which a participant's race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other social group categories affected their professional identities. Other questions worth exploring include the following: In what ways do person identities (one of the three main bases of identities according to identity theory) relate to an individual's professional role identities? Why was it that participants' faculty identities were negatively affected by colleagues not aspiring towards the same faculty identity standard (Chapter 3)? This appears to be a limitation of ICT. What theories might be better able to explain this phenomenon? Is this the case for other professional groups as well? Why or why not?

Other theoretical frameworks can be used in conjunction with identity theory to explore the concept of professional identities. One next step is to move beyond the department or college/organizational level and focus more on the institutional level and its impact on professional identities. Chreim, Williams, and Hinings' (2007) multilevel analysis on the medical profession can serve as a guide for this type of future research. Chapter 5 also points to the potential of incorporating organizational studies concepts, and specifically Positive Organizational Scholarship frameworks, to further the study of professional identities.

### **Other Important Future Research Directions**

This research points to additional research questions related to other topics as well. Very little research has examine community college faculty unions. The faculty union had little influence on the faculty identities of participants at ECC, but what about at other institutions? What are ways in which faculty unions are influencing the development of community college faculty identities, both positively and negatively? Additional case studies, and ideally comparative case studies, should be conducted.

Building on research on caring in K-12 contexts, future research should explore the spectrum of caring that community college faculty employ in their classrooms and when interacting with students. What effect does this have on students?

Another area for future research that this dissertation points to is how the institutional identity of community colleges relates to community college faculty identities. Cohen and Brawer (1972) pointed out the relationship between the identities of community college faculty and the identities of community colleges over 40 years ago. In what ways and to what extent has that relationship evolved over time? Pusser and Levin (2009) explained just five years ago that community colleges' many purposes "lead to multiple identities" and that "many of those

identities are likely to be poorly understood by external actors at any given time given the complex and conflicting demands on the institutions” (p. 8). If “community colleges” and “institutions” were replaced with the phrase “community college faculty,” this claim would still ring true. This dissertation reveals that community college faculty also take on multiple roles and also encounter complex and conflicting demands. Levin (2012) recently wrote about the relationship between the organizational identities of community colleges and the professional identities of community college faculty. “The faculty labor force for community colleges both reflects and shapes institutional identity,” he wrote. “Understanding faculty, then, is a heuristic for understanding the community college” (Levin, 2012, p. 246).

In light of this perspective and after reviewing the findings from this dissertation, the questions beg: To what extent are community colleges providing guidance, care, and support to their students and serving their communities? If faculty are like priests, to what extent are community colleges like churches (or other places of worship and refuge) for students and their communities? What are the implications if positive organizational level influences on community college faculty identities dwindle or turn negative? What are the implications on community colleges and their students and communities if more faculty begin viewing themselves like a juggler on a tightrope the way Lynn did? How can community colleges better support their faculty’s professional identities so they can, in turn, better support their organizational identities and missions?

Fueled by the completion agenda and the Obama administration’s funded priorities, more and more attention and research have been devoted to community colleges and community college student outcomes (Kelly & Schneider, 2012). This is a positive development and should continue. However, it is important to note that the community college model was built to

advance college access (Cohen and Brawer, 2008), and in many ways it has lived up to that promise. Today, community colleges enroll close to half of all undergraduate students in the country (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014; Snyder & Dillow, 2013). The community college model was not built and is not prepared to advance the popular student success movement that is gaining momentum every day. What implications does this have on community college faculty and their faculty identities? This is an area worthy of attention and future research.

Overall, the growing focus on community college students and their academic success is a positive development. What this dissertation and other scholars like John Levin suggest is that more attention should be devoted to the study of community college faculty as well. If we aim to better understand community colleges and support community college students, we also must aim to better understand and support community college faculty.

Lastly, it is also important to note that community colleges involve more than just faculty and faculty identities; they also involve staff and administrators and their professional identities. Extensive research has been generated on student engagement at community colleges, and while student-faculty interactions remain the most influential in terms of student engagement and student success (Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Deil-Amen, 2011; McClenney & Marti, 2006), student engagement at community colleges is not entirely predicated on faculty alone. Counselors and peers also play an important role in engaging students, especially students of color (Carroll, 1988; Chang, 2005). While we continue to better understand the faculty identities community college faculty, we should aim to conduct more research on the role identities of student support professionals and administrators as well. Future research should examine how the full range of professionals and their role identities at community colleges interact and influence each other,

and how the growing complexity of community colleges will continue to have an impact on their organizational identities and their faculty and staff's professional identities.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Protocol

#### *Background*

1. Tell me about how and when you decided to become a faculty member at a community college. Is there a story behind why you became a community college faculty member? If so, what is it?
2. *[Review their responses to online survey—including home situation, education, teaching experience, other work experience, and career goal—to ensure accuracy and capture further details and comments about their personal and professional contexts.]* Do you have anything else to add or share specific to your personal and professional background?

#### *Faculty Identities*

3. Research has shown that community college faculty members take on several roles in their faculty jobs. In your experience, what roles do you take on as a community college faculty member?
  - a. Prompt: Example roles may include teacher, mentor, counselor, colleague, coach, role model, academic, disciplinarian, parent substitute, confidant, manager, motivator, course designer, and so on.
  - b. For each role, please (1) describe the role in terms of what it involves in the general sense and (2) what that role involves for you and means to you personally. When you describe a role, feel free to share a story or example that illustrates that role.
4. How easy or difficult is it to take on the multiple roles you've described?
5. Have you felt that any of these roles conflict with each other or are not compatible with one another? If so, describe a time or situation when that happened and what resulted, e.g., how you were affected by it.
6. Have you felt that any of these roles work in concert with one another? If so, describe a time or situation when that happened and what resulted, e.g., how you were affected by it.

#### *Identity Prominence*

7. What role or roles do you receive the most and least support for? (By “support” I mean support you generate yourself or support you receive from others or the college in the form encouragement or reinforcement.)
  - a. Describe the type of support you receive or generate for that role or those roles.
8. What role or roles are you most and least committed to? (By “committed” I mean invested in, in terms of time, energy, and self.)
  - a. Describe your commitment to that role or those roles.

9. What role or roles do you receive the most and least external rewards for? (By “external rewards” I mean money and prestige.)
  - a. Describe the type of extrinsic rewards you receive for that role or those roles.
10. What role or roles do you receive the most and least intrinsic rewards for? (By “intrinsic rewards” I mean feeling effective and/or competent.)
  - a. Describe the type of intrinsic rewards you receive for that role or those roles.
11. All that said, what role or roles are most important to your identity as a community college faculty member? What role or roles are least important? (By “identity,” I mean what it means to be who one is, or what it means to be community college faculty member.)

### *Institutional Contexts and Influence*

12. Tell me about what a typical workday and workweek is like for you. (If there’s no typical day, describe an example day or days you recently had.)
  - a. In what ways are you engaged here at ECC?
  - b. Other than teaching, what else do you do here? (serve on committees, tutor, other service)
    - i. How have those activities shaped your faculty identity?
13. I am interested to hear about what your work environment is like. Please describe the place you work.
  - a. How would you describe your **college** and **department**?
    - i. How collegial is it? How often do you interact with other faculty members?
    - ii. Do you participate in a mentoring program, either as a mentor or mentee? What has been your experience?
    - iii. What is the relationship like between part-time faculty and full-time faculty? What about relationships with adjuncts?
  - b. Describe your **office space**, if you have one. (Size, location, around other colleagues, time spent there?)
  - c. What influence do these **work environment** factors have in shaping your faculty identity?
    - i. Specifically, how important are interactions with other faculty colleagues (full-time, part-time, both) to the development of your professional faculty identity?
    - ii. If your faculty colleagues were asked to describe you, what would they say?
14. How would you describe the **leadership** at the college, from the president to the provost to the dean to your department chair. Do you interact much with any of them?
  - a. How would you describe your relationship with your **department chair**?
  - b. If your department chair were asked to describe you, what would he/she say?
  - c. What influence if any has the leadership at ECC had in shaping your faculty identity?
15. How would you describe the **union** at ECC? (positive or negative impressions?)
  - a. Are you a member of the union? If so, how active are you in the union?
  - b. What influence if any has the union had in shaping your faculty identity?
16. How would you describe **faculty assessment** and the **tenure and promotion process** at ECC? (positive or negative impressions?)



- a. What influence if any have faculty assessment and the tenure and promotion process had in shaping your faculty identity?
- 17. Are you active in participating in **professional development** at ECC or other schools you might be teaching at?
  - a. What influence if any has participating in professional development had in shaping your faculty identity?
- 18. Are you active in your **discipline**? For example, have you attended or presented at disciplinary conferences?
  - a. What influence if any has being active in your discipline had in shaping your faculty identity?
- 19. We just talked about your experiences outside the classroom and if and how they have played a role in shaping your faculty identity. Now I'm interested to hear more about your experiences **inside the classroom**. How have your experiences inside the classroom shaped your faculty identity? Can you give examples?
  - a. How do you typically feel in the classroom? (Prompt: confident, safe, supported, excited, stressed, worried, etc.)
- 20. What role has **interactions with students** (both inside the classroom and outside the classroom) played in the development of your professional faculty identity?
  - a. How often do you interact with students? How well do you know them?
  - b. If your students were asked to describe you, what would they say?
- 21. What other institutional factors have influenced your faculty identity?

*Personal and Professional Contexts and Influence*

- 22. Let's go back to our discussion of your personal and professional backgrounds. I'm wondering what influence those factors might have on shaping your faculty identity. How has your (see below) shaped your faculty identity?
  - a. Gender
  - b. Race
  - c. Home/family situation
  - d. Education
  - e. Teaching experiences, including how long been teaching in general and at community colleges specifically, courses taught (developmental versus regular)
  - f. Part-time/full-time status
  - g. Other work experiences
  - h. Career goals

*Identity Standard and Identity Verification*

- 23. In your view, how would you describe the ideal community college faculty member?
  - a. What has helped to influence or shape that ideal you just described? (Prompt: Other colleagues? students? education?, etc.?)
  - b. How close do you feel you fit this standard?
- 24. Tell me about situations or times when you most feel (or felt) positive emotions as a community college faculty member.
  - a. Prompt: Examples of positive emotions include satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, fulfillment, pride, and so on.

25. Tell me about situations or times when you most feel (or felt) negative emotions as a community college faculty member.
  - a. Prompt: Examples of negative emotions include feeling stressed, angry, or upset.
26. Do you feel like your opinion is valued at this institution?
27. Do you see how your work contributes to the mission of the institution?

*Summary*

28. Reflecting on our discussion thus far, overall, how would you describe your faculty identity? In other words, in your view, *what does it mean to be* a community college faculty member?
29. If you were to come up with a metaphor or analogy to describe what it is like being a community college faculty member, what would it be?
  - a. Prompt: If I asked you to finish the sentence, “As a community college faculty member, I am...” how would you finish it?

*Closing: Practice-focused Questions*

30. In your experience, what has been most positively influential in shaping your faculty identity?
  - a. If prompt needed: Examples may include participating in faculty professional development opportunities, formal mentorships, informal mentorships, informal interactions with other faculty colleagues, participating in academic conferences, interactions with students, etc.
31. In your experience, what if anything has inhibited your faculty identity development?
  - a. If prompt needed: Examples may include lack of understanding about community colleges, feeling disconnected from students, exhaustion, feeling disrespected by administration/students/society, etc.
32. What advice would you give to community colleges that are looking to better support their faculty, both part-time and full-time?
33. Anything else to add or share?

## Appendix B: IRB-Approved Recruitment Email

Hello,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Michigan and, for my dissertation, I am studying faculty at community colleges.

I am looking for willing participants to interview who are faculty members at [Name of College here]. I am interested in learning about your career path and the motivations and challenges you face and have faced in your faculty role. I'm also interested to hear your thoughts and impressions about being a community college faculty member.

If you are interested in participating in my study, I am hoping you might have time over the next couple months when I could interview you and learn about your experience. The interview should last about 90 minutes. I will arrange/have arranged to hold interviews in a private office or room on campus. I am also happy to arrange a phone interview if you prefer.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take a brief, 5-10 minute online survey that is intended to collect some basic background information about you before your scheduled interview.

Participants will be compensated \$50 for participating in this study.

Participation is voluntary and information you share will be kept strictly confidential. Your choice about whether or not to participate will not in any way influence your standing or relationship with your College or its faculty, staff, or community. Your identity will remain anonymous in the dissemination of findings.

If you have any questions or would like to participate, you can reach me at [kthirolf@umich.edu](mailto:kthirolf@umich.edu) or by phone at 734.546.5516. (This study has been approved by UM's Institutional Review Board, IRB number HUM00046290.)

Thanks in advance for your help.

Kate Thirolf  
Doctoral Student  
Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education  
University of Michigan  
[kthirolf@umich.edu](mailto:kthirolf@umich.edu) / 734.546.5516 (cell)

## Appendix C: Pre-Interview Online Survey

How long you have been teaching (in years, months)...  
in general?  
at a community college?  
at ECC?

Are you currently teaching somewhere other than ECC?

- Yes
- No

*If yes:* Where else are you teaching?

What type(s) of teacher education, training, or professional development have you received or participated in?

What course(s) are you currently teaching?

What course(s) have you taught in the past? Please list how many times (e.g., number of semesters) you've taught each course.

Are you currently a part-time or full-time faculty member?

- Part-time
- Full-time
- Other

*If part-time:* Would you prefer a full-time faculty position?

- Yes
- No

*If part-time:* Have you ever been a full-time faculty member before?

- Yes
- No

*If full-time:* For how long (in years or semesters) were you a full-time faculty member?

*If full-time:* Have you ever been a part-time faculty member before?

- Yes
- No

*If full-time:* Have you ever been a part-time faculty member before?  
For how long were you a part-time faculty member?

What if any work experience (both current and past) do you have other than teaching?

Tell me about yourself.

Gender

Race

Home/family situation (e.g., married, single, children at home?)

Education (e.g., degrees received, college/universities attended)

Age

What is your household income?

- less than \$50,000
- between \$50,000 and \$100,000
- more than \$100,000

Finally, how would you describe your career goal?

## Appendix D: Example Interview Protocol for New Faculty Hires

- Teaching
  - Describe the type of teacher you are. What is your teaching philosophy?
    - Strong candidates would be able to clearly articulate their teaching philosophy.
  - Tell us about your most fulfilling teaching experience. Why was it fulfilling? Tell us about your most challenging teaching experience. Why was it challenging?
    - Committees should look for genuine passion about teaching in candidates' responses to these questions.
  - What are your career goals? Where would you like to be professionally in five years? How does this position support your career goals?
    - Career goals should squarely focus on teaching and being a better teacher to improve student outcomes. Strong candidates would explicitly mention that they want to remain at a community college. Weak candidates would focus more on research and not mention wanting to stay at a community college.
  - What are your teaching goals? If hired, how much time do you expect to spend on teaching? How does your teaching relate to your research and/or service?
    - Strong candidates would not hesitate to say they would focus most of their time on their teaching and becoming a better teacher. The more candidates' intended research and service activities relate to their teaching, the better.
  - What are your research goals? If hired, how much time do you expect to spend on research? How does your research relate to your teaching and/or service?
    - A candidate who talks more about (and with more passion about) their research goals than their teaching goals likely would not be a good fit at a community college. One exception might be if their research were directly related to teaching.
- Supporting students
  - To what extent have you taught students from diverse and/or difficult life circumstances? Tell us about those experiences.
    - Especially among candidates who will be teaching developmental courses, the more experience candidates have teaching diverse students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the better.
  - Describe how you support your students.
  - If you had a student that came to you and shared with you that she was unexpectedly pregnant, he/she was in an abusive relationship, he/she was homeless, [or other specific personal issue], what would you do?
    - Candidates who describe supporting their students directly (i.e., themselves) or indirectly (i.e., directing students to support services on campus or in the community) would fit better at a community college than candidates who do not.
- Caring for students (\*especially important for faculty who teach developmental level classes)
  - Tell us about one or two of your most challenging students. What did you do? What were their outcomes?

- Candidates who express a genuine concern for their students, even their most challenging students, would fit better at a community college than those who do not.
  - How do you make your classrooms ideal learning environments for your students? (Follow up: Is it important to you that your students view your classroom as a comfortable and safe place? Why or why not?)
  - Do you think it is important that your students trust you? Why or why not? (Follow-up: What are ways that you instill trust between you and your students?)
    - Especially for candidates who will be teaching developmental courses, they should recognize the importance of creating comfortable and safe learning environments and being someone their students can come to trust.
  - How would your students describe you?
    - Strong candidates should have very high expectations of their students and also be accessible and approachable.
- Community service
  - Describe your community. Is community important to you? Why?
    - Strong candidates would genuinely care about their communities and be able to clearly articulate why.
  - Do you engage in service to your community? Why or why not? If you do engage in community service, tell us about it.
    - Community service can be broadly defined here. Strong candidates do not have to volunteer at the local homeless shelter every week (in fact, that may take away from their teaching), but they may share their time and resources from time to time in other ways to feel a part of and strengthen their communities.
  - How do your service activities relate to your teaching and/or research goals? If you have any, what are your service goals?
  - Is there something particularly attractive to you about teaching at a community college? If so, what is it?
    - Like many participants in this dissertation study, strong candidates would recognize the connection between teaching at a community college and benefiting their communities.
- General
  - How would you describe the community college mission? How do you see yourself contributing to that mission?
    - Strong candidates would be very familiar with the “open door” community college mission and the multiple missions, for which community colleges are known (Bailey & Averianova, 1998). They also would understand and appreciate that community colleges are teaching institutions first and foremost and community college faculty are teachers first and foremost.
  - What concerns, if any, do you have about teaching at a community college?
    - If candidates express concerns about community colleges’ lack of status or high teaching loads, they likely are not a good fit for the position.

- In your opinion, what are the most important qualities or attributes of a community college faculty member? How close do you feel you fit that description?
  - The more familiar candidates are with the “distinct and significant” nature of community college teaching, the better (Holladay-Hicks & Reynolds, 2005). Strongest candidates would mention all four components of the community college faculty identity standard identified in Chapter 3: teaching, supporting, and caring about students and serving their communities.
- What metaphor might you use to describe your faculty identity, i.e., how you view yourself as a community college faculty member?
  - Candidates who view themselves, in some way or another, as guides to their students, or generally focus on teaching and helping students achieve their goals, would be strong candidates for a community college faculty teaching position.
- Influences
  - What has influenced the type of teacher you are today?
  - Teaching at a community college has its challenges and frustrating moments, as is the case for all teaching positions. What have you done in the past to handle the challenges and frustrations that come with teaching?
    - In addition to getting a sense of how passionate a candidate is about teaching, these questions can be used to probe to what extent candidates have and are open to connecting with their colleagues.
  - Describe your view of the ideal colleague. How close do you feel you fit that description yourself?
    - Strong candidates would recognize and articulate the importance of connecting with colleagues and being a supportive colleague.

After an extensive review of the literature, to my knowledge, this is the first research-based and theoretically grounded list of interview questions specific to the goal of hiring community college faculty. Of course, some of these questions already may be questions that many hiring committees ask candidates. My dissertation empirically validates those questions and may identify important and novel questions as well.



## Appendix E: Consent Form

### Consent to Participate in a Research Study

#### The Experiences and Professional Identities of Faculty at Community Colleges

Principal Investigator: Kate Thirolf, Ed.M., Doctoral Candidate, University of Michigan  
Faculty Advisor: Peter Riley Bahr, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Michigan

Invitation to participate in a research study: Kate Thirolf invites you to participate in a research study about the experiences of part-time faculty at community colleges. The research will focus on how faculty reflect on and come to understand the dimensions of their faculty role(s) and the challenges and supports they encounter as community college faculty.

Description of subject involvement: If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to (1) take a brief online survey to collect information on your personal and professional backgrounds and (2) participate in a semi-structured interview that should last about 90 minutes. If you consent, interviews will be audio-recorded. As a participant, you will be asked to describe the roles you take on as a community college faculty member, the institutional and situational contexts you are a part of and their influences on your faculty identity, and what motivates you and demotivates you as a faculty member at a community college. You may be asked to voluntarily participate in subsequent interviews or focus groups about whether and to what extent your impressions of being a faculty member may have changed.

Benefits: Reflecting on your role and work as a faculty member may be uplifting, so you may personally benefit from participating in this study. Although you may not directly benefit from participating in this study, others may benefit because the results of this study will hopefully contribute to our understanding about the experiences of part-time and full-time faculty and may help to inform how colleges can better engage and support them in their faculty roles.

Risks and discomforts: Reflecting on your role and work as a faculty member may also cause discomfort. As a participant in this research, you are subjected to minimal risks and every attempt has been made to ensure your protection. See sections below on confidentiality, storage and future use of data, and voluntary participation for details.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated \$50 for participation in this study.

Confidentiality: Your participation in this study will be kept strictly confidential. All data and results will be treated with strict confidence by the researcher. As interviews are transcribed, pseudonyms will replace any and all personal and institutional names. Unless you explicitly consent otherwise, a pseudonym will be used when findings are reported to protect your identity. On request and within these restrictions, results may be made available to you. *The confidentiality of the data will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.* However, the Institutional Review Board or university

and government officials responsible for monitoring research may inspect these records.

Storage and future use of data: To keep your information safe, the researcher will store all study-related digital files (including audiofiles, transcripts, and survey responses) on a secure laptop computer and all paper-based files (including consent forms and notes) in locked file cabinet in her home office. It is intended that data collected from this study will be retained for future research after this study has completed.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also decline to respond to any questions you do not want to answer. If for any reason you decide that you would like to discontinue your participation or not answer a specific question, simply tell the researcher. Your choice about whether or not to participate will not in any way influence your standing or relationship with your college.

Who to Contact for Research-Related Questions: For questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Kate Thirolf at 734-546-5516 or [kthirolf@umich.edu](mailto:kthirolf@umich.edu). Kate's faculty advisor is Dr. Peter Riley Bahr ([prbahr@umich.edu](mailto:prbahr@umich.edu)).

Who to Contact Regarding Your Rights as a Participant: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 540 E Liberty St., Ste 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933 [or toll free, (866) 936-0933], [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu).

Signatures: By signing this document, you are agreeing to be part of the study. Participating in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

*I agree to participate in the study.*

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Print Name

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Signature

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Date

*I agree to be audiotaped as part of the study.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*I consent to have my data retained for further research after this study concludes.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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